

May 23, 2016

Honorable Mayor Liccardo and Councilmembers, City of San José  
200 East Santa Clara Street, San José, CA 95113

re: Comments on the proposed San José Budget

Dear Mayor and Councilmembers,

On behalf of the San José Neighborhoods Commission, we thank you for the opportunity to participate in the budget process, and we would like to provide the following comments regarding the Mayor's Budget Proposal and the subsequent City Manager's response.

Once again, we are **generally supportive** of the overall Budget proposals. We appreciate the challenges of limited revenues and the seemingly unlimited number of demands upon them.

- We agree with the **philosophy** of "tapping the brakes" so as to "live within our means", and to "save for a rainy day" – especially since we know that our current stretch of good luck is not likely to continue indefinitely. We also agree that ongoing programs should not be initiated with one-time funding.
- We are pleased to see the administration is striving to **work with police, fire**, and others to settle past difficulties with pensions, disability, and morale problems: it is critical that the problems be resolved without endangering the future financial viability of the City. In anticipation of upcoming retirements, salaries and benefits will need to be competitive to help recruit and retain new employees. Recruiting locally may be more cost-effective.
- And San José has an **ongoing financial challenge** due to its low "Jobs per Employed Resident" (J/ER) ratio, a problem that gets exacerbated whenever employment and commercial lands are converted to residential. We agree with the Mayor's comments that it is better to encourage the founding of new businesses and the growth of small businesses rather than to give incentives in an attempt to steal existing businesses from other jurisdictions.

We understand why the City is going for the **1/4% sales tax increase** -- we've been through the budget games and have seen where the additional revenue would make a big difference. We understand why it is a "general" tax rather than the funds being tied down to specific uses: the state law allows the one type of measure to pass with 50%+1 whereas the other requires a two-thirds majority. However, we also understand the reservations of many in our communities, and how, to quote a Councilmember, "anything can be changed on any given Tuesday." So, while we are supportive, we do have misgivings and so can give only conditional support.

In addition, we would like to comment upon the following points:

- We applaud your support for **parks** and the increased funding to finally allow the regional City parks to be open seven days a well. We want to emphasize the need for steady funding for maintenance and repairs, and also the need for more park rangers: the latter can help patrol and protect the parks and thereby reduce the need for the former.

- We support the continued efforts on **gang suppression** and the providing of alternatives – the “San José Works”, the Street Team for employing the homeless, open libraries and community centers, and gang investigation technologies. We recommend that the services also address female members. We support the “Neighborhood Watch” efforts, and the funding for meeting venues for the community meetings.
- We support the emphasis on implementing **technology** to improve city performance – the innovative “Smart City”, with improved databases, better communication equipment for police reporting, better citizen user experiences, and the use of web technology to help prepare for Natural Emergency response. These are some of the items for which Commissioner Joe Horwedel advocated last year, and we are glad to see that they are now included in the budget.
- We strongly support the City’s efforts to **control illegal dumping** – we feel it is so important that we are writing you a separate letter on the topic. And Neighborhood Clean-ups boost community pride and provide great team building experiences.
- We also strongly support the City’s efforts to **control illegal fireworks**. As we said in our letter to the City last year, “The City should utilize its full enforcement staff ... by using the Fire Marshalls, code enforcement, Community Service Officers (CSO's), park rangers, etc.”
- We are pleased that the City is working with the County to tackle the **homeless** issue. It is a complex issue and is much more than just shooing the homeless from their encampments, it is dealing with the underlying issues and treating the individuals humanely. There needs to be solutions for the housing of seniors, low income families, and veterans. The homeless problem creates quality of life issues for everyone across the city.
- **Streets** are important to a city, both for the moving of traffic and also as part of the residents’ urban environment. Pavement maintenance is important, but so are Road Diets, Complete Streets, and Neighborhood Traffic Calming.
- **Combating blight** citywide: Downtown Streets Team is the perfect solution for any neighborhood when tackling blight: they have shown to be extremely helpful in providing support during neighborhood clean-up events.
- We encourage the City to continue (and complete) the earlier efforts to define and protect “**historic neighborhoods**” to help preserve established communities and protect them from “scrape and replace”. We note that the County is beginning to look into seeking National status as a “Heritage County” in honor of our region’s long history and agricultural past and the transition to “Silicon Valley”: perhaps the City can collaborate with the County in support of their efforts.
- While we support the Mayor’s “**Innovation Vision**”, we also urge the City to keep its “**Green Vision**” and to continue its efforts to be an environmentally sustainable city. (And when the City hires consultants to help implement these visions, we encourage it to “hire local”, and to use consultants who are familiar with San José and its rich history and nuances.)

And a couple personal notes: (1) I’m glad to see San José is doing **VivaCalle** again this year (and am especially excited that it’ll go down my local shopping street this time!), and (2) as a longtime season ticketholder at **The SJ Stage Co.**, I’m glad the City is helping with issues related to the possible loss of their venue in the fallout of the RDA unfolding.

We are grateful for the opportunity to work with the Mayor, Council and Staff in defining our priorities and goals and developing ways to meet them. We look forward to supporting the City and doing everything we can to help as you work to improve the neighborhoods of San Jose for us all.

Dr. Lawrence Ames,  
Chair, San José Neighborhoods Commission

