



Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND
CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Julie Edmonds-Mares

**SUBJECT: COMMUNITY BUDGET
MEETINGS SUMMARY**

DATE: May 25, 2017

Approved

Date

5.25.17

BACKGROUND

As in previous years, the Mayor, City Councilmembers, and the City Manager's Office coordinated Community Budget meetings. This year, four meetings, as opposed to last year's ten meetings, were held in centrally located public spaces during May. These meetings are an essential part of the City's Budget process to solicit input from community members throughout the City. Approximately 160 community members participated this year, providing direct feedback to the Mayor, City Council Members, and City Manager's Office about service priorities.

Each Community Budget meeting was kicked-off by the a Councilmember followed by a comprehensive but concise budget presentation, generally lasting a half hour. Following the formal presentation, there was an hour-long question and answer session to solicit participant input and conversation on a wide variety of community concerns. The meetings lasted approximately 90 minutes.

Residents were provided with an introduction of the 2017-2018 City Manager's Budget Message and the web links to various documents on the City's Budget webpage for further reference. Flyers were produced in three languages (English, Spanish and Vietnamese); both Spanish and Vietnamese speakers were referred to staff fluent in their language so that they could request language interpretation. Language interpretation was provided in Spanish at two of the meetings and no requests of Vietnamese were received. Comment cards were made available so that participants not comfortable asking their questions publicly at the microphone had the option to submit questions in writing. At each of the four Community Budget meetings, department subject matter experts were available to respond and provide context and clarification to the conversation.

ANALYSIS

The community discussions were as diverse as the City's population. At the same time, several common themes of emerged from the meetings as priorities:

- **Crime/Public Safety**
- **City Aesthetics and Neighborhood Blight**
- **SJ Prepared/CERT/ Flood Response**
- **Homelessness/Housing**
- **Streets and Traffic/Bike and Pedestrian Safety**
- **Parks/Libraries/Recreation and Community Services/Placemaking**

Crime/Public Safety (4 of 4 meetings): There were multiple instances at each meeting in which public safety and/or crime issues were raised. Some attendees had experience as victims of a theft or other crime and were interested in making sure that the budget contained funding to help increase the number of officers. There were questions related to the throughput of officers graduating from the academy and support for the additional academy each year, as well as concern over retention.

Selected Resident Quotes:

- "What about starting a Police Cadet program to help kids make an early career choice to be in law enforcement and give them an easier way into the San Jose Police Academy?"
- "I've lived here 35 years and never had an issue with crime in this area. Now in the space of six months, I've had two bikes stolen and my car broken into. And one of the bikes was at a library. Can you have them (police) increase patrols?"
- "Burglaries are up in District 2 for sure. I see it and hear about it all the time. We need to recruit and then hold on to the officers so we have more in the field and neighborhoods."

City Aesthetics and Neighborhood Blight (4 of 4 meetings): Several concerns were raised at the all the meetings which were related to the way the neighborhoods look as well as situations where blight was evident. Specifically, residents spoke of: weeds in medians, park maintenance issues, illegal dumping and abandoned vehicles, graffiti, garbage cans in the middle of the street, Dumpster Days, outreach to bring awareness to everyone about the neighborhood cleanups, street sweeping signs, and moving vehicles to allow for a complete sweeping job.

Selected Resident Quotes:

- "You have talked about graffiti and street repair. Well Navarez (Avenue) looks like the Amazon, with 5-6 feet tall weeds, and young people can get lost in there. Sometimes you can no longer see street signs anymore."
- "Is there any way to augment this (code enforcement) portion of the budget? Right now, there is no way to access code enforcement on weekends or after hours, so they never see the evidence (of the infraction)."

- “There are many rental homes on my street and they look horrible! Landlords should have to keep them up. But when you call to report it you might get switched from the City Call Center, to Code Enforcement to illegal dumping and finally you get dumped into a voicemail and nobody calls back. This isn’t right! And you hear from the staff ‘we’re short staffed, we no longer do that’, or ‘there’s nothing I can do.’ This just is not right!

