

## New Haven CAN Be Better!

Spontaneous combustion is the best way to describe the launch of New Haven Citizens Action Network (NH CAN). Earlier this year, at the height of the City of New Haven budget hearings, a group of citizens realized they had to organize to effect change.

The New Haven Board of Aldermen and Mayor John DeStefano planned record spending, a \$30 million escalation in one year, funded largely with a supersize property tax increase. “Families in New Haven can no more afford these high taxes than seniors can. If city spending was reasonable, we could all afford the taxes – seniors and families” says Mona Berman, small business owner, long time city activist and member of the steering committee of NH CAN.

NH CAN believes in fiscal responsibility and open, transparent government. We believe too many public policy decisions are rubber-stamped by the NH BOA. There is little public input and it’s routinely dismissed and ignored.

NH CAN members sought to change the status quo and repeatedly testified during city budget hearings offering constructive suggestions to rectify wasteful spending. Their major concerns were with under-funded pension plans (short millions) and city debt (over half a billion dollars and growing). NH CAN sought serious attempts to cut spending winning few concessions. Most of the suggestions were ignored and taxes, fines and fees were raised.

“Most of the budget process was a sham ... a phony exercise in fiscal restraint and public testimony,” says Gary Doyens, a member of the NH CAN steering committee. “They didn’t like that we tracked their decisions, questioned their budget priorities and held them accountable. The finance committee really didn’t want to hear from us and their decisions reflect that.”

NH CAN is now actively working a number of NH BOA races, in many cases against the incumbents who favored higher taxes, record spending and less public input. It’s organizing citizens across the political spectrum who believes that the best government is one we can afford, and one that listens to the people it claims to represent. For contact and further information, visit our website at [www.nhcan.org](http://www.nhcan.org).

by Gary Doyens, NH CAN steering committee member  
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