



# City Neighborhood Council

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## DISTRICT COUNCILS:

- Ballard
- Central July 13, 2011
- Delridge Neighborhoods
- Downtown Mayor Michael McGinn
- East City Hall, 7<sup>th</sup> floor,
- Greater Duwamish 601 Fifth Avenue, P.O. Box 94749
- Lake Union Seattle, WA 98124-4749
- Magnolia/Queen Anne City Councilmembers
- North City Hall, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor
- Northeast 601 Fifth Avenue, P.O. Box 34025
- Northwest Seattle, WA 98124-4025
- Southeast RE: 2012 BUDGET PROPOSALS
- Southwest To the Mayor and 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 the following suggestions for the 2012 budget.

Overview. With revenue in short supply, difficult budget choices must be made. Consolidations and efficiencies are strongly preferable to cuts, which should especially be avoided if they lead to greater future costs. Stewardship of City facilities and properties is essential even in the toughest budget times. Maintenance funds should be restored, not cut. Where cuts are made, they must not unnecessarily reduce services to the public or damage community-building and public safety. Keeping communities safe and vital is one of the highest missions of government, and never more important than when other programs are being cut. Civic engagement must remain a priority, especially in better spending of existing resources. CNC supports continued dialogue on the most cost effective ways to achieve worthy goals.

## Department of Neighborhoods & Engaged Seattle

- Neighborhood Matching Fund. NMF has not fully recovered from past cuts and should not be cut further. To the degree that past cuts can be restored, they should be--or if not, with a commitment to more robust funding when the City's financial condition improves. The Neighborhood Matching Fund involves citizens at a fundamental level in their government and in building community. It attracts vast volunteer resources, producing major improvements for the City at low cost. Accomplishments from the Neighborhood Matching Fund over the years in work accomplished, money and volunteer labor, and in community building have been enormous. When direct City programs are being cut, NMF is even more needed, leveraging private dollars and volunteer hours. NMF empowers Seattle residents and communities to make up for what the City can no longer afford to do.
- Neighborhood Service Centers and Neighborhood District Coordinators. CNC is not reconciled to last year's disproportionate cuts in NSCs and the NDCs. If what was cut last year cannot be restored, the City must at least hold the line against further cuts. The service centers are the City's outposts in the community and are particularly needed for seniors, the disabled, and those on low incomes or for whom English is not their first language. There is a continued need for decentralized access to city services based on a well thought out rationale for the number, location, and size of these access points, as well as what specific city services are most vital. Neighborhood District Coordinators involve residents and businesses and bring grassroots ideas into the bureaucracy. They are the City's best means of outreach, including to traditionally underserved communities.

They provide the Executive and City Council with strategic advice on responding to community issues and concerns and they facilitate the public's access to the Mayor and other officials. Please preserve these inexpensive services with their multiplier effect in building citizen engagement, community self-help and stewardship.

- Consolidation. CNC is cautiously receptive to proposals to consolidate the Department of Neighborhoods with some other offices, but only if doing so strengthens the core DoN functions discussed above.
- Civic engagement fairs. We suggest an initiative for civic engagement that, by broadening the use of resources currently focused on the Mayor's Town Hall Meetings will have little or no additional budget cost. Existing funds in the departments and the offices of the Mayor and City Council should enable each year in different parts of the city six or more civic engagement fairs. A possible model is the "gathering of neighborhoods" that the Delridge and Southwest District Councils have jointly sponsored yearly. The Mayor's Town Hall Meetings, in addition to plenary sessions, also have a fair-like format, with booths for face-to-face contact. These events bring members of the public, businesses, community groups, and public agencies and elected officials together under one roof to publicize and leverage existing government resources by reaching and empowering volunteers, many formerly unfamiliar with the available governmental and community resources. Significant resources from the Department of Neighborhoods and other departments, as well as the Mayor's office are currently going into the Mayor's Town Hall Meetings, whose attendance might be great with the changes suggested here. We suggest that civic engagement fairs be co-sponsored jointly (if they wish) by one or more district councils, that the Mayor's Town Hall Meeting be a feature, and that one or two City Councilmembers also be included in the format for each event. We request that the Mayor and City Council, working with the City Neighborhood Council, design these civic engagement fairs to enhance the impact of the substantial resources already going into the Mayor's Town Hall Meetings.
- 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, almost none of which are now recorded or made available on the City web site or through the Seattle Channel. Open government and civic engagement require that the City make use of this inexpensive technology that can be managed by board members themselves or by City staff who are already in attendance.

