

**State of Texas
County of Bexar
City of San Antonio**



**Meeting Minutes
City Council Budget Work Session**

Council Briefing Room
City Hall
100 Military Plaza
San Antonio, Texas 78205

2023 – 2025 Council Members

Mayor Ron Nirenberg
Dr. Sukh Kaur, Dist. 1 | Jalen McKee-Rodriguez, Dist. 2
Phyllis Viagran, Dist. 3 | Dr. Adriana Rocha Garcia, Dist. 4 Teri
Castillo, Dist. 5 | Melissa Cabello Havrda, Dist. 6 Marina
Alderete Gavito, Dist. 7 | Manny Pelaez, Dist. 8 John
Courage, Dist. 9 | Marc Whyte, Dist. 10

Tuesday, August 27, 2024

2:00 PM

Council Briefing Room

The City Council convened a Budget Work Session in the Council Briefing Room beginning at 2:03 PM. City Clerk Debbie Racca-Sittre took the Roll Call noting a quorum with the following Council Members present:

PRESENT: 10 – Nirenberg, McKee-Rodriguez, Viagran, Rocha Garcia, Castillo, Cabello Havrda, Alderete Gavito, Pelaez, Courage, Whyte

ABSENT: 1 - Kaur

ITEMS

1. Staff presentation on the FY 2025 Proposed Budget focusing on, but not limited to, the following City Departments or Initiatives: [Erik Walsh, City Manager; Justina Tate, Management & Budget]

- A. Animal Care Services
- B. Development Services / Code Enforcement
- C. Solid Waste

A. Animal Care Services (ACS) Department

Interim Director of ACS, Mike Shannon presented the \$32.3 million FY 2025 Proposed Operating Budget which was a 13.6% increase over FY 2024 with 38 additional positions. Shannon reported on the five pillars of the ACS 2023 Strategic plan which included supporting a safe community for people in their neighborhoods, protecting the safety and providing humane treatment of pets, championing a healthy and thriving workforce, fostering positive connections with our community, and supporting the placement of pets for life.

Shannon provided an overview of the department which included services in the field, placement and shelter, clinic, and support services such as education/outreach, volunteer services, and fiscal. The ACS Advisory Board was an integral part of the work managed by the department, according to Shannon.

Shannon stated that in FY 2024, City Council made a significant investment in ACS and the performance measures indicated improvement in response to critical calls with an estimated response rate of 64% and a goal to achieve a 76% response rate in FY 2025. He noted that however, the 80% rate of compliance for dangerous dogs had been achieved in FY 2024 compared to 44% in FY 2023. He stated that additionally, 3,602 criminal citations were issued in FY 2024 as compared to 1,898 in FY 2023. He added that fourteen more first response positions (12 officers and 2 supervisors) were included in the FY 2025 Proposed Budget at a cost of \$1.4 million; the goal of adding more officers was to eventually get to a 100% response rate for critical calls by FY 2026.

Shannon stated that spay/neuter was a critical opportunity for the department. He reported that 33,080 surgeries were estimated for FY 2024, up from 23,646 in FY 2023, with a target of 41,170 surgeries in FY 2025. He noted that this would be achieved by adding \$2.7 million and 21 positions to operate two spay/neuter clinics, one at Denver Heights on the East Side and the other at Las Palmas on the West Side.

Another goal was to increase the live release rate to 83% which included 11,000 rescues and 6,500 adoptions according to Shannon. He reported that the high-volume pet partnership with San Antonio Pets Alive! (SAPA!) Began this month with a scope of rescuing 4,000 pets per year at a cost of \$175 per pet. The department also partnered with St. Mary's University and the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) to conduct a study on stray and roaming dogs; the results were anticipated in the first quarter of FY 2025.

Shannon listed the FY 2025 improvements including the addition of one Neighborhood Engagement Coordinator at a cost of \$81,625 and \$200,000 for wide-spread marketing campaigns focused on: placement (adoptions and fostering), responsible pet guardianship, and direct connection with communities at 80 events. He indicated that the proposed capital projects included funding for the design of a new stray/roaming dog kennel with 52 dog runs and a new animal hospital funded through the 2022 General Obligation Bond Program.

Shannon highlighted the Council Consideration Request (CCR) submitted by Councilmember Alderete Gavito that requested increased fines for repeat owners for roaming dog violations, sterilization of pets found free of restraint, and implementation of a pseudonym program to protect the identify of people filing dangerous dog affidavits. He noted that this was scheduled to be briefed to the Public Safety

Committee in the fall of 2024.

