



Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND
CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Councilmember Jimenez

SUBJECT: 2020-2021 COUNCIL POLICY
PRIORITY SETTING

DATE: February 21, 2020

Approved

Date

02-21-2020

RECOMMENDATION

Direct staff to explore additional potential modifications to the Priority Setting process, incorporating the following elements and suggestions. Any changes will not be implemented until the next Priority Setting session, in 2021.

1. Alignment with Council Reorganization and Budget
 - a. Evaluate the desirability of establishing a 2-year Priority Setting cycle. The process could begin shortly after the reorganization of the Council and conclude with the adoption of the budget. This would provide staff with two fiscal years to accomplish the priorities.
 - b. Continue aligning the Priority Setting process with the budget process to ensure priorities are integrated into the budget.
 - c. Continue providing annual progress reports, at minimum, coinciding with the Mid-Year Budget Review or another appropriate opportunity. These may allow for minor modifications to the priorities as needed.
2. Strategic Planning
 - a. Explore opportunities to incorporate greater strategic planning into the Priority Setting process. For example, consider a 2-step process in which the Council first establishes high-level, thematic goals, potentially with measurable outcomes. Then, the Council identifies specific projects that would achieve those thematic goals.
 - b. Priority projects unrelated to the thematic goals may be added to the workplan if sufficient resources and staff capacity are available.
3. Assessment of Resources and Staff Capacity
 - a. To provide a more transparent and realistic assessment of available resources and staff capacity, include other ongoing projects in the workplan that is developed through the Priority Setting process. These projects would include those identified in the General Plan, Climate Smart San José, the Housing Crisis Workplan, and other major plans, initiatives, and programs that contribute to staff workload.

- b. Organize priority projects, including those identified through 3(a), by City Service Area (CSA). This will help ensure a more equitable distribution of projects across City departments.

ANALYSIS

The Priority Setting process is an important opportunity for the Council to brainstorm ideas for new policy initiatives and develop a workplan to achieve those objectives. The Council must make challenging decisions in determining where to deploy valuable and limited resources and staff capacity. The process has been effective in requiring the Council to display discipline in taking on new projects.

I am grateful to City staff and the City Manager's Office for continuously improving the process, and I encourage my colleagues to support the citywide roadmap project described in the report, which will provide the Council even greater insight into existing workload and impacts to staff capacity. In addition to this effort, I am recommending that the Council direct staff to explore other modifications with the intention of making the Priority Setting process even more effective.

First, staff should evaluate ways to make the Priority Setting process more consistent and routine, and to further integrate it into the budget process. Priority Setting should be done infrequently and in a predictable manner. This will ensure that staff will have enough time to work on the established priorities and achieve them in a realistic timeframe. We also recognize that different Councils have different goals. We should consider establishing a fixed 2-year Priority Setting cycle, aligning with the reorganization of the Council every two years. The Priority Setting process should continue to inform the development of the budget and provide the Council the context necessary to discern whether adequate resources exist and what trade-offs may be needed. Annual (or more frequent) progress reports, perhaps alongside Mid-Year Budget Reviews, will allow the Council to determine whether additional funding or shifting of priorities is necessary to keep things on track.

Second, staff should propose ways to allow for greater strategic planning in the Priority Setting process. Currently, disparate projects are in competition; the Council is asked to pick between projects that have very different staff and resource impacts. The prioritized projects often have little in common with each other. Staff should evaluate the feasibility and desirability of a 2-step process in which the Council first determines high level, thematic goals. These could be as broad as "Housing" and "Transportation," or as specific as "Deliver 20,000 net new housing units" or "Reduce traffic fatalities and serious injuries by 50%." The Council would then brainstorm and select projects and programs that would specifically help achieve these major, high-level goals. Recognizing that the Council may have other priority projects, we can also allow for unrelated projects as long as there is sufficient funding and staff capacity.

Finally, after the thematic goals are determined, staff should include alongside the ideas brainstormed by Council a list of ongoing actions and efforts that also achieve those goals, as well as any other existing projects that have a material impact on resources and staff capacity. This will provide much greater context and transparency to the existing workload, and it will help the Council make more realistic determinations about the

projects we prioritize. Organizing all of these projects -- existing and new ideas -- by CSA will also help the Council better understand impacts of new projects to each City department and allow for a more equitable distribution of projects across departments.

Staff should also feel empowered to explore other ideas that will improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the Priority Setting process. We have been a very ambitious Council, and we all want to see our priorities accomplished. Our Priority Setting process can be improved to better reflect the highest priorities of the Council and allow us to achieve those goals on a realistic timeframe.

