Mayor Chris Coleman will hold two community conversations on the City budget that will outline to residents the severity of proposed cuts in state local government aid to Saint Paul and the options available to solve the projected $44 million deficit in the next two years.

In January, Governor Pawlenty released his recommendations for resolving the state's $4.8 billion budget deficit for next biennium, drastically cutting the money the state provides cities for property tax relief. The 12- and 31-percent cut in Saint Paul for 2010 and 2011, respectively, comes on top of the $5.7 million unallotment in December that impacted the City's current budget.

"While many people know LGA by its official title, in Saint Paul we know it as cops, firefighters, parks and libraries," Mayor Coleman said. "The governor's proposed cuts will take Minnesota in a direction that, I believe, most of us don't want to go. However, we must prepare for the potential of his plan and the significant impact it will have on our city."

Community conversations will be held:

5:30 to 7 p.m. Feb. 17 in the auditorium at El Rio Vista Rec Center/Neighborhood House, 179 E. Robie Street; and

5:30 to 7 p.m. Feb. 24 in the Bullard Rainforest Auditorium at Como Park Zoo and Conservatory Visitor Center, 1225 Estabrook Drive.

In the last several weeks, Mayor Coleman has met with the City Council, department directors and the unions that represent city employees in an effort to generate innovative solutions and ways to alter service delivery and reduce expenses. The community conversations allow residents to have an open and honest discussion about the true cost of city services and the value they bring to the community.

"Saint Paul residents' understanding of the challenges we face and willingness to contribute their insights will enable us to move forward together and ensure Saint Paul remains a great city for generations to come," Mayor Coleman added.