

**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 29, 2023

10:00 AM

Council Briefing Room

The City Council convened a Budget Work Session meeting in the Council Briefing Room beginning at 10:00 A.M. City Clerk Debbie Racca-Sittre took the Roll Call noting a quorum with the following Council Members present:

PRESENT: 11 – Nirenberg, Kaur, McKee-Rodriguez, Viagran, Rocha Garcia, Castillo, Cabello Havrda, Alderete Gavito, Pelaez, Courage, Whyte

ABSENT: None

ITEMS

1. Staff presentation on the FY 2024 Proposed Budget focusing on, but not limited to, the following City Departments or Initiatives: [Erik Walsh, City Manager; Justina Tate, Director, Management & Budget]
 - A. Solid Waste Management
 - B. Development Services Department

City Manager Erik Walsh introduced the Items and stated that both departments would present sequentially with discussion to occur afterward for all topics simultaneously.

David Newman, Director of the Solid Waste Management Department (SWMD), described department services and funding sources including the Solid Waste Operating and Maintenance Fund (M&O) proposed to be \$148.7 million and Fleet Services Fund proposed to be \$28.4 million; together these funds were proposed to be increased overall by 5.2%.

Newman stated that the department served over 371,000 residential customers annually through weekly collections of recycling, organics, and garbage; twice a year collections of brush/bulky, and on demand collection of bagged leaves and out of cycle collections.

Newman proposed to abate 10,000 illegal dumping sites and 700 homeless encampments in FY 2024. He explained that the fund was structurally balanced since 2015 but was currently unable to sustain the level of expenditures without a rate increase, citing landfill and waste disposal contracts, rising vehicle costs and higher labor expenses.

Newman described the residential customer billing model which included three sizes of garbage carts, the large cart (96 gallon) being the most common (77% of the carts) and most expensive with a recommendation to increase the fee by \$3.49 to a cost of \$30.25 per month. The mid-size cart (64 gallon) would increase by \$1 to a fee of \$19.76 per month and was used by 13% of the residents. Small cart (48 gallon) fees would remain steady at \$14.76 per month and accounted for 10% of all residents. However, Newman added that there would be an environmental fee assessed to all accounts. Newman explained that customers could save money by downsizing from the brown garbage cart and rely more on recycle and organics which were both 96 gallon or large carts.

Newman compared San Antonio with the peer cities of Dallas, Austin, El Paso and Ft. Worth and described some of the FY2024 initiatives including \$531,564 to address illegal dumping including an awareness campaign, free landfill days, community cleanup and free bulky. Newman proposed \$638,925 for technology to provide service verification and navigation to optimize routes and ensure no lost pickups, as well as a heat plan for summer collections.

Michael Shannon, Director of Development Services Department (DSD) stated that the department had over 500 employees in three main divisions: Land Development, Plan Review and Field Services. In the FY2024 Proposed Budget, Shannon stated that the Code Enforcement Team was funded with \$17.4 million from the General Fund, the rest of the department was funded with restricted funding at \$50.4 million, and capital improvements were funded at \$1.5 million for improvements to the One Stop Center. Shannon recommended eight new Code positions increasing the total number of staff to 509.

Shannon reported that permit activity had been declining and was expected to return to pre-pandemic normal levels (3,329 permits per year); the strongest level of activity was in 2021 (5,946 permits per year) mostly due to lower interest rates.

Shannon reported a FY2024 target of three business days for initial residential plan review, 18 calendar days for complex commercial plan reviews and 95% of building inspections completed as scheduled. He noted that code enforcement investigations had increased this year over 2023 including more calls for overgrown yards, property maintenance investigations, vehicle investigation, graffiti and permits. Shannon stated that the goal was to be more proactive and was targeting 65% proactivity, as well as a 90% compliance rate (where properties came into compliance in 45 days).

Shannon stated that 3,292 miles of residential streets were analyzed for spacing and gaps of streetlights; 4,300 new lights were warranted. He noted that \$5.8 million was approved in the FY 2022 Budget to fund 1,100 streetlights and so far, 187 had been installed, 377 lights were on order. Shannon stated that the department met with CPS Energy on a bi-weekly basis as they were managing the installation of new streetlights which had a goal of installing 200 to 400 lights per year over the next five years.

In April 2023, DSD began the Proactive Apartment Inspections Program and performed 7,821 inspections of 899 apartment complexes; 14 were required to be registered due to violations which meant the properties would receive monthly proactive inspections for six months and could graduate if there were no violations in six months.

DISCUSSION:

Mayor Nirenberg spoke in support of the follow through on the code violations at DSD as well as the significant number of proactive apartment inspections. He asked if DSD had enough staff for the apartment Program. Shannon stated that the department had ramped up staffing and was able to meet many of the goals set for the Program and had made continuous process improvements along with the San Antonio Apartment Association's feedback.