SJ Prepared/CERT/ Flood Response (3 of 4 meetings): The flood was discussed and brought up in various contexts such as rehousing victims so they don’t become homeless, flood control and support for ongoing conversations to have the Santa Clara Valley Water District ‘help us prevent floods in the future’, and funding projects to enhance response in the event of disaster.

Selected Resident Quotes:

- There was a Neighborhood Watch person who is also CERT-certified and he said that programs like SJ Prepared and CERT will go a long way to help educate people about what is important to do for your neighborhood after a disaster, and also just to get to know neighbors so everyone can help each other out in that time of need.
- “We don’t know when it will rain again like it did, but you should talk to the Water District because when Lake Cunningham was constructed, it was considered as a resource to help the Water District with flood control planning. And it is right there, and we need to clean it up so it can be used for recreation, but also, it can be important for flood control, so tell them we need their help.”

Homelessness/Housing (3 of 4 meetings): Many community members expressed concern about the growing homelessness problem, its impact on their quality of life within neighborhoods, and the need to provide both services and long-term solutions for the homeless population.

Questions and comments related to the Story Rd. homeless encampment with acknowledgement that when the homeless clean-ups near creeks occur, the homeless people are more visible and that something should be done to help to get them jobs so that can get into housing and sustain themselves.

Selected Resident Quotes:

- A resident commented that the city needs to not only clean up places like the Story Rd. encampment, but provide follow up services and housing. He said “People say the homeless don’t want housing but I think if you have a program to offer housing they’d be happy to have a place to stay that is off the streets.”
- “We are seeing more and more homeless people in our neighborhood. I’ve been here for 20 years and not seen as many homeless as I have in the last year. Please fund programs to help this situation.”

Streets and Traffic/Bike and Pedestrian Safety (4 of 4 meetings): Residents expressed interest in ensuring that San Jose Vision Zero was funded and there were comments at each meeting concerning traffic issues such as: traffic calming, traffic enforcement, green bike lanes, availability of sidewalks in good order in their neighborhoods. Potholes, street resurfacing and

repair were brought up as a concern for many who reaffirmed the need for funding being applied to make progress on the street maintenance backlog.

Selected Resident Quotes:

- One speaker was a woman who was hit by a car near Bascom and Fruitvale and she wanted to know what can be done to make it safer for parents and kids coming home from school at that intersection. She also wanted to know how to get speed bumps installed (question received in Spanish and interpreted).
- Interest was piqued regarding increased funding for street maintenance and variations of the question “Will any of the 250 miles of pavement improvements be in my neighborhood,” was voiced at several meetings.
- “Green bike lanes are great. I’m glad you’re doing them as I ride in them. But as a driver, I’m not really sure how they work and when cars can cross into the green.”
- “The crosswalk at Highway 85 and Cottle Rd is terribly unsafe and people cross there when they get off Lightrail and go into work at Kaiser...something needs to be done and there is VTA money, so you need to talk to them.”

Parks/Libraries/Recreation and Community Services/Placemaking (4 of 4 meetings):

Residents frequently expressed their desire to have community centers and parks available in their neighborhood where they can go for services (i.e. senior nutrition program or youth programs) and as a place for the greater community to have a place to meet and get to know neighbors at events. Frequent requests for funding be extended to provide programming and an interest in finding funding sources to support infrastructure improvements were voiced. Placemaking events like *Viva Calle* and *Viva Parks* and the hope to have them funded permanently were emphasized by speakers. The current funding of libraries which allows them to now be open six days a week was reinforced as a priority by speakers at several meetings. With respect to parks, libraries, and community centers, it was brought up often that the level of service should be maintained or expanded and the current facilities be maintained. The message was clear that we should not reduce funding in these areas.

