



# 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 29, 2008

Seattle City Council  
 City Hall, 600 4th Avenue, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor  
 PO Box 94749  
 Seattle, WA 98124-4749

**RE: NEED FOR TIMELY WEB ACCESS TO BUDGET DECISION DOCUMENTS**

Dear Councilmember:

Adoption of the budget, especially the biennial budget, is the most important statement of the City of Seattle’s priorities. A first-listed responsibility that Resolutions 27709 and 28815 assign to the City Neighborhood Council is “review and recommendations regarding City budget issues including the general fund, capital and block grant budgets and the Neighborhood Matching Fund.” The City is required to help: “Opportunities for neighborhood involvement in the City budget process shall be created and maintained.”

CNC, the district councils, and the general public, cannot meaningfully participate in budget decisions without timely access to the documents regarding impending decisions on the budget. In recent years, an important improvement in access has been that, once released, the Mayor’s full proposed budget and the presentations that the executive departments make to the City Council Budget Committee, are promptly being added to the City’s web site.

Once the Mayor has conveyed the proposed budget to the Council in late September, a hectic two months ensue in which the real City budget is decided upon. A May 2006 letter from the City Neighborhood Council urged that during this period, the City Council “post member and staff proposals and analyses on the Council web site in a timely way, preferably simultaneously with their creation.” We reiterate that request today.

The City web site still lacks access—timely or otherwise—to most of the documents by which the City Council considers and, in many cases, changes the Mayor’s proposals. The City Council will inform and involve the public if it adds to its web site as they are created the following documents: (1)

questions that the City Council poses to the departments and the answers received; (2) budget issue papers; (3) budget analyses; (4) proposed budget actions (“green sheets”); (5) draft budget provisos and statements of legislative intent; and (6) draft budget spreadsheets. These documents have totaled barely as many pages as are in the Mayor’s budget proposal, but they are crucial for the citizen oversight and participation in the budget decisions that the City Council considers and makes.

Until the City Council begins placing these budget documents on its web site, citizens desiring access to them must (if they even know of their existence) specifically request them, or make the trip to City Hall to search for them in notebooks that are available only in the City Council chambers during Budget committee meetings, or in the City Clerk’s office during business hours. Any copies taken home cost fifteen cents each, and may not be available until the following day.

By quickly putting these budget decision documents on its web site, the City Council will provide timely, economical, and round-the-clock access to these crucial elements of the public’s business. Those who physically or economically cannot come to City Hall will at last have access, as will those who because of a physical disability need their access to be in electronic rather than paper form. Even those without a computer or web access will have greatly improved options.

Including these documents on the web site will also provide a timely electronic record once City Council decisions have been made. The lack of this electronic record has meant, in recent years, that after the budget is adopted in late November, it takes three months or more (that, is well, into the actual budget year that this budget applies to) before the final budget, or even an unofficial version, is published or is made available on the City web site.

We urge that the City Council make the above improvements in timely web access to the documents regarding its 2008 consideration of the 2009-10 budget. Technology and training for real-time web publishing are now common in businesses and government agencies, and the City Council should make full use of these techniques to inform and involve the public as it develops the City budget. The above letter was approved, without opposition, at the July 28, 2008 meeting of the City Neighborhood Council.

Sincerely,  
[signed]  
Chris Leman  
Chair, City Neighborhood Council

cc: Mayor and the Finance Department