Mayor Nirenberg suggested that SWMD explain the long-term recycling goals and breakdown of the types of waste collected; recycle organics, and garbage. Newman reported an increase in total tonnage of collections per customer and would offer the Bitters Brush site which was changed to residential customers only, and noted that drought also impacted the collection of brush and organics. Mayor Nirenberg requested information on whether people were downsizing their brown carts. Newman stated that new homes were automatically receiving the medium sized carts. Mayor Nirenberg congratulated SWMD for their successful marketing campaign.

Councilmember Viagran requested an update at the Community Health Committee on single use plastic bags. She also requested information on fleet maintenance, costs, time out of service, and suggested that the garbage trucks participate in the equipment rodeo. Councilmember Viagran recommended an educational campaign encouraging residents to move their cars on garbage pick-up day. Councilmember Viagran requested some proactive outreach to assist in getting residents to move to smaller carts and asked how people would know what size cart they had suggesting that if their cart was usually not full, they should be encouraged to reduce their cart size. Councilmember Viagran requested an update on the homeless encampments and illegal dumping programs. She supported more community events to reduce illegal dumping.

Councilmember Viagran asked if DSD provided an incentive to retain staff. Shannon replied that the department had hired over 30 new Code Officers in the past two years and there were incentive programs such as certification pay and overtime which helped retain employees. Councilmember Viagran listed the code violations that she most often heard about in her council district which mirrored DSD's top five investigation cases, so she recommended more education and community engagement. Councilmember Viagran asked if there was a pattern to the calls for alleys such as Seniors versus families or leases and short-term rentals versus homeowners. Shannon stated that the City Code required owners to maintain their alleys behind their homes and offered to provide statistics. Councilmember Viagran requested information on the types of equipment and usage of the Tool Shed which was a tool loan program for residents.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez asked how much additional funding the fee increase would generate and requested statistics on the number of residents that downsized the last time the rates went up. Newman stated that the increase would raise an additional \$22 million in revenue. Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez requested clarification on the Fleet Services Fund.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez recommended implementation of alternatives to homeless encampment abatements particularly for areas that repeatedly had encampments. Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez suggested quarterly bulky and brush collection might decrease illegal dumping and asked for the cost. He recommended using the advanced Library Card for residents to access the free drop-off sites, suggested a free day might also curb the illegal dumping and supported the Dial a Trailer Program to bring services closer to people's homes. Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez commented that an organization was interested in taking used mattresses and refurbishing them and recommended that the City partner with them to help reduce waste and dumping.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez noted that in 2021, he authored a Council Consideration Request (CCR) to fund street lighting as a crime reduction strategy and was pleased with the program, however, he recommended close coordination with the neighborhood and residents to acquire the necessary right of way to install the streetlights; noting that out of town landlords were a challenge. Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez clarified that CPS Energy had issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for an additional team to design and install the streetlights.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez was interested in what the Good Neighbor Program (GNP) might do for vacant structures. City Manager Walsh commented that repeated fire, code or 3-1-1 calls would need to be tracked and analyzed; staff would develop a proposal to get ahead of the issue and would report to City Council. Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez supported the proactive apartment inspections and requested more information on the apartment naughty list and an increase in Case Workers to help the families. Shannon stated there was an online dashboard with real time data.

Councilmember Cabello Havrda asked SWMD if there was a dedicated team focused on illegal dumping and recommended making it easier for residents to dump at city sites noting that commercial businesses had experienced dumping and there were heavily used illegal dumping sites. Newman stated that the illegal dumping crew was called the Hot Shot Team but recommended more education and the use of a driver's license rather than the CPS bill at the city dump sites.

Councilmember Cabello Havrda recommended a review of other cities' best practices regarding technology and other innovations. Councilmember Cabello Havrda suggested outreaching at the Senior Centers to encourage them to move to a smaller cart.

Councilmember Cabello Havrda asked about the equipment Tool Shed location and use and suggested that more locations would help. Shannon stated they checked out lawn mowers and hand tools over the weekend and had over 100 people access the Tool Shed which was downtown. Councilmember Cabello Havrda requested information on the Streetlight Program including a map and timeline and suggested adding cameras for safety as well. Shannon stated that new subdivisions were required to install streetlights, however, older subdivisions needed more infrastructure for the streetlights noting that some people wanted lights and security cameras and some did not.

Councilmember Cabello Havrda closed her comments by noting that local government was the place where work for the residents was done in a relatively short time.