B. Solid Waste Management Department (SWMD)

Director of SWMD, David Newman outlined the department's mission which was to create a safe, sustainable, and equitable multimodal transportation system for San Antonio. Newman presented the \$190.2 million FY 2025 Proposed Operating Budget which was a 7.4% increase over FY 2024 with five additional positions.

The department served 375,000 residential curbside customers with weekly recycling, organics and garbage collections, according to Newman. He proposed increasing the rate of the large and medium carts by \$0.50 to help pay for services. SWMD also provided brush and bulky pickup twice a year and on-demand collection of bagged leaves and out-of-cycle brush, bulky, and cart pickup. Newman reported that there were three types of drop-off sites: bulky, brush, and hazardous household waste. He added that the department also managed crews to handle illegal dumping, homeless encampment trash, downtown litter baskets, dead animal collection, closed landfill maintenance, and provided outreach and education.

Newman reported on performance measures from FY 2023, 2024, and 2025. He stated that the sustainability measures included a diversion rate which was the percentage of waste collected by the City diverted away from landfills by recycling, composting, etc. Newman stated that most Texas cities diverted between 20%-30%, with Austin being the highest at 39%; San Antonio was currently at a 33% diversion rate. The FY 2025 goal was to achieve a 40% diversion rate and, according to Newman. He mentioned that San Antonio had the strategies in place to achieve this goal including education/outreach to focus on increasing recycling and organics.

Newman stated that the Smart Collection System would include daily navigation and he provided a visual map of what was picked up and would be on the agenda for consideration by City Council this Thursday. He noted that additionally, \$535,000 had been allocated to clean up 700 homeless encampments but 1,100 had been estimated to be cleaned up by the end of FY 2024.

Deputy Director of SWMD Josephine Valencia stated that the "Fight Dirty" illegal dumping campaign was an outreach program to prevent illegal dumping, however, the cleanup would require five additional positions to support a new illegal dumping crew at a cost of \$799,757. She noted that this crew would also help clean up homeless encampments for a total litter cleanup of 400 collection miles. She added that additionally, positions would be added to maintain service levels due to customer growth at a cost of \$98,636.

Valencia highlighted the CORE 4 Recycling Campaign which focused marketing and outreach to increase diversion rates. She proposed reducing the Bitters Brush Grinding shift from 7 to 6 days per week with the operation closing on Sundays as this was the lowest attendance of the week with 40 visitors. The reduction would save \$58,182 by reducing one vacant position.

Valencia summarized that the department had a goal to maintain the current service levels and high customer satisfaction rating. She stated that the Budget included a \$0.50 rate increase on large and medium carts, an additional illegal dumping clean-up crew, and focused marketing and outreach to

increase the diversion of garbage to recycle or compost.

C. Development Services Department (DSD)

Interim Director of DSD, Amin Tohmaz presented the \$75.4 million FY 2025 Proposed Operating Budget which was an 8.5% increase over FY 2024 mostly due to employee benefits and abatement contract costs and capital projects to add street lights. He proposed a reduction in four vacant positions. Tohmaz described the three department functional areas: land development, plan review, and field services. He reported that FY 2024 permit activity had increased since FY 2023 when the interest rates were high. He mentioned that all targets for reviews and inspections of development projects had been met. He indicated that code enforcement response time and abatement goals had been met with a 90% compliance rate and a proactivity rate of 77% in FY 2024.

Tohmaz stated that In FY 2022, City Council approved \$5.8 million to assess 3,292 miles of residential streets and install streetlights and FY 2025's program included \$3 million to install 282 solar lights. He noted that the Senior Assistance Program (SAP) to provide abatement of code violations such as lawn maintenance, trash/debris, outside placement and hazardous tree removal for elderly or disabled residents on a fixed income was proposed at \$100,000 (same as FY 2024) but it would be citywide instead of \$10,000 per district.

Tohmaz stated that the FY 2025 Proposed Budget included the addition of one Code Officer at a cost of \$124,168 to address compliance with the Short-Term Rental (STR) Ordinance. He noted that the STR permit fee had increased for Type 1 rentals to \$300 and for Type 2 rentals to \$450 and DSD had asked STR platforms to remove listings without a legitimate permit number and to emit hotel occupancy tax directly to the City monthly. He mentioned that the new Ordinance also added a required "quiet" hours notice. Tohmaz added that new enforcement options included: a compliance meeting with the Director, Civil Enforcement through an Administrative Hearing Officer, and extended the revocation of permits for noncompliance to three years.

