MENLO TOGETHER

June 8, 2020

To: Menlo Park City Council and Staff
Re: Agenda item I-1 Budget

Honorable Council Members,

Menlo Together is a group of Menlo Park and Peninsula residents who envision a city that is integrated and diverse, multi-generational, and environmentally sustainable. Our core values are: equity, sustainability, inclusion, health, and racial and economic justice. We came together around these core values because they are necessary to the health and strength of our community, no matter the economic circumstances.

As the Council finalizes the budget, we urge you to prioritize:
1) Meeting the needs of the most vulnerable and impacted residents;
2) Maintaining the City's capacity to restore services and achieve the City's goals when the crisis and ensuing economic downturn have passed;
3) Deferring projects for which delay will not cause harm or significantly increased costs.

Following are our concerns with the proposed budget, and suggestions to align the budget to live up to these values.

Eliminating Belle Haven services for two years or more. The latest staff report discloses that the City has delayed construction of the new community center, with a "best-case" estimate for the building's closure in late March 2021. It also notes that "Facebook needs additional time to ensure that the proposed design for the new facility is consistent with the project budget." Given this new schedule, preemptively closing the Belle Haven Community Center makes even less sense than it did before. The City should keep the community center open to provide services to Belle Haven residents, even if services must be adapted due to Covid-19.

Shutting the Belle Haven Community Center during the recession would exacerbate historical inequities in an already underserved part of the community.

Preserving childcare. The draft budget proposes to maintain childcare services. However, the proposed changes risk failure for the program - increasing fees above market rate, adding surcharges, and closing the program if it is undersubscribed with these uncompetitive rates. Please invest in our

community by investing in affordable childcare. Please maintain the program at affordable rates with reasonable policies so it continues. Closure of the childcare services will harm the livelihood of families who depend on childcare to hold paying jobs and those who make up the child care workforce (largely women of color). Additionally, if we let go of childcare providers today, we will face an even greater lack of providers when the economy recovers.

Deferring capital projects that can wait, and using reserve funds the City saved for emergencies such as this. Instead of cuts that harm residents facing the greatest impact from the recession, we recommend deferring capital projects that -- while worthwhile -- are less urgent than preserving essential services for our most vulnerable residents.

Next step: sustainability investments. With regard to the sustainability budget cuts, staff now recommend removing $400,000 for EV Chargers (see page E1-31) in order to show eligibility for a grant to cover the costs of the chargers instead. When it is time to review the updated Climate Action Plan (CAP), we will support budget amendments that ensure the city's investment in climate action. The climate crisis won't wait.

Thank you for preserving funds for housing planning and for retaining the staff needed to get started on the city's legal and moral obligations to plan for affordable housing.

Thank you for funding the police open data portal and pruning police services. As people across the nation march to demand police accountability and the use of local government funds to sustain residents during the Covid-19 recession, we commend the Council for these actions, which will increase transparency and preserve other critical services for residents.

A budget reflects values - all the more so when decisions are difficult.

Thank you for your consideration.
Adina

Adina Levin, for
Menlo Together
https://menlotogether.org
650-646-4344