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*The Levy Oversight Committee is an advisory body that monitors revenues, expenditures, and program and project implementation. The Oversight Committee advises the City Council, the Mayor, and SDOT on responding to program and project cost savings or overruns. The Oversight Committee reviews SDOT's program and project priorities and financial plans and makes recommendations to the Mayor and City Council regarding the spending of levy proceeds.*

*Council Bill 118402*

**June 10, 2020**

**To:** Lorelei Williams, SDOT Deputy Director, Capital Project Delivery

**From:** Move Seattle Levy Oversight Committee

**Cc:** Mayor Jenny Durkan; Seattle City Councilmembers; Sam Zimbabwe, SDOT Director

**Subject:** Response to SDOT's Proposed Prioritization Methodology for Anticipated Budget Impacts Related to COVID-19

The Move Seattle Levy Oversight Committee (LOC) has reviewed the proposed project prioritization factors included in Attachment A of the 5/21/20 memo from Lorelei Williams. It is our understanding that the city is anticipating major revenue shortfalls due to the economic burden COVID-19 has inflicted on our community. As you review the LOC recommendations below for how to respond to the shortfall, please note that placing the highest priority on safety and equity will ensure that the values reflected in the enabling legislation will be reflected in the projects the levy is still able to fund.

**Values Outlined in Legislation**

One of the roles of the LOC is to ensure that the levy is implemented in line with what Seattle voters approved and subsequently what appears in the levy legislation. The legislation includes an emphasis on creating a walkable, transit-rich city; promoting a transportation system that helps fight climate change, nurtures vibrant communities, and improves public health; providing safe infrastructure for children and all pedestrians; maintaining streets that can carry an increasing number of people; and integrating and prioritizing the implementation of modal plans. These values helped inform the recommendations outlined below.

**Assessment**

As one of our responsibilities is to monitor revenues and expenditures, the LOC understands that certain projects in the

Move Seattle Levy portfolio may be delayed or eliminated due to revenue shortfalls and that prioritization factors will be used to make these decisions.

The LOC believes that factors D (Project Prioritization Score) and E (Equity Score) are important to consider. Providing transportation assets to areas of the city that have been historically underserved is of the utmost importance and should be considered strongly by SDOT when prioritizing levy projects.

The LOC also stresses that factors C (Project Status) and F (Grant/Partnerships) are of importance when considering project prioritization. Projects that have already spent a large sum of funding in construction, are close to being awarded for construction, or have funding secured from outside sources should continue. The LOC believes this will maximize the deliverables that are provided to the citizens who voted for this levy.

### **Recommendations**

Although they were not entirely clear from the materials presented, Factors D (Project Prioritization Score) and E (Equity Score) appear to be derived using varying methods. The LOC recommends that these factors be represented consistently between projects to provide an opportunity for a fair comparison. The LOC believes equity should be emphasized in all prioritization decisions and having a clear understanding of these scores will aid in this. The LOC requests information on how these two factors are determined.

The LOC also requests more clarity on Factor G (Asset Preservation OR Resilient Neighborhoods OR Transportation/Transit Backbone). It appears this factor is concerned with the routine maintenance of assets as well prioritizing key arterial routes in the city. This factor should have specific and objective definitions if it is to be used for prioritization.

There are other factors that the LOC recommends considering when prioritizing projects. As noted earlier, the LOC would like to see an emphasis on safety in prioritization decisions. Projects that have the potential to prevent injuries and fatalities should be prioritized, as is outlined in the legislation. The LOC also feels strongly that projects that help work towards Seattle's climate change goals should be given emphasis. Urban Villages should also be taken into consideration when prioritizing projects since they are part of the city's strategy to reducing dependence on cars.

The LOC recommends that SDOT continues to have transparency in this prioritization process. It is particularly important that all of the items identified for prioritizing projects include clear definitions and the decision-making process is easily available for community members to find and understand. The Move Seattle Levy is a voter-approved tax and the citizens have a right to know the decisions that are made regarding levy projects. Any action SDOT can take to provide additional clarification on how the decisions were made is strongly encouraged. We would like to give credit to the SDOT staff with whom we have worked with on levy oversight, particularly

Lorelei Williams and Rachel McCaffrey, for their transparency and for their prodigious efforts to compile information to make it possible for the LOC to make useful recommendations.