Tohmaz proposed \$50,000 in FY 2025 to hire a consultant to develop a Code Strategic Plan with stakeholder feedback. He stated that Code Enforcement had been internationally accredited since 2018 and was #1 in Texas and #4 nationwide. He indicated that The Boarding Home Program, established in 2015 with four staff members who were only inspecting seven boarding homes, was recommended for elimination. Tohmaz stated that these inspections would be covered by existing staff at a savings of \$215,188.

DISCUSSION:

Discussion was held on all items simultaneously.

Councilmember Alderete Gavito fully supported the personnel and Budget increases for ACS and wanted to ensure that there were designated staff to follow up on citations and sterilization agreements to hold people accountable. Shannon stated that the follow-ups were slow in the past due to staffing issues, but the department had put more emphasis on this task and was not planning to add staff, this was an additional duty.

Councilmember Alderete Gavito asked about the difference between ACS officers and other types of investigators. Shannon stated that all were certified animal care officers and the new positions would give the department 50 critical call responders. Councilmember Alderete Gavito asked if there were enough veterinarians. Shannon stated that the goal was to hire enough veterinarians but he noted that the new medical techniques slowed down the number of spay/neuter surgeries that could be accomplished. Councilmember Alderete Gavito was very excited about the new West Side clinic.

Councilmember Alderete Gavito asked if the Proposed Budget would meet the requirements of her Council Consideration Request (CCR 2024-0014) related to loose and dangerous dogs. Shannon stated that a larger conversation about the CCR was needed and decisions would need to be made that could impact future Budgets but for now, the plan was to increase the number of spay/neuter surgeries. City Manager Erik Walsh commented that it was a matter of changing processes to see how many of the 41,170 surgeries could be used for roaming-owned pets as well as community spay/neuter surgeries. Mayor Nirenberg noted that the conversation should go to the Public Safety Committee and then to a B session.

Councilmember Alderete Gavito recommended including the new citations and severity of penalties in the outreach and education campaigns. Shannon stated that this message would be included in the billboards and at the neighborhood meeting level. Councilmember Alderete Gavito recommended improved communications between ACS and 3-1-1. Shannon stated that 3-1-1 scripts and responses were being modified to ensure proper communication. Assistant City Manager Jeff Coyle stated that 3-1-1 had implemented a quality assurance team that would respond to residents who were not satisfied with the outcome.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia supported the \$50,000 for the code enforcement strategic pPlan to create a compassionate team and give them tools to help residents. She commented that restaurant owners had stated that the permitting process was cumbersome and had complained about delays and asked about the timeline for reviews. Tohmaz stated that DSD had 18 days to review the permit initially and nine days to respond to any corrections made.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia expressed concern that for all the warranted streetlights, only 28% were implemented and was glad to see the implementation of solar lighting that could help. She asked why the standard only required lights on one side of residential streets. Tohmaz stated that if there was light within 600 feet in a residential area, CPS Energy stated that the light was not warranted and he offered to review any location the Councilmember identified.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia asked about the increase in positions in FY 2023 for DSD and why one position was decreased. Director of the Office of Management and Budget Justina Tate attributed the fluctuations to implementation of the ACCELLA Build SA Permit Management Software. Tate also clarified that positions had been added for proactive apartment inspections in FY 2024.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia asked ACS about the position changes and suggested that more staff could be added to the live release team. Shannon stated that the critical call response and spay/neuter clinics were the most pressing priority for additional staff. Councilmember Rocha Garcia commented that picking up more strays might add to the shelter population and the need for more live release team staff. City Manager Walsh stated that there was not enough money to increase all aspects of ACS and he

understood that City Council's priority was to get to a 100% response rate on the critical calls and staff the new clinics.

Councilmember Whyte commented that the animal care network had been broken for some time, noting that the Proposed Budget was being increased by 13.6% while public works was only being increased by 3%. He asked whether 38 new employees would help ACS meet its goals and address the issues. Shannon stated that 21 positions were to support the new spay/neuter clinic which was the largest increase in the Proposed Budget; the other 14 were the officers to respond to those critical calls for aggressive animals and cruelty cases. Councilmember Whyte recommended getting ACS and other stakeholders and partners together to develop creative solutions.