Selected Resident Quotes:

- “Events like *Viva Calle* and *Viva Parks* give us an opportunity to get to know our neighbors and do something enjoyable, while also providing fun for our youth to keep them out of trouble. But it needs to be a permanent program to help the youth, so please fund these things.”
- “I am interested in the Arena Green Carousel and the funding to refurbish it and getting it running...is it going to be running and will that be permanent or just a one-time thing since the funding I saw in the budget was one-time? It really adds to the interest for kids going to Arena Green and makes it a nicer space.”
- “These parks, especially the one near me, really needs maintenance. Sprinklers and irrigation is broken and it is all dug out two feet below the slides on the playground. Does anyone ever look at that? We need to make sure we can fix things at all the parks, not just a few.”

- “Many youth centers closed during the downturn in economy and repurposed. Can those be opened again? Anyway, we need youth centers all around the City. We need to have programs there like SJWorks and interesting things for them to do, close to home, to keep them from going to gangs and getting in trouble running around town—programs like we used to have like the gang task force.”
- “We need to continue to fund Senior Centers and the nutrition programs. We need to be friendly to people as they age and provide them a place for their activities so they age happy and healthy.”

Overall Resident Participation and Interests

The residents that attended the Community Budget meetings were generally informed participants well aware of the challenges the City faces in its budget. Several were inquisitive about sources of funds and what should change to help the City increase revenues to offset costs. At two meetings, there were specific questions about the reason for the deficit when the economy has been strong. One person asked why pension reserve funds have not been growing during a booming economy. There were at least three general comments concerned that staffing levels still must be low because when they call they get a voicemail.

There were several community members who represented organizations that expressed concern for funding because they wanted particular City services or programs, or to partner with the City to address specific needs in the community. These included:

- **CommUniverCity**—Pointed out the several projects that they are working on to address issues in San Jose that were discussed, and expressed strong desire to continue to work for San Jose and the community. They thanked the City for funding, and requested continued support in the budget.
- **Commission on Aging**—Support for San Jose Promise and funding things to support an age-friendly community was this representative’s key message.
- **Lake Cunningham Supporters**—A sailing enthusiast/advocate (Velma Million) and SJSU professor (Shirley Reekie), representing nearly a dozen interested groups, gave an overview of the need for open water surface sports at the lake in this part of town, indicating that 500 users per week were using it before it closed. Ms. Million, for whom the marina is named, requested the City fund it especially for the youth.
- **Proponents of Low Utility Rates**—Residents at two of the meetings registered concern with the increase in utility rates. These included garbage/recycling rates (in multi-family dwellings) and water rates for residents of modest means who might be impacted by utility rates that are adjusted upward each year. The resident spoke about San Jose Water Company. When it was pointed out that it is not a public utility he asked the City to talk to San Jose Water Company about the impact of high rates for residents in San Jose,

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particularly because ratepayers are now paying more to make up for water saved during the drought.

- **Sacred Heart Community Services**—This City partner brought several clients with limited English proficiency to participate and have their voices heard. They specifically wanted to request that the Rapid Response Network and services to immigrants be funded, along with other services related to ‘urban affairs’. Clients spoke in Spanish with language interpretation.
- **San Jose Prepared/CERT**—A neighborhood association member talked about the CERT training which will help neighborhoods get through the critical post-disaster timeframe and that all the neighborhoods can benefit from this kind of training. He asked that the funding be continued and expanded so that we have better response within the community should there be another event like the 2017 flood.

In contrast with last year’s Community Budget meetings, there were a fair number of compliments verbalized at three of the four meetings. Compliments came in the form of appreciation for key issues being addressed and funded last year, acknowledgment that there are more staff providing services than previously, and appreciation to Mayor and Council for prioritizing community needs. In most cases, there was a general positive response from most participants that ‘things are moving in the right direction now.’

COORDINATION

The Mayor’s Office supported the scheduling of dates, selecting locations, providing a meeting format and presentation, and flyer production. Each meeting had a Council Member ‘host’ based on the central location of the meeting. The Administration coordinated multiple-department participation, language assistance services for those with limited English proficiency, and on-site logistics.

/s/

JULIE EDMONDS-MARES
Deputy City Manager