

City Council Budget Questions

Updated: November 2, 2022

Q. There is \$0.5 million added for HVAC upgrades at the current Operations Center. We are building a new one. Does it make sense for us to invest in the facility we will not need long term?

A. Normally, if the transition from the current facility to the new one is anticipated to take place within 3-4 years, we choose not to invest in modifications. In this case, it is highly likely that the move-in date will be 2027 or 2028. Due to the timing of transition, HVAC repair and upgrades were warranted. We always look to balance the costs associated with an investment like this against the useful life and have historically used a 5-year guideline. In some cases, it may not make sense because reactive, episodic repairs erode the cost savings of deferred maintenance on facility that is planned to be replaced. We will continue to be flexible as we seek to optimize this balance for this as well as other facilities such as replacement fire stations.

Q. I like what I'm seeing for LED Streetlight replacement and repair (P. 385, 386, 394). I also like the \$.5M for the charging stations. That might be a little low and there should be a significant grant from CPU (P.359).

A. The City will seek to leverage local resources with grants through CPU as well as what may be available in the recently passed federal legislation. The budget also includes grant writer capacity for this purpose as well as many other functions and programs at the City. If this yields additional funding or rebates, we could amend the budget during one of the supplemental appropriations next year.

Q. My overall concern are the interest rates. 7% is going to be a problem that is going to have a dramatic impact on the economy. Should we be planning for a less optimistic forecast?

This is a more optimistic and aspirational budget than we have developed in the past. We are also likely headed towards recession in the next year or two. The City has a \$5 million revenue stabilization balance in the General Fund and have our reserves funded to our financial policies. Our most volatile revenue source is Sales Tax, while other revenue sources to the General Fund are very reliable and predictable. Sales tax is highly dependent on the economy and has been slowing down these last three months, although it remains on track to exceed forecast this year. Due to the evolution of the local economy and the advent of internet sales tax, sales taxes are less volatile than it was during prior economic events. As the City has done in the past, staff will closely monitor revenues and make recommendations to the City Manager and his directors to slow down spending if needed. This can be accomplished through freezing vacant positions and delaying capital investments. A large portion of new additions in the budget are one-time in nature, including many positions, which gives good flexibility to respond to a downturn. We have already alerted the City leadership that this is the environment we are operating in. We are confident the City organization and Council will successfully navigate through whatever the economy brings to us in the next two years without negatively impacting the City's financial stability.

Q. Is a new fire station in Fruit Valley road under consideration?

A. The budget includes the capital investments as outlined to the voters in the work leading to [Proposition 2](#), which were developed by Chief Brennan Blue and his team and based on a data driven

analysis of system needs to improve response times and resulting outcomes. That analysis did not show that the Fruit Valley was underserved. Because of the specificity of the commitments associated with Proposition 2, only those investments included in the ballot resolution may be funded with proceeds from that levy.

For reference, the one-time cost to build a new station is estimated at \$15-20 million (depending on market conditions), the acquisition of fire apparatus (trucks and/or engines) and staffing and operations of a station requires the hiring of 15 firefighters (ongoing cost). The analysis of station locations is based on the emergency call trends and forecast service area-wide and [can be found here](#). Chief Blue can provide additional information and insight to City Council on follow up if needed.

Q. What is the City doing to get better accessibility into the City's facilities, including Firstenberg and Marshall centers?

A. Both centers are currently accessible for individuals with disabilities. During the remodel of the Marshall center in 2017, the changing rooms were modified to accommodate use by individuals with disabilities. In addition, the Marshall Pool was upgraded including improvements to the pool systems, deck, and pool tank. Also, additional pool access and three new individual/family change rooms were created. Both Marshall and Firstenberg centers exceed code requirements for bathrooms and changing spaces.

Other accessibility investments include funding for a tactile printer and software, to enable City materials to be translated for those who have visual impairment, as well as enhanced capacity (through staff and technology) to better engage unheard and under-heard voices in our programmatic and project- based community engagement.

The recommended budget also includes funding for accessibility improvements at City Hall, and other facility investments (police, fire) which will all incorporate best practices for accessibility.

Multi-lingual/translation services are recommended to be enhanced in this budget through a combination of expanded contract translation services as well as part time, temporary and project-based staff focused community engagement. Permanent FTEs for translation services were not included because it is challenging to cover the wide range of languages spoken in the community at the time. Currently, contracted services provide valuable flexibility to meet the multi-lingual needs of the community.

11.7 Update: the City's current translation services vendor offers telephonic and in person translation services. This is a new vendor to the City in the current biennium. The recommended budget will increase the value of this contract, expanding the City's capability to provide translation more frequently and in more languages which will be used to support engagement on a project and program basis as well as can be used to multi-lingual pilot customer service at City facilities. This, in addition to the community language needs assessment planned for 2023-24 will enhance the City's capabilities to serve members of our community more effectively in their primary language.

Q. What is the planned approach for the printed newsletter? How will it compliment the City's other communication channels?

A. The strategy is to have a varied set of channels to meet the diverse information needs of the community. While social media and the website are effective channels for the City, not all of our residents use social media or choose to follow our web content. A newsletter that is mailed to all households will help fill this digital information gap. A newsletter will allow the City to do longer-form storytelling through articles, infographics, and photography. A print newsletter complements our other channels by providing another way to share and cross promote information. The printed version will be in English, but we will translate the content into the main languages spoken in Vancouver and make it available using QR codes.

Q. Why are we trying to create the City's naturescaping projects, rather than incorporating lessons and examples that already exist, (at the WREC facility, County created gardens), and updating our standards to start incorporating native vegetation when building/rebuilding parks and building roads?

A. While referenced as a "pilot" project, this effort is the beginning of a programmatic approach to ultimately modifying the standards for public and private landscaping in the city. We will be building off known efforts in this arena, but the City's naturescaping project will focus on areas with specific needs. For example, road rights of way and stormwater infiltration basins are exposed to different types of chemicals, etc. than a demonstration garden might be and will require functional as well as ornamental mixes. In parks, high traffic areas also require different combinations of plants. We also intend to develop vegetative covers that are climate hardy while lowering ongoing maintenance needs. As the standards are propagated, they will be added to development standards so that infrastructure dedicated to the city through private development follows the new criteria.