



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

October 31, 2012

Seattle City Council
P. O. Box 34025
Seattle, WA 98124-4025

CNC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE 2013-14 BIENNIAL BUDGET

Dear City Councilmember:

City legislation assigns an important role in the budget process to the City Neighborhood Council and the thirteen District Councils that comprise it. CNC sent budget recommendations to you and the Mayor in a July 11, 2012 letter (posted at seattle.gov/neighborhoodcouncil). In consultation with the District Councils, CNC has reviewed the Mayor's proposed 2013-14 budget and has the following comments (see the July 11 letter for background).

1. Neighborhood District Coordinators. CNC urges a restoration of 13 NDC positions from past years' disproportionate cuts to 9, and that all authorized positions be filled. Amidst austerity, these coordinators are more needed than ever to leverage scarce volunteer and City resources.

2. Neighborhood Matching Fund. CNC appreciates the Mayor's proposed small increases, but urges more. NMF is hurting from past years' cuts.

3. Civic engagement fairs. Using existing funds in the departments and in the offices of the Mayor and City Council, please enable each year in different parts of the city six or more civic engagement fairs to be sponsored or co-sponsored (if they wish) by one or more District Councils.

4. Webcast and phone listen lines for board and commission meetings. Almost none of the City's boards and commissions are webcast nor is their audio available by phone listen lines. Open government and civic engagement will benefit from inexpensive technology that can be managed by board members themselves or by staff who are already in attendance.

5. Public safety. CNC supports the funding of ten new police officer and additional non-commissioned positions. Please restore the Crime Prevention

Coordinators to pre-2011 levels of seven (six plus one Asian Liaison, citywide). These positions leverage volunteers to extend officer effectiveness in an affordable manner. CNC also requests that SPD make more information available on its web site about its precinct advisory councils--how they are appointed, their procedures, when they meet, etc.

6. Health, human services, housing, libraries, and community centers. CNC supports the Mayor's restoration from past cuts, such as to extend late-night hours and teen programs in community centers, extend library hours, and end the library August furlough closure.

7. Parks and Seattle Center. CNC is concerned that the Mayor's budget proposals do not go far enough to restore sustainable maintenance levels for park and Seattle Center structures, roads, paths, gardens, and ecosystems. Recent cuts in painting, carpentry, metal work, plumbing, electrical repair, weeding, pruning, watering, cleaning and trash pickup place this legacy in jeopardy. Unchecked invasive weeds in parks endanger desired vegetation and spread outside the parks to natural areas as well as to private gardens. With vegetation and physical structures alike, deferred maintenance imposes future costs that rise exponentially and unsustainably. These maintenance needs are far more important than Woodland Park Zoo's proposed additional parking lot, which should not be considered for funding until it has cleared environmental analysis.

8. Bridges, roads, walkways, bikeways, greenways, and green streets. CNC supports the Mayor's proposed increase in SDOT maintenance, but is concerned that it is not enough to prevent further deterioration, much less restore facilities to the better conditions of the past. At the proposed levels of major maintenance, even arterials will continue to deteriorate, while virtually nothing is budgeted to halt the rapid decline of non-arterials (most neighborhood, business, and industrial streets) which are 60 percent of Seattle's lane mileage and at least 40 percent of the road maintenance backlog cost. Because major maintenance is so expensive, the City should be proactive in reducing damage from vehicles that exceed weight limits either illegally or because laws exempt them from these limits. We also urge that funding from the Appearance and Pedestrian Environment program for business districts not be restricted to those with parking meters.

9. Trees. Despite a small proposed increase, SDOT's urban forestry program hasn't recovered from previous years' cuts. Also, we urge that SPU lengthen and promote the annual fall free pickup period for garden waste, and limit charges for the dumping of leaves at transfer stations. Owners are removing mature trees because of the cost of disposing of leaves, thereby undermining the City's tree coverage goals.

10. Outreach and involvement. CNC appreciates response to our past concerns over overuse of contracting out for outreach and involvement by SDOT, SPU, and City Light. By now allowing these departments to have more employee positions

for outreach and involvement, the Mayor and Council have saved money and increased effectiveness. But we are concerned that these departments are making too little use of Department of Neighborhoods staff, who have unique outreach and involvement skills. We suggest closer oversight of outreach and involvement to ensure that contracting out is not overused and that SDOT, SPU, and City Light be encouraged to spend some outreach and involvement dollars by reimbursing DON staff.

11. Public-Private Partnerships. Controversy over private uses of City land and facilities is fanned by different agencies' piecemeal approach and a lack of expert, independent oversight. The Public-Private Partnership Panel that the City Council authorized in the 1990s was well-designed to provide this oversight, and should be revived.

12. Tax Expenditures. Just as at the federal and state levels, taxpayers pay more as Seattle foregoes millions in potential revenue by waiving or reducing taxes for favored businesses, as with the Multifamily Tax Exemption that a recent Auditor report found wanting. CNC suggests that all tax expenditures be reviewed annually, and if the public interest is not well-served, be repealed or reduced.

13. Video Voters Guide. Seattle Channel and the Ethics and Elections Commission are producing this guide only in odd numbered years. As local ballot measures are increasingly common in even numbered years, the Video Voters Guide should be produced every year, at least for local ballot measures.

14. On-line availability of City documents. Most ordinances and resolutions adopted prior to the mid-1990s remain inaccessible electronically. Funding should be provided to the City Clerk to digitize these documents and place them on the web site in a searchable form. And unlike the Office of the Hearing Examiner, the Ethics and Elections Commission has not yet placed on-line most of its opinions; it should be provided funds for this purpose.

15. Retention of public records. With technology improvements dramatically reducing the cost of data storage, the City can afford to retain all public records for at least a year (Pierce County retains all documents for six years, the statute of limitations for felonies). Seattle's current 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.

16. Prompt publication of final budget. Agencies and the public cannot effectively track spending when the final budget as approved by the City Council is not posted until well into February of the fiscal year. Additional funds for earlier publication should be provided to the City Budget Office, which does remarkable work with little staff.

Thanks for your consideration of the above recommendations. A draft of this letter was distributed to the District Councils for comment and revision, and was discussed, revised, and approved at the October 29 CNC meeting.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chas Redmond". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "C" and a long, sweeping underline.

Chas Redmond, Chair
City Neighborhood Council

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