### **Moving Forward**

The LOC understands that factors other than COVID-19 will affect the city's transportation cash flow (West Seattle Bridge, Initiative Measure 976, as well as uncertainty surrounding both state and federal funds). The LOC would like to review a projected cash flow that SDOT is anticipating. This will aid in prioritizing levy projects as they fit into SDOT's budget as a whole.

As the Mayor and City Council develop the 2021 budget this summer, we hope they consider our input on the prioritization of transportation projects. In general, the LOC would like to see existing levy projects be funded first before new projects are considered. The LOC understands that this unprecedented financial challenge to Seattle means we are facing decisions related to cutting basic transportation needs. We urge the Mayor and City Council to identify new revenue for transportation projects. In particular, we support the continuation of the Seattle Transportation Benefit District to provide revenue to offset General Fund spending reductions on levy projects and ongoing Metro bus service. The LOC hopes to see the Mayor and City Council look for additional, progressive sources of revenue to fill gaps in our transportation budget.

Sincerely and on behalf of the Move Seattle Levy Oversight Committee,

Rachel Ben-Shmuel  
Co-Chair

Ron Posthuma  
Co-Chair

Attachments: Attachment 'A' from SDOT memo dated 5/21/20



## ATTACHMENT A: DRAFT LEVY PORTFOLIO PRIORITIZATION FACTORS

*This document is a companion piece to Memorandum titled “Move Seattle Levy prioritization methodology and draft prioritization factors, in response to City revenue and budget impacts related to COVID-19,” transmitted to the Levy Oversight Committee on May 21, 2020.*

**Draft Levy portfolio prioritization factor details:** SDOT has compiled the following draft factors based on existing Levy and departmental priorities to serve as factors in guiding the Department’s decision making in the context of our current budget realities. We would like to emphasize the draft status of these factors and seek the Levy Oversight Committee’s input, particularly regarding the questions outlined on page 2. These represent the many factors that the Department will consider as we prioritize our Levy work and we look forward to the LOC’s input in this area. Our methodology and development of these factors aims to address anticipated Levy portfolio work plan changes while allowing the Department to remain responsive to changing and uncertain times. Letter identifiers have been applied for discussion and revision purposes.

Identifier	Factor	Details/explanation
A.	Project name or levy deliverable category	A specific project will be listed if applicable, and when not available (such as for operations/maintenance activities), an annual deliverable category will be identified (e.g. 2020 crosswalk restriping”).
B.	Levy program/s	The relevant Levy program will be listed, e.g. “Sidewalk Safety Repair.”
C.	Project status	This will account for project status: active construction, pre-construction or final design, operations and maintenance (O&M), or planning/design.
D.	Program prioritization score, if applicable	Many Levy programs go through robust prioritization efforts to advance a concept into planning and project delivery (e.g. Bicycle Master Plan Implementation Plan). When available, these processes thoroughly vet and score projects for safety, racial/social equity, community prioritization, and other factors.
E.	Equity score (high-low), if not included as part of criterion D	The above described program prioritization processes typically encompass an equity evaluation. If social equity is not already addressed through the program’s prioritization process, an equity score will be applied using the 2015 Racial Equity Toolkit; specifically the map on page 15 of this document. This is an interim tool until we update the Levy program RET in conjunction with the Portfolio Status Update and make adjustments accordingly.
F.	Grants/partnerships	Indicate total value of secured or highly like grants or partnership dollar amounts.
G.	Asset preservation OR resilient neighborhoods OR transportation/transit backbone	Three core functions were identified to allow SDOT to be responsive to unprecedented times and in the context of a changing and uncertain future (West Seattle Bridge, social distancing, etc.). Asset preservation refers to work supporting preservation and maintenance; resilient neighborhoods encompasses active transportation, work in support of economic recovery, and access to services or jobs; and the transit backbone is in support of a core transit network, including RapidRide and access to frequent reliable transit.
H.	Other considerations	Other relevant factors/considerations.