



City Neighborhood Council

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DISTRICT COUNCILS:

- Ballard
- Central
- Delridge Neighborhoods
- Downtown
- East
- Greater Duwamish
- Lake Union
- Magnolia/Queen Anne
- North
- Northeast
- Northwest
- Southeast
- Southwest

July 11, 2012

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE 2013 BUDGET

Dear Mayor McGinn and members of the City Council:

Continuing in the budget advisory role assigned by City legislation to the City Neighborhood Council and the thirteen District Councils, and based on consultation with and among the district councils, CNC offers its suggestions for the 2013 budget. Eight key themes and priorities are in the bulleted first section, and budget recommendations are in the twelve numbered items that follow.

THEMES AND PRIORITIES

- Keeping communities safe and vital is never more important than when other programs are being cut.
- Stewardship of City facilities and properties is essential even in the toughest budget times.
- Civic engagement must be a high priority.
- With revenue in short supply, tax expenditures (revenues foregone through deductions and exemptions) should be sunsetted or substantially reduced.
- Consolidations and efficiencies are strongly preferable to cuts, especially cuts causing greater future costs.
- Where cuts are made, they must not unnecessarily reduce services to the public or damage community-building.
- Involve the public early and often in assessing public-private partnerships, in taxing and spending decisions, and in which bond and levy measures should go to the ballot.
- Even in the toughest times, small but worthy initiatives can and must be afforded.

BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Neighborhood Service Centers and Neighborhood District Coordinators. CNC is not reconciled to recent years' cutbacks. The service centers are the City's outposts in the community and particularly needed for

seniors, youth, the disabled, and those on low incomes or for whom English is not their first language. Neighborhood District Coordinators involve residents and businesses and bring grassroots ideas into government. Please preserve these inexpensive services with their multiplier effect in civic engagement, community self-help and stewardship.

2. Neighborhood Matching Fund. Not fully recovered from past cuts, NMF involves citizens at a fundamental level in their government and in building community. When direct City programs are being cut, NMF is more needed to leverage private dollars and volunteer hours that help make up for what the City can no longer afford to do.

3. Civic engagement fairs. Existing funds in the departments and in the office of the Mayor should enable each year in different parts of Seattle six or more civic engagement fairs. Significant resources are currently going into the Mayor's Town Meetings. We suggest that civic engagement fairs with agency tables be co-sponsored jointly (if they wish) by one or more district councils and that these civic engagement fairs tap some agency resources already going into the Mayor's Town Meetings, so that no new funds would be needed.

4. Webcast of board and commission meetings. A low-cost initiative that the City should undertake even amidst budget cuts is the webcast of meetings of its boards and commissions, only a few of which are now recorded for the City web site or Seattle Channel. This inexpensive technology can be managed by board members themselves or by City staff already in attendance.

5. Public safety. A precondition for community is to protect residents and businesses from crime, fire, and disasters. As the largest single expense from the General Subfund, uniformed police and fire services should be delivered in the most cost-effective way to achieve mission objectives. Uniformed services go furthest when civilian staff assist block watch and emergency preparedness volunteers. Vigorous resident and business efforts at the block level to prevent crime and "broken windows" have confined the spread of crime "hot spots," which will proliferate as block watch efforts decline. Outreach by the Police Department's crime prevention coordinators and its Office of Emergency Management should be better integrated.

6. Health, human services, housing, libraries, and community centers. Helping the most vulnerable is the right thing to do, and reduces government costs in the long run. Homelessness is a regional problem and its solution must involve other cities, King and other counties, and state government. Keeping libraries open throughout the week and year is among the City's core public services, especially for those without access to a computer and the internet in this difficult economy. Community centers are a vital component of community-building and public health. Late night hours and teen programs are needed for youth development and safety.

7. Parks and Seattle Center. Just as private owners protect their investment, the City must fully maintain its park and Seattle Center structures, roads, paths, gardens, and ecosystems. Recent years' cuts in maintenance invite damage that eventually costs more to fix, if it even can be.

8. Bridges, roads, walkways, and bikeways, greenways, and green streets. Public health and safety require continued efforts to fund walkways, bikeways, and safe crossings of roads. Maintenance is also lagging, especially for the non-arterials (most neighborhood, business, and industrial streets) which are 60 percent of Seattle's lane mileage and at least 40 percent of the maintenance backlog cost. Neglect today allows deterioration that becomes more costly to repair with each passing year. Avoidable damage should especially be reduced, such as from vehicles that exceed weight limits either illegally or (e.g. with buses and solid waste pickup vehicles) because laws exempt them from these limits. Damage is so expensive to repair; please be proactive in preventing it.

9. Contracting of outreach and involvement. This should be reduced by City departments (such as Seattle Public Utilities, City Light, and the Office of Economic Development). Contractors effectively charge the City for informing themselves about contacts already known to the City employees who must spend valuable time to provide this information. When contracts end, the investment is lost (sometimes to be sold back to the City after it has lost the institutional memory from outreach efforts undertaken by its own employees). For Seattleites who don't understand English, and where City staff or volunteers can't communicate with them, contractors have their place—but not for reaching seniors, renters, and youth. The City has reduced its outreach to the general public (including seniors, renters, and youth, most of them fluent in English). Funds should first go into restoring general outreach efforts and Neighborhood District Coordinator positions. If a department ascertains that a Public Outreach Liaison is needed for language assistance, it should contract with that person directly rather than through a non-profit intermediary as at present.

10. Public-Private Partnerships. Recent controversies over private uses on City property have not been well served by a piecemeal approach and a lack of sustained oversight. The public and elected officials alike must receive earlier and more complete information about proposed new partnerships, including independent expert review to ensure consistency with the public interest. A Public-Private Partnership Panel oversaw such projects in the 1990s; something like it is urgently needed today.

11. Tax Exemptions. Just as at the federal and state levels, Seattle foregoes tens of millions in potential revenue by tax deductions or exemptions for favored businesses, thereby increasing the taxes paid by other businesses and by individuals. With revenues so tight at present, CNC suggests that most tax exemptions be sunsetted or substantially reduced.

12. Strategic bond and levy agenda. CNC urges that, before decisions are made on whether to issue non-voter approved bonds and whether to put particular bond and levy measures before the voters, the Mayor and City Council jointly adopt, with public involvement, a strategic bond and levy agenda setting firm priorities and committing to a public process for the final decisions each year.

Despite today's difficult budget climate, the City must not further reduce maintenance of its structures, parks, and roads. Cuts, where they come, must fall lightest on direct services to the public, especially programs like the Neighborhood

Matching Fund and the Neighborhood District Coordinators, which empower residents and businesses. Achieve savings by reducing contracting and by reducing or eliminating tax exemptions that favor some businesses over other businesses and over individual taxpayers. Grasp opportunities to target existing spending more effectively on mission objectives.

Thanks for your consideration of the above recommendations. A draft of this letter was distributed for comment and revision to the District Councils, was discussed at the May 21 CNC meeting, and was revised, and authorized at the June 25 CNC meeting.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chas Redmond". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Chas Redmond, Chair
City Neighborhood Council

cc: Mayor, City Budget Office, Department of Neighborhoods, District Councils