Councilmember Alderete Gavito asked if SWMD assisted with alley cleanups. Newman stated that SWMD cleared brush and the Public Works Department performed site grading, however, illegal dumping was a challenge as the City Code required homeowners to upkeep the alley.

Councilmember Alderete Gavito asked how much revenue the top five code enforcement investigations brought in and how long residents were given to mow their overgrown yards before they received a citation. Shannon stated that they were usually given up to two weeks and could be given more time if there was a hardship. Councilmember Alderete Gavito asked about the funding for assistance and how to apply for the Compliance Fund; noting that she was developing a CCR to help seniors.

Councilmember Alderete Gavito asked why the graffiti target was lower than what was abated this year. Shannon explained that it was simply a target. Councilmember Alderete Gavito suggested that the process of installing a streetlight was a complicated process requiring four residents to agree. Shannon stated that the process was cumbersome but not all four residents had to agree, just the one that had the light pole or electricity run through their property, however, the department had planned more community engagement to explain the process to residents. City Manager Walsh suggested that the Program could be flexible in streetlight location to help get it moving more quickly.

Councilmember Castillo thanked SWMD for considering employee working conditions in the summer heat and asked if technology could include citing whether the person forgot to put out their trash or there was an obstruction. Councilmember Castillo stated that most of her 3-1-1 reports were on illegal dumping and thanked SWMD for handling those in three days and asked about geo-locations of repeated illegal dumping sites. Newman showed a map of the repeat sites as well as the types of items. Councilmember Castillo supported additional funding for cleanup of homeless encampments and illegal dumping sites.

Councilmember Castillo supported funding for City Code Case Managers and asked about their role. Shannon stated that the City Code Case Manager would work with vulnerable members of the community to facilitate discussion between other partners and direct the residents to resources to

help resolve the violation. Councilmember Castillo supported the proactive apartment inspections, streetlighting index and requested more installation in Council Districts 4 and 5. Councilmember Castillo expressed concern that cleanup of encampments might lead houseless individuals to move into vacant buildings which would lead to more fires.

Councilmember Courage requested clarification from SWMD on the Proposed Budget. Director of the Office of Management and Budget OMB), Justina Tate, explained that the \$28.4 million in Fleet Services Funding came from internal charges to SWMD, Public Works and Parks. Councilmember Courage commented that the requested increase in revenues was \$20 million when the increased spending was only \$18 million. Tate explained that OMB was estimating a \$1.5 million deficit in the fund in FY 2023 and the money was needed to balance the fund.

Councilmember Courage suggested that there would be a revenue impact if a lot of residents chose to move to a smaller cart. City Manager Walsh explained that there was an operational impact to the smaller cart versus the larger cart and an adjustment would need to be made next year.

Councilmember Courage suggested not raising the environmental fee for vulnerable residents or providing a sliding scale.

Councilmember Courage asked why DSD had staff overseeing affordable housing and recommended coordination with the Neighborhood and Housing Services Department (NHSD). Shannon reported that the team focused on streamlining the permitting and development process for affordable housing projects similar to the school team that was developed 15 years ago. Councilmember Courage mentioned that residents had complained about noise at night and requested information on how many 3-1-1 calls were received for noise complaints. Shannon reported that noise enforcement was routed to the SAPD non-emergency number and were not handled by Code Officers after a pilot where Code Officers were out at night managing 2,999 calls.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia commented that illegal dumping was becoming bolder and noted that someone had dumped an entire mobile home on the side of the road in her council district. Councilmember Rocha Garcia supported the proactive focus of Code Compliance including the dashboard noting that there were dangerous apartment complexes and suggested that some were owned by the same person. Councilmember Rocha Garcia recommended a strategic plan to include the GNP and Vacant Building Program focused on prevention. She requested a report on street lighting at the Planning and Community Development Council Committee (PCDC) and recommended consideration of the staffing required for new programs.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia requested a third brush collection last year and supported more brush and bulky collections this year and noted the great work of the Hot Shot Team. Councilmember Rocha Garcia asked if seniors could be automatically enrolled in assistance programs rather than making them reapply every year. Councilmember Rocha Garcia stated that she received a lot of complaints regarding potholes near the dump sites.

Councilmember Kaur requested the total Proposed Budget for homeless encampments in FY2024. Tate stated that \$2.2 million was included which was an increase of over half a million.

Councilmember Kaur asked how out-of-cycle bulky pickups were budgeted and suggested more community cleanup days. Newman replied that SWMD would work with the council districts on more cleanup days but the individual out-of-cycle bulky pickups were negotiated directly with the resident who requested it.

Councilmember Kaur asked how old landfills were managed and monitored. Newman stated that SWMD had a team dedicated to compliance and monitoring of landfills and he provided an update on the new recycling contract that would begin next year and included a local recycling facility in Council District 4. Councilmember Kaur requested information on the revenues produced by selling compost. Newman stated that the City contracted with a company to process the compost and the company sold it, noting the cost of the contract with the composting company was less than disposal of compost material in the landfill.