Councilmember Whyte supported the addition of more code enforcement officers to address calls in Council District 10 as it directly impacted residents' day-to-day lives. He asked how residents were advised when their cases were closed. Tohmaz stated that the current metrics required code officers to respond to a call within two days and follow-up on the case/case closure within 45 days, noting that 95% met the 45 day metric. Tohmaz commented that the number of calls in Council District 10 were not as high as in other areas of town. Councilmember Whyte supported the boarding home efficiency and added that similar efficiencies could be found citywide with Zero Based Budgeting.

Councilmember Whyte asked if there was an alternative to increasing the rates for SWMD. Newman stated that the option would be to decrease services which would likely affect their 97% satisfaction rate. Councilmember Whyte requested clarification on closing the brush sites on Sundays. Newman stated that there were 600 individuals utilizing the brush sites daily but only 40 were utilizing them on Sunday so it made sense to close.

Councilmember Whyte asked about picking up shopping carts from the homeless encampments and whether those were reused or recycled. Newman stated that most of the 2,500 carts were disposed of and could not be recycled because they were contaminated. Councilmember Whyte requested a heat map of where the shopping carts were found in preparation for a CCR.

Councilmember Courage requested information on training and retention of ACS officers. Shannon stated that the current cadet class started with 14 and 12 were expected to graduate in October 2024 and he would provide the current staff retention rate. Councilmember Courage asked what the cost would be to spay/neuter every animal that was picked up and asked if there were any laws preventing this policy. Shannon stated that legal concerns and the entire process would be analyzed with the CCR which was making its way through the Public Safety Committee. Councilmember Courage commented that since owned animals were euthanized there should be no reason not to spay neuter. Shannon noted that all laws were followed when animals were euthanized, and those laws were different from spay/neuter laws.

Councilmember Courage asked about mobile spay/neuter clinics and where ACS would find veterinarians. City Manager Walsh stated that due to budget constraints and the need to staff the new clinics, a mobile clinic was not feasible, and veterinarians would be a contracted service, not City employees.

Councilmember Courage asked how SWMD monitored repeated illegal dumping locations and what

were the fines. Newman stated that these were tracked and cameras were used to help identify the times of dumping and provided the information to the police so they could be investigated and charged. Councilmember Courage asked how many calls were received for code violations daily and how many were received at night. Tohmaz reported that there were 300 code violation calls received per day and 55% of the violations were for tall grass and not at night.

Councilmember Castillo was excited to see the Las Palmas Spay/Neuter Clinic being funded and staffed. She supported increasing fines for irresponsible pet owners and an increased response rate to critical calls. Councilmember Castillo expressed concern that if there were more officers picking up strays, they might fill up the shelter and suggested more resources might be needed for adoptions. She commended ACS on their high quality commercials and educational programs.

Councilmember Castillo stated that illegal dumping was a huge issue in her council district and expressed concern that people were turned away from regular dump sites due to disallowed materials that they might just be dumping nearby in the neighborhood. Newman stated that he was not aware of illegal dumping near the dump site. Councilmember Castillo recommended more free days for people and asked if there was an option to let people without a CPS Energy bill or commercial operators dump for free. Newman stated that allowing business to dump for free would overload the system in a matter of minutes but they could look at expanding free days for residential customers with the proper documentation. Councilmember Castillo recommended enhancement of the communications to billboards.

Councilmember Castillo stated that her CCR 2024-0006 entitled Dangerous Assessment Response Team (DART) Cost Recovery was intended to ensure that the cost of all City resources were being captured through the DART Fee Program. Villagomez stated that the CCR was still going to the Committee. Councilmember Castillo supported creation of the code enforcement strategic plan and she hoped additional funding could be allocated to the Senior Assistance Program (SAP) if it ran out of money. Tohmaz stated that he would ask for more money if needed for the SAP. Councilmember Castillo commented that the development team had high-level credentialed staff and recommended increased compensation for Code Officers.

Councilmember Viagran requested information on the usage of the different sized carts and suggested a process to help residents downsize their carts. Newman reported that 14% of the carts were small, 10% were medium, and 76% were large carts. Councilmember Viagran commended the difficult jobs of drivers to maneuver around cars parked on the street to get to the carts.

Councilmember Viagran asked if more than the 282 streetlights could be added if they used solar. Tohmaz clarified that the 282 lights were all solar and would cost \$3 million. Councilmember Viagran supported the development of a code enforcement strategic plan but recommended that the plan include specific details and not just a high-level plan. Tohmaz agreed to ensure that this was included.

Councilmember Viagran stated that the first DART she participated in as a ride-along included ACS officers that had to take out hundreds of animals that had been previously removed and were back in the home. Since then, Councilmember Viagran supported more enforcement. She recommended more specifics to be included in the ACS Strategic Plan so that these instances would not occur; this would also mean more adoptions and spay/neuters. Councilmember Viagran commented that ACS officers had

a very difficult job and they needed to have mental health services.