### **Public Safety, Libraries & Youth and Families**

- Public safety. A precondition for community is protecting residents and businesses from crime, fire, and disasters. As the largest single expense from the General Subfund, uniformed police and fire services should be carefully analyzed to ensure that their mission objectives are delivered in the most cost-effective way. Uniformed services will go furthest with civilian assistance to block watch and emergency preparedness volunteers. Crime "hot spots" have been limited by vigorous resident and business efforts at the block level to discourage crime and the "broken windows" that invite it. Such hot spots will spread as block watch efforts decline. The crime prevention coordinators should not, as planned, be zeroed out, but rather be increased if possible. CNC supports active consideration of integrating crime prevention programs within the Community Policing Teams units. If the Police Department cannot provide funding for civilian assistance to resident and business volunteers in their crime prevention efforts, this function should be funded in the Department of Neighborhoods, whose philosophy of organizing and outreach may prove a better fit. Continued cooperation with SPD would of course remain central to the crime prevention coordinator role. Alternatively, consider transferring the crime prevention coordinators to the Office of Emergency Management, where block-level organizing for disaster readiness would benefit from the coordinators' skills at empowering volunteers.
- Health, human services, housing, and community centers. Helping the most vulnerable is the right thing to do, and can reduce government costs in the long run. Homelessness is a regional problem and its solution must involve other cities, King and other counties, and the state government. Community centers are a vital component for neighborhoods and important for community-building. The CNC urges that the Mayor and City Council recognize the great need for these centers. Hours cut last year should be restored and community centers should not be converted to office space. Late night hours and youth programs are needed for teen development and safety, and must be protected from cuts. Our youth are our future, and we must invest in their success.

- Libraries. Keeping libraries open throughout the week and year is one of the City's most important direct public services. Libraries are particularly important for the many who lack access to a computer and the internet in this difficult economy. The CNC recognizes that reductions in direct services will require adjustments by library patrons, but please consider alternatives to a system wide one-week closure or the reduction of branch operating hours. We support the exploration of new revenue sources as an addition to library funding from the General Subfund.

### **Infrastructure & Agenda**

- Public Spaces. Just as private property owners protect their investments, the City must fully maintain its park and Seattle Center structures, roads, paths, gardens, and ecosystems as an obligation to current taxpayers and future generations. Recent years' cuts in maintenance invite serious damage that will cost more to fix in the long run.
- Roads and bridges. Street maintenance is lagging, especially for the non-arterials (most neighborhood, business, and industrial streets) which are 60 percent of Seattle's lane mileage and 40 percent of the maintenance backlog. Neglect today allows deterioration that becomes more costly to repair with every passing year. The City should be proactive in reducing damage from vehicles that exceed weight limits either illegally or because (e.g. with buses and solid waste pickup vehicles) laws exempt them from these limits. If it is not, please recognize the need for increased maintenance as a tradeoff for the continuing damage.
- 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 develop, with public involvement, a strategic bond and levy agenda setting firm priorities and committing to a public process for the final decisions each year.

Conclusion. 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. To the extent that public services are reduced, please preserve programs like the Neighborhood Matching Fund and the Neighborhood District Coordinators which empower residents and businesses to do for themselves what government can no longer do.

Thanks for your consideration of the above recommendations. Successive drafts of this letter were distributed for comment and revision to the district councils, and it was discussed, revised, and authorized at the June 27 CNC meeting.

Sincerely,



Chas Redmond  
Chair, City Neighborhood Council

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