Councilmember Kaur supported a review of the Code Compliance Tier Levels and suggested a faster response time for Tier 2 calls. Shannon stated that priorities could be shifted and targets reviewed. Councilmember Kaur supported community graffiti abatement programs and commented that permits were approved by the City but those might not comply with Homeowner's Association or neighborhood guidelines and recommended more staff training.

Councilmember Kaur requested updating of the streetlight maps to include the new redistricting and requested more information overlays such as crime data and a spending plan for the streetlighting project. City Manager Walsh noted that there was enough funding to install 1,100 streetlights while 4,300 were funded and would take some time to install but the City and CPS Energy needed to move faster. Councilmember Kaur noted that 50% of apartments with violations were in Council District 1.

Councilmember Whyte suggested that SWMD consider picking up recycling weekly rather than every other week like El Paso and other peer cities and asked how much money would be saved if the frequency decreased. City Manager Walsh stated that staff would analyze the cost. Councilmember Whyte requested more information on how technology would improve service and provide efficiencies for SWMD. Newman stated that a missed pickup was the number one call (between 60,000 and 80,000 per year) to 3-1-1 and suggested it would not only ensure less missed pickups, but would optimize the routes, particularly for new drivers with auditory navigation.

Councilmember Whyte asked where the additional SWMD revenues were planned to be used. Newman stated that the funding would shore up this year's shortfall, provide more services as included in the improvement and maintain good service. Tate reported that FY2023 expenses were greater than revenues by \$12 million, noting that SWMD began FY2023 with a \$11 million fund balance so there was a shortfall.

Councilmember Whyte commented that some of the SWMD Fund was transferred to street and service alley maintenance. Tate stated that normally \$800,000 was included in the fund but the expense was foregone in 2023 because of the deficit, however, the new rates included reinstating the Budget for alley maintenance.

Councilmember Whyte expressed concern about noise at night and suggested more enforcement. He asked for the compliance rate with Short Term Rentals (STR). Shannon estimated STRs at 50% to 60% compliant but DSD did not have good numbers as the reporting was aggregated to the region rather than the City, however, there was a plan to partner with finance to hire a consultant to analyze collecting the taxes and compliance rates. Councilmember Whyte commented that increasing solid waste fees and utility rates negatively impacted residents and took up all the money residents were saving in the proposed property tax reductions.

Councilmember Pelaez requested a streetlight in his council district where there had been burglary of a Sikh Temple and commented on murders and violence at bars in his council district citing the excellent response from the City departments. Councilmember Pelaez also noted a homeless encampment in Council District 8 near Clark High School which made his residents feel unsafe as those individuals often started fires and used drugs.

Councilmember Pelaez noted that cities in Oregon had been overrun by homeless encampments and suggested that their leaders had realized cleanup and abatements were necessary similar to our practices. He noted that however, the cleanups needed to be in partnership with Homeless Outreach Coordinators and Case Managers. He supported having a data informed approach to solving the homelessness crisis including the number and nature of contacts with individuals at the camps as well as the location and type of cleanup, resident complaints, referrals made to and accepted by those in the homeless camps and efforts made to preserve the homeless persons' property. City Manager Walsh commented that simply abating an encampment was not the solution to homelessness but was a first step and more services for the unhoused as well as resident communication were needed.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez requested a deep conversation about abatements and creation of a notification policy. City Manager Walsh stated that the process would need to be developed over time and acknowledged that better communication was needed.

Mayor Nirenberg recommended a B Session with all housing ecosystem partners from homeless response to affordable housing so that there could be a public meeting to discuss housing in a comprehensive manner.

Councilmember Viagran requested that staff let the council district office know if there was resistance from a resident to install streetlighting.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Mayor Nirenberg recessed the meeting into Executive Session at 12:29 p.m. to deliberate and discuss the following:

- A. Economic development negotiations pursuant to Texas Government Code Section 551.087 (economic development).
- B. The purchase, exchange, lease or value of real property pursuant to Texas Government Code

Section 551.072 (real property).

- C. Legal issues related to litigation involving the City pursuant to Texas Government Code Section 551.071 (consultation with attorney).
- D. Legal issues relating to emergency preparedness pursuant to Texas Government Code Section 551.071 (consultation with attorney).

Mayor Nirenberg reconvened the meeting in Open Session at 2:04 p.m. and announced that no official action was taken in Executive Session.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 2:04 p.m.

Approved

**Ron Nirenberg
Mayor**

**Debbie Racca-Sittre
City Clerk**