



City of San José

Neighborhoods Commission

May 26, 2015

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,

Part of the charter of the San José Neighborhoods Commission (NC) is to “provide recommendations to the city council on the annual budget process”. Accordingly, the NC formed an ad hoc Budget subcommittee to review the Mayor’s Budget Proposal item by item, resulting in these recommendations and comments which were reviewed and approved by the full Commission on May 13, 2015.

Overall, we generally support the Mayor’s Budget. We would like to emphasize the following points:

Public Safety

Community feedback tells us that **Public Safety** ranks as one of the neighborhoods’ most important issues. The number of peace officers in the San José Police Department (SJPD) should at least be restored to the previous levels, and ideally should be increased. San José needs more officers on patrol, and they should be provided with adequate personal protective gear and on-board vehicle technology to aid in the performance of their duties.

The **Community Service Officer** (CSO) Program has brought value to the SJPD and to the communities this past year, and the NC supports increasing this force. The CSOs do not negate the need for more sworn officers, but they can greatly augment and extend the service of the police for the community. The use of CSOs, along with online reporting tools and the use of analytic software, should be aggressively pursued to better meet the needs of our community.

The NC supports the **Gang Prevention** efforts. Prevention is better for the residents of the neighborhoods, and cheaper than suppression both financially and in human costs.

It is essential to produce more **Summer Jobs for Youth** which will help keep the youth off the streets and out of gang activities.

The San José Clean Act against **Illegal Dumping** is a valuable program against community blight that needs to be built into the base budget as an ongoing program. It is a model of how city services are

aligned around the communities' needs rather than departmental structures. It should be expanded so that it can be more proactive, and also can better connect organizationally so that all city staff are watching for and reporting illegal dumping.

Revenue

As you heard at your April 14th Study Session, it is important to resist **Employment Land Conversion**. San José will not be able to work its way out of its current financial difficulties if it continues to allow its tax-producing employment lands to be converted to service-demanding residential lands.

As has been painfully demonstrated with the many conversions along Oakland Road, the rezoning of parcels is like the falling dominoes: once one goes, the next in line is soon to fall. There are a number of proposed rezonings coming your way in the near future, and while some may appear to be "the last one standing", even they must be preserved. To do otherwise would demonstrate that this new Mayor and Council will allow commercial land conversions under the new Envision 2040 General Plan Update. Developers demanding subsequent similar conversions will cite the Mayor and Councils' actions as precedent to advance their projects.

We appreciate that there is a great incentive for the developers to seek these conversions. The land instantly becomes two, three, or more times more valuable; it is a "gift" to the developers. As a "Charter City", it is legal for Council to give such gifts, if done "for the public purpose". We recommend that the City Auditor be asked to produce an annual report for the public that lists all these rezonings, the names those who received the benefits, and the public purpose. We recommend that the report also include a list of other gifts, such as waived or reduced city fees, tax subsidies, below-market leases, etc., given to for-profit or non-profit organizations.

We also hope the City will follow up on some of the City Auditor's prior suggestions, such as providing the resources needed to improve the collection of uncollected receivables.

We feel it is important to keep the Envision 2040 goal of 1.3 jobs per employed resident, rather than shifting to a more "realistic" value of 1.0. If the goal were to be reset to 1.0, it is unlikely that San José would ever achieve even that modest goal, whereas keeping the goal at 1.3 at least drives the City planners to aim high. We also support **Small Business Assistance** and incentives, which can help to create these jobs.

Quality of Life

Libraries are an important part of the core infrastructure in our neighborhoods. Keeping libraries open longer will be welcomed by students and parents alike and will help prevent youth problems, which is far better and cheaper than future gang suppression.

An idea: consider opening the libraries seven days per week. Keep the total number of weekend hours the same, but split them between Saturday and Sunday. Many in the Valley work on Saturdays or observe it as a holy day, and having open hours on Sunday would truly give everyone the opportunity to utilize our library system.

We support increasing the effort to maintain our **Streets and Roadways**. Maintenance can only be deferred for so long before the delayed repairs cost many times more than the original maintenance.

We also support **Traffic Calming**. As the economy improves in the Valley and San José sees more development, we need to invest in our neighborhoods to protect our investments in pedestrian

and bicycle networks. We need to aggressively manage inappropriate traffic in our neighborhoods and to keep our major roads from turning into speedways. Investments should be aligned with the needs across the city and not just for the most organized or vocal neighborhoods. Traffic calming needs to also include a regular dose of aggressive commute-time traffic enforcement by the Police. The community should be given an accounting of the funds collected as mitigation for the Protected Intersections Program, along with estimates of future funding based on projects moving through the development process. The CIP process (see below) should be used to prioritize the use of these funds.