Councilmember Cabello Havrda noted that the ACS facility was in her council district and she recognized the passion that the ACS officers had for their work and the animals they helped/people they served. Councilmember Cabello Havrda recommended growing the foster and rescue networks. She supported the goal to provide more spay/neuter surgeries and provide more education. Councilmember Cabello Havrda expressed concern with increasing fees as not all residents were aware of the services or could afford the surgeries.

Councilmember Cabello Havrda noted that a recent Town Hall focused on Code Enforcement had the highest attendance and the most frequent 3-1-1 call was for SWMD followed by Code Enforcement. The streetlight gap was a safety issue, according to Councilmember Cabello Havrda, and she recommended prioritizing pathways to schools and bus stops.

Councilmember Cabello Havrda stated that the highest number of calls to 3-1-1 was for SWMD as people noticed right away when their bins were missing or their trash did not get picked up and the department was extremely responsive, however, she wondered why illegal dumping had increased. Newman stated that illegal dumping had always existed because it was expensive to use the commercial landfills but he did not know why it had increased. Councilmember Cabello Havrda requested an infographic on recycling.

Councilmember Alderete Gavito supported the SAP and was happy to see the allocation of \$100,000 for FY 2025 and wondered what lessons had been learned. Tohmaz stated that when the program first started, code officers were trained but they would forget so a regular training was implemented and application forms were provided for the resident to complete and hand back to the officer, additionally, council district offices were trained. Another lesson learned was that the demand was greater in some council districts than others, so while the pilot was for \$10,000 per council district, having the money in a citywide pool would improve results and be more equitable. Councilmember Alderete Gavito asked if the funds could be used to remove dead trees. Tohmaz stated that tree removal was included but was expensive and infrequent and did not make up that much of the total program expense.

Councilmember Alderete Gavito recommended a reassessment of responsiveness goals for Code Enforcement. Tohmaz noted that the Strategic Plan was expected to reassess the goals and metrics as well as the processes noting that in 2012, Code Enforcement merged with DSD but used to be a separate program. The Goal was to have the plan by the end of the year, according to Tohmaz.

Councilmember Alderete Gavito requested that SWMD correlate the brush pickup schedule to coincide with the best months to trim trees to stay out of the active oak wilt areas during peak season for the disease which would help support CCR 2024-0001 entitled Oak Wilt Replacement Program.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia requested details on the illegal dumping cleanups noting that Council District 4 had three times the tonnage of other council districts and made up almost half of the grand total. She was grateful that there was a covert operation to figure out who was committing illegal dumping and would support any technology to improve the outcomes and reduce illegal dumping. Councilmember Rocha Garcia supported the new illegal dumping crew and recommended the addition of one more bulky collection cycle in her council district.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia noted that the ACS live release rate was 83% and asked if ACS was designated as a no-kill shelter. City Manager Walsh indicated that the definition of no-kill had evolved; the City's definition was 90% because some dogs were simply not able to be adopted, however, challenges began during the pandemic and the percentage declined. City Manager Walsh stated that there was an upcoming foster event where employees would receive eight hours of incentive leave if they volunteered to foster animals.

Councilmember Courage asked how many staff were in DSD and how many were code officers and what were the officers' working hours. Tohmaz stated that the department had 102 code officers out of 503 total staff and code officers worked 8:45 a.m. to 4:30 a.m. or 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m. but there were 12 to 15 officers who worked on Saturday.

Councilmember Courage questioned whether one code officer being requested for Short Term Rentals was enough noting that there were 4,000 STRs expected and asked about the STR permitting process. Tohmaz stated that STR operators needed to apply for a permit but were not inspected, rather were self-certified. Councilmember Courage recommended a code officer for nighttime noise complaints such as STR house parties and loud bars and stated that they could investigate without talking to the owners. Tohmaz stated that the Noise Ordinance was enforced by SAPD not Code Enforcement and was designed that way because Code Enforcement were not peace officers so they could only measure the noise decibels and report to SAPD who had to resolve the issue.

Mayor Nirenberg supported the progress on the ACS strategic plan including strong enforcement against owners who were not keeping their animals on their property or had dangerous dogs causing community safety issues.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

A. Executive Session was not held.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 4:22 p.m.

Approved

**Ron Nirenberg
Mayor**

**Debbie Racca-Sittre
City Clerk**