



City Neighborhood Council

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June 28, 2013

Mayor Michael McGinn
City Hall, 7th floor,
601 Fifth Avenue, P.O. Box 94749
Seattle, WA 9812402-4749

City Councilmembers
City Hall, 2nd floor
601 Fifth Avenue, P.O. Box 34025
Seattle, WA 98102-4025

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE 2014 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 2014 budget. Eight key themes and priorities are in the first section, with budget recommendations in the 17 numbered items that follow. (For detail on many of these recommendations, see CNC's July 11 and Oct. 31, 2012 letters, at <http://seattle.gov/neighborhoodcouncil>.)

THEMES AND PRIORITIES

- Keep communities safe and vital
- Uphold a high standard of stewardship for City facilities and properties
- Engage citizens in their government and in helping one another
- Sunset or substantially reduce deductions and exemptions that reduce revenue
- Prefer consolidations and efficiencies to cuts in services, and especially avoid immediate cuts that would cause future costs to be greater
- Ensure early and broad public involvement in assessing public-private partnerships, taxing and spending, and which bond and levy measures should go to the ballot
- Budget within existing funds, avoiding additional levies and bond issues where possible
- Fund small but worthy initiatives even in the worst financial climate

DISTRICT COUNCILS:

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

BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Neighborhood Service Centers and Neighborhood District Coordinators. Restore the original thirteen centers and coordinator positions from past cuts. These inexpensive services bring grassroots ideas into government and have a multiplier effect in civic engagement, community self-help and stewardship - especially for seniors, youth, the disabled, and those on low incomes or for whom English is not their first language.
2. Neighborhood Matching Fund. NMF is more needed than ever to leverage private dollars and volunteer hours that help make up for what the City can no longer afford to do. Please bring funding close to \$3 million/year.
3. Civic engagement fairs. Civic engagement fairs with agency tables should be co-sponsored jointly (if they wish) by one or more district councils. Tap agency resources already going into the Mayor's Town Meetings, so that no new funds are needed.
4. Webcast all board and commission meetings. This inexpensive technology can be managed by board members themselves or by City staff already in attendance.
5. Public safety. Restore the Police Department's crime prevention coordinators to at least ten from previous cuts and better integrate those efforts with the Office of Emergency Management. Increase information on the SPD website about precinct advisory councils--how they are appointed, their procedures, when they meet, etc.
6. Health, human services, housing, and community centers. Homelessness is a regional problem and its solution must involve other cities, King and other counties, and state government. Expand by at least 25 percent the late night hours and teen programs at community centers.
7. Parks and Seattle Center. Eliminate the deferred maintenance backlog for City park and Seattle Center structures, roads, paths, gardens, and ecosystems including restoring from previous cuts the activities of painting, carpentry, metal work, plumbing, electrical repair, weeding, pruning, watering, cleaning and trash pickup. Deferred maintenance imposes future costs that rise exponentially.
8. Roads, walkways, bikeways, greenways, and green streets. Increase by at least 10 percent the funding of pedestrian and bicycle improvements, as well as maintenance for non-arterials which are 60 percent of Seattle's lane mileage and at least 40 percent of the maintenance backlog cost. Reduce avoidable damage by enforcing weight limits and discouraging vehicles that are exempt from these limits.

9. Trees. Restore SDOT's urban forestry program from previous cuts; a 25 percent increase would be reasonable. Lengthen and promote SPU's annual fall free pickup period for garden waste. Limit charges for the dumping of leaves at transfer stations.

10. Contracting of outreach and involvement. Departments like City Light, SPU, and SDOT should make better use of Department of Neighborhoods staff, who have unique outreach and involvement skills, with DON reimbursed--a better model than contracting out this work.

11. Public-Private Partnerships. Elected officials and the public must receive earlier and more complete information about proposed new partnerships, including expert review to ensure consistency with the public interest. A Public-Private Partnership Panel oversaw such projects in the 1990s; something like it is still needed to ensure independent, comprehensive oversight.

12. Tax Expenditures. Deductions, exemptions, and deferrals free some taxpayers (usually favored businesses) from paying their share. All tax expenditures should be reviewed annually and repealed or reduced if the public interest is not well-served.

13. Strategic bond and levy agenda. 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 should 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.

14. Video Voters Guide. Seattle Channel and the Ethics and Elections Commission produce this guide only in odd numbered years. As ballot measures are increasingly common in even numbered years, the Video Voters Guide should be produced every year.

15. On-line availability of City documents. Fund the City Clerk to digitize ordinances and resolutions adopted prior to the mid-1990s and place them on the web site in a searchable form. Fund the Ethics and Elections Commission to digitize and place on line all past opinions, as the Hearing Examiner has done.

16. Retain public records. The City should retain all public records for several years, especially since technology is dramatically reducing the costs. Seattle's deletion of many e-mails and other documents within weeks of when they are created or received is not consistent with open and accountable government.

17. Timely publication of final budget. Provide funds to the City Budget Office to enable the final budget as approved by the City Council in November to be posted on the City web site more promptly than the current February date.

Conclusion. Grasp opportunities to make government more open and to target existing spending more effectively on mission objectives. Achieve savings by reducing contracting and by reducing or eliminating tax expenditures that favor some businesses over others and over individual taxpayers. Reverse past cuts in maintaining the City's structures, parks, and roads, as well as past cuts in programs that empower residents and businesses. Make savings by repealing or reducing some tax expenditures.

Thank you for considering the above recommendations. A draft of this letter was distributed for comment and revision to the District Councils and was discussed at the May 20 CNC meeting. A revised draft was then distributed to the District Councils, and was discussed, revised, and unanimously adopted at the June 24 CNC meeting.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Philip Shack', written in a cursive style.

Philip Shack
Chair

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