Homelessness affects us in every neighborhood in San José. We support the City's efforts to look at different solutions: the past practice of displacement only shifted the homeless to different locations. We are encouraged that the City is participating with the County and the State on the Homeless Task Force. We support the Veteran's Challenge goal of ending veteran homelessness. We are intrigued by the concept of "Micro housing" – modular non-permanent structures that can be moved as needed. An idea: what if the City were to sponsor a design competition? Have architects worldwide submit concepts that show that small can be beautiful, and that affordable can be respectful and dignified. It would be an opportunity to build public awareness of the homelessness issue.

Parks are important to San José, and are a necessary part of our infrastructure. All parks throughout the city are suffering, not just St. James. Many parks are having problems with the homeless, illegal dumping, and lack of maintenance. Some of these problems are being addressed by the proposals above, and volunteers can help with some issues. Partnership with or sponsorship by organizations such as the Knight Foundation or the San José Parks Foundation may help improve services. Every park in our city deserves attention and every district should be apprised of their parks' needs, be it maintenance or lighting, special event needs, etc.

We are pleased that **Fireworks** have returned for the 4th of July celebrations, and that they will be at Lake Almaden as well as in Downtown. We hope that, in the future, the City will be open to having celebrations in other parts of town as well, such as at Lake Cunningham on the East Side.

Innovations

The proposal for **Participatory Budgets** sounds good, but we have some concerns that well-organized neighborhoods might grab all the money, whereas it might be more needed in less-organized neighborhoods, perhaps for traffic calming and code enforcement / blight abatement.

The City needs to be more innovative in its **Procurement of Software** and cognizant of data sharing capabilities throughout all departments. The I/T Department should procure off-the-shelf software that is routinely updated and maintained, rather than attempting to create its own software. Software needs "interoperability" and to not be limited to using a "proprietary format": the data from the Police analytics software should be shareable with the software used by the Parks Department, Fire Dept., Code Enforcement, etc. This will enable a convenient exchange of data between city departments so as to allow for the thoughtful analysis of data from multiple sources.

The City should also look at its internal capacity to conduct quality data analysis: the City Auditor's Office does very good work mashing data to find the hidden clues to underlying issues, and those skills should be developed in every department.

Community Involvement

We support the **Neighborhood Dashboard** concept. Currently, the public needs to master numerous apps and websites in order to report issues online. The City should procure an integrated “San José app” and have a single website to track service requests by the community. There are a number of vendors already offering this service, and the City should select one and implement it.

The City should look at how these tools can give data that can be used to measure the health and completeness of a neighborhood as part of the implementation of the General Plan. For example, Walkscore.com is a good start at comparing neighborhoods, and AARP just released their tool to look at community health. By using open data, sites like these can show our neighborhoods the progress in improving the quality-of-life resulting from the City’s investments in services.

The **Capital Improvement Programs (CIP)** is an important policy document that should have a year-round process. The public should be involved in “connecting the dots” of where the deficiencies are in the community and where the funds are coming from. Since much of the funding is through construction taxes, use this process to help educate the community on the value that new development brings to a community, and show how it can help solve problems and not just create them. Open up the “black box” of the funds. Use an open-data platform to show the source of funds and their use, and keep the data up-to-date and connected to the CIP with the new integrated permitting system. The CIP needs to be more than a once a year hearing at the Planning Commission to certify alignment with the General Plan. The CIP should be specifically showing how it is measurably achieving the goals of the General Plan, including jobs per employed resident.

And this year’s budget should include resources for the **Implementation of the General Plan Update**. “Envision 2040” may be an award-winning document, but it doesn’t do much for the community until it is actually implemented into ordinances. Staff needs money to “codify” aspects such as Riparian Setback Policy and for long-range planning of, for example, the employment lands. This doesn’t require funding from the General Fund: the money is already being collected from a surcharge to building permits – it just needs to be prioritized.

We appreciate this opportunity to provide the neighborhoods’ perspective on this year’s budget proposal, and we look forward to participating in the ensuing discussions.

Dr. Lawrence Ames
Chair, San José Neighborhoods Commission.