



May 14, 2020

Dear Members of the San Diego City Council:

Over the past few weeks, you have received input from many community members about the City of San Diego's Fiscal Year 2021 proposed budget. This public input has come from every district and in various forms, including public comment, reports, and letters from community organizations and individuals. Taking all of this into consideration, we submit this letter on behalf of the TRUST SD Coalition and the Climate Action Campaign.

Budgets are an expression of our priorities, and they should strive to balance the needs of all stakeholders. Simply put, budgets are value statements. It is our hope that the needs of our community will be addressed in a manner consistent with our shared values.

Our current public health crisis presents an opportunity for the city of San Diego to invest in programs and infrastructure that demonstrate a commitment to the well-being of every San Diegan. With this public health crisis, we have the opportunity to grant relief to small businesses, provide rental assistance for those impacted by COVID-19, assist local non-profits and food banks, and explore permanent housing solutions. These are all worthy priorities.

Of major concern, however, is the proposed closure of our libraries, seemingly without regard for available data. For instance, the blanket elimination of operating hours on Sundays and Mondays for all libraries across the city does not take into account that these days are two of the highest trafficked days at the Malcolm X/Valencia Park Library. The proposed permanent closure of Mountain View/Beckwourth Library is also problematic in that it serves both District 4 and District 9 constituents, populations that already suffer from economic disparities. The closing of this library during this difficult time will no doubt hamper community members' abilities to use public library services and resources, such as computers to search for jobs and other economic opportunities. Furthermore, it is our position that true smart cities prioritize maintaining robust access to libraries.

Also of concern is the proposed 84 percent increase of the Sustainability Department’s budget for the sole purpose of supporting the City’s over-budget “Smart Streetlights” Program. This program should not be a priority during this crisis. We ask instead that you work with the Public Safety Committee, and Councilmember Montgomery in particular, to adopt an ordinance to regulate the City’s use of surveillance technology. We believe it is also prudent to establish an advisory commission that councilmembers can rely upon to fully vet the true impacts of future privacy-impacting technology, such as “smart” infrastructure. Future budgets can then address such infrastructure with clear vision.

Of final and greatest concern is the implementation of the Climate Action Plan (CAP) Update. The Smart Streetlights Program, which is housed under the Sustainability Department, has become a barrier to climate action goals, rather than a program that supports them. Our Climate Action Plan calls for an update by 2020. We recommend that in the upcoming fiscal year’s budget, necessary funds to start the CAP update process be allocated and that the CAP be amended to include new best practices and strategies. We also request the implementation of the Independent Budget Analyst’s 2018 recommendation that the CFO include a CAP Five-Year Forecast as an addendum to the Five-Year Financial Outlook on an annual basis. That Outlook would offer the Mayor and City Councilmembers a clear understanding of the actions and investments needed to hit the 2020 and 2035 CAP targets. It is time the City take a holistic programmatic approach to CAP implementation and ensure that social equity is monitored and protected in each goal.

Again, even in the midst of a public health crisis, there is opportunity. We urge you to address the needs of our community by adhering to our shared values.

Sincerely,



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