



May 26, 2021

Re: Comment, Agenda Item 1, Review and Recommendation Regarding the FY 2021-2022 Proposed Budget

Dear South Pasadena Finance Commission:

This week, as we reflect upon the murder of George Floyd by the police, we are reminded of our roles in building safe communities for all people, inclusive of our Black, Latinx, and Asian neighbors who have been historically left out of government decisions in our city. We have set forth our vision for a more inclusive city in the [Care First Budget](#).

Hundreds, if not thousands, of residents here in South Pasadena believe in the urgency of our time to enact budgets and policies for racial, economic, and environmental justice. The time is now, not tomorrow. We are pleased with several proposals in the city staff report about the budget and would like the Commission to consider our comments as you make your recommendations to the City Council.

We demand a foundational shift in the city's approach to social services. The city's investment in public safety should not be primarily with the police department. Rather, the city should take a more expansive view with programs and services that better ensure our safety and well-being. In 2020-2021, the city spent one-third of our general funds on the police department, nearing \$10 million or \$381 per resident for policing alone. This spending is more than 80% of police departments in California.¹ As a result of the city's outsized spending on police wages and salaries, the city has forfeited opportunities to robustly fund other city programs and services.

City staff has "discouraged" the implementation of new or enhanced social service programs funded by large injections of one-time revenue from the cell phone tower lease and federal stimulus money. (Budget Staff Report, p. 4.) We disagree with this outlook. This is a limited view of the future with an assumption that the status quo of general fund spending must continue as is. If funding is reallocated from the outsized police budget, new programs which require ongoing expenditures can be supported by the general fund. That is why, for the next fiscal year, we recommend the city allow no growth in the police department's budget and that it permanently cuts all current vacant positions in the department—not re-fund any police positions. The city should then use the coming fiscal year to study how future cuts can be made within the police department, especially with the role of the new Crisis Intervention Team.

We enthusiastically support creating a Crisis Intervention Team. But, to be clear, this mobile crisis response should not be managed by the police department. The basis for creating a Crisis Intervention Team at this juncture is to take away law enforcement's role in responding to

¹ In 2017, with a police budget of \$8.32 million or \$320 per resident, the city already spent more police funding per capita than 82% of police departments in California. Police Scorecard, South Pasadena, <https://policescorecard.org/ca/police-department/south-pasadena> (last accessed May 25, 2021).

mental health crises. We want to provide people with an unarmed response service that does not involve any threat of lethal force. Thus, the Crisis Intervention Team should not be an extension of the police department, but should be viewed more like an emergency health service. This team could more appropriately be housed in the Fire Department, which is already connected to the city's dispatch system and provides emergency responses.

Next, we support the city's proposals to fund several new staff positions in the Planning and Public Works Departments to meet our city's affordable housing and infrastructure needs. We hope the Public Works Department position will be tasked with implementing several environmental and transportation initiatives. However, if that is not the intention of this new position, we recommend the city to fund at least one more new position, an Environmental Programs Manager, and use one-time funding to hire a temporary Transportation Manager or consultant to prepare the necessary plans to tap funding already earmarked for South Pasadena traffic management and complete streets projects. Residents have waited too long for the traffic relief and safety enhancements these projects would provide.

We share the city's priorities to assist the post-pandemic needs of the community and to improve the way the city addresses the needs of the unhoused and individuals with mental health issues. To ensure staff is adequately supported, we recommend that the city establish a Housing Commission to work alongside the Planning Department and its increased responsibilities in enforcing our city and state's housing laws. We also ask the city to establish a Homeless and Housing Resource Center with the city's one-time funds and/or general funds while it develops permanent operational funding for the center. The growing homeless crisis in the greater Los Angeles region calls for all cities to step up and do their part.

The city's strong financial position in the upcoming fiscal year allows the city to do even more for racial and economic equity than what city staff has proposed. In addition to programs that have been proposed, we urge the Commission to consider funding programs to support Black-owned businesses, pilot a local guaranteed income program, and provide more services to support our children and youth, including a city jobs program.

We are aware of the great task ahead of the city to get these programs permanently and deeply rooted so they can bloom into real progress. We support the direction the city's budget discussion has headed in light of our demands for a more racially and economically inclusive city, and we appreciate the Commission's service to our community.

Sincerely,

Anti-Racism Committee of South Pasadena
Black Lives Matter South Pasadena
Care First South Pasadena
South Pasadena Tenants Union
William Kelly, on behalf of Transition South Pasadena