



City Neighborhood Council

c/o 700 Fifth Ave, Suite 1700, PO Box 94649, Seattle WA 98124-4649
Telephone: (206) 684-0719 Fax: (206) 233-5142 TDD: (206) 684-0446

DISTRICT COUNCILS:

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

October 29, 2010

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

CNC Recommendations for the 2011-2012 Seattle Budget

Dear City Council member:

City legislation assigns to the City Neighborhood Council and the thirteen District Councils that comprise it an important role in the budget process. CNC has reviewed the Mayor's budget proposals, and finds that they are significantly at variance from our July 2 budget letter to the Mayor.¹ We summarize below the key disparities and their relation to our priorities of community-building, public services, stewardship, equity, efficiency, and sustainability.

Community-building and public services:

CNC's recommendation was not to reduce public services or community-building programs. While welcoming the Mayor's funding of human services, we cannot accept his deep cuts in other public services. Building community is among the highest missions of government, never more important than when other programs are being cut. A well-organized community, through volunteer action and mutual aid, can do what government cannot afford or could not do as well as what people do for themselves if they have the tools. Yet five of the City's 26 Parks Department community centers are proposed to be closed or severely cut--eliminating safe community focal points, especially for youth. And the crime prevention staff (once with 20 full-time equivalents and now withered to six) is proposed in the Mayor's budget for only four FTEs, and through an uncertain Federal grant rather than City funds. The crime prevention coordinators advise and organize citizens and businesses to help police officers deter and catch perpetrators. CNC is concerned that closing community centers and reducing crime prevention staff will increase crime and unravel communities.

DoN among hardest hit by cuts:

The Department of Neighborhoods is among the City's smallest departments, but would suffer proportionately more cuts than much larger departments.

¹ Access this at <http://seattle.gov/neighborhoodcouncil/documents/CNC2010budgetletteronletterhead.doc>

DON's community-building role cannot survive these cuts. The Neighborhood Matching Fund brings people together on projects that benefit all of Seattle. By leveraging private dollars and volunteer hours, it returns double value or more for each City dollar. The Neighborhood Matching Fund hasn't recovered from past cuts, yet the Mayor proposes a further cut of 22 percent--a grievous blow to a nationally acclaimed success in community-building, with last year's cuts, this budget would provide only 55 percent of the NMF funds that were available in 2008.

Another grievous blow to community-building as well as to public services is the Mayor's proposal to eliminate seven of the thirteen Neighborhood Service Centers (Beacon Hill, Capitol Hill, Downtown, Fremont, Greenwood, Queen Anne, and West Seattle) and six of the thirteen District Coordinators. The Coordinators and their field offices long predated DON, and are inherent in Seattle's success in bringing government closer to the people and producing results not achievable top-down. Departments that lack field offices depend on the District Coordinators and their offices as "feet on the street" and a link to residents and businesses.

While reassured by the City Budget Office that there is no consideration of reducing District Councils from the existing 13, CNC feels strongly that the public services the District Coordinators provide, including to the District Councils, cannot be accomplished from DON's downtown headquarters or from offices not located within each District Council boundary. The District Coordinators uniquely have the trust of the grassroots and of City Hall alike. The proposed cuts would be a historic setback for 40 year's of success in decentralizing government.

Stewardship:

CNC's July 2 letter also urged that the City no longer lag in maintaining parks, trees, community centers, piers, streets, walkways, and other physical investments. The proposed budget places the City farther behind, allowing further deterioration that eventually costs more to repair—a burden passed along to our youth once they become taxpayers. Cuts in Parks Department maintenance (such as painting, carpentry, metal work, plumbing, electrical repair, tree pruning, water maintenance, cleaning and trash pickup) place our already deteriorating park system in unprecedented jeopardy. The proposed budget also allows further growth in the backlog of repairs needed in non-arterial (neighborhood and industrial) streets, which receive few funds from the transportation levy. In 2006, City Council Central Staff estimated the cost of rebuilding non-arterial streets at 40 percent of the total arterial and non-arterial backlog, a proportion now growing as arterials continue to be rebuilt while non-arterials remain ignored.

Equity and efficiency:

Economies are best achieved if all programs are subject to collaborative savings efforts. The proposed cuts fall especially heavily on the very public services and community-building and stewardship efforts that CNC's July 2 letter sought to defend. Some cuts are necessary, but CNC urges that they not be considered without looking at the entire City budget. Uniformed police and fire services
CNC letter to City Council regarding Mayor's 2011-2012 Budget proposal p.2 of 3 11/1/10

absorb more than 48 percent of the General Subfund, yet the proposed budget yields few savings there

To exempt some programs from budgetary scrutiny isn't an efficient use of tax dollars, and reduces the incentive for agencies' self-examination and disclosure of possible savings. Only if all programs are scrubbed thoroughly looking for alternative savings will the 2011-2012 budget be equitable and efficient. Revenues must remain in the picture. In the Mayor's proposed budget, two-thirds of the gap between spending and revenues is addressed by spending cuts and one-third by revenue increases. This ratio should be reconsidered.

Sustainability and fairness:

The City Neighborhood Council is concerned that, because of its harsh impacts on public services, community-building, stewardship, and maintenance and its hands-off approach on large segments of City spending, the Mayor's proposed 2011-2012 budget is not sustainable, equitable, or efficient. We urge the City Council to take a fresh and hard look at the proposals and adopt different priorities.

Thanks for your consideration of our recommendations. This letter was authorized by unanimous vote at the October 25, 2010 City Neighborhood Council meeting.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Charles Redmond" followed by a stylized flourish.

Chas Redmond, Chair
City Neighborhood Council

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