

In past years, I have prepared lengthy memos and lists of programs, including projected cost figures. I can't say those have led to much change. So this year, I am instead focusing my requests on three categories: managerial changes to spend the money we already have, incremental expense increases to extend what the city is already doing well, and strategic expansion of the city's investment in our Built Capacity.

This year, we lack the rosy projections for growth that the city has enjoyed for the past decade, but money is not always the problem. Some of the most vexing problems with our city budget are often not caused by a lack of money allocated.

It is no fault of the planning staff that they have been redirected and prioritized away from the Union Square East Neighborhood Plan, which is destined now for a 4th consecutive budget despite an unspent allocation of funds in their Prof & Tech Svcs lines for that project. This is not a matter of lacking funding; a budget increase WILL NOT help when the money has been there for years and the project has still not happened.

When the entire allocation of our Opioid Recovery and Remediation Fund - the legal settlement money so rightly touted by state level officials - has gone completely unspent, the problem is not "lack of funds". Over half a million free dollars from the Sackler family and others who harmed our community have gone unused. Our HHS team could be standing up treatment and harm reduction programs that have capacity to help RIGHT NOW, and have room to grow, rather than "waiting to see" when the legal barriers to an OPC might be overcome.

I implore the Mayor to focus on achieving the managerially stated goals of each year's budget and using the resources we ALREADY HAVE ACCESS TO which are going unspent.

Now, the opportunities to conserve money via the innovative route of "hire workers instead of renting contractors" are also abundant. Again, the problem is not a lack of money - the city spends more money on contractors than it would on full time employees, with one of the most glaring examples being our Water Department. But it's not just them; more employees would give the DPW Grounds Dept the staff needed to clean and maintain our Squares and all of the new Green Infrastructure being built in them, including Davis yes, but also in Union Square where the trash accumulating in the public ways are a constant source of frustration for residents. More employees in the DPW Buildings Dept would allow more consistent and frequent maintenance work, badly needed on city buildings to prevent them from falling into disrepair so complete that they require reconstruction. This is ultimately cost SAVING.

I implore the Mayor to work with all Department Heads to reduce consultant spending and redirect those funds to full time hires in understaffed departments, as well as identify areas where contracted activities could be performed by internal staff and hiring to accomplish that.

I understand that there are limited opportunities for growth in this year's budget. I believe that we should be incrementally increasing funding in departments that serve enormous populations, like the Schools, and yet are traditionally underfunded, like the Libraries, Arts Council, and Council

on Aging. These are limited expenditures that can go a long way, and the department heads have no shortage of ideas on how to meet the communities' needs.

In addition, the Office of Housing Stability has been excellently managed and has demonstrated its essential value many times over since its creation a few short years ago. Internal funding to preserve and continue to expand their reach as ARPA funds dry up will be essential, and I urge the mayor to prioritize it.

Likewise, in our current climate the Office of Immigrant Affairs has stepped into the breach and is delivering services far beyond what I think most people considered possible until recently. As they identify needs and opportunities to protect our residents from federal predation, funds should be made available for deployment from our reserves and stabilization funds to quickly move on program expansions throughout the year.

I implore the Mayor to sustain the progress she has continued to support in these departments.

Now, on to Built Capacity. Even in a constrained fiscal environment we **MUST** remain focused on the future. Any organization, nation, or municipality's ability to achieve objectives is a direct result of the priorities expressed through their budget. Capability is a result of one's **BUILT CAPACITY**, what we spent money on in previous years. What we spend on now dictates what we will be able to achieve in 3-5 years. There's no shortage of good ideas that deserve consideration for investment. Here are three which I will personally emphasize, some of which have been requested for several consecutive years:

- 1) First, enabling the creation of permanent supportive housing by partnering with the expertise we have locally, people who have already pitched their vision to this City Council. Investment now means housing for vulnerable neighbors
- 2) Second, additional staff capacity and focus to finally, after over 5 years, enforce the Vacant Properties Ordinance - an ordinance that this Council passed while the Mayor served on it, I might add, yet has never been enforced.
- 3) Third, but most urgently, is the need to create an unarmed Alternative Emergency Response unit ***OUTSIDE*** of the Somerville Police Department. We have seen in the past months the limitations of our ability to protect our residents. Response and support to families affected by these abductions is being delivered laudibly by SOIA, but Somerville PD is neither equipped nor positioned well to help these residents who are being targeted by federal action. The families who most need their help **DO NOT** call SPD, and **WILL NOT** open the door when approached by SPD. Those families need a number they can call which will send them someone who they trust can **HELP**, someone who they will not fear, someone who will not bring with them the risk of further legal trouble or, god forbid, violence.

The common thread to many of these requests is, ultimately, a focus on matching our **SPENDING** to our stated goals as expressed by **BUILT CAPACITY**. The nations of Europe are facing a similar

challenge to ours. How can they handle their dramatically increased capacity needs? In their case those are due to shifts in global political situations, and are both humanitarian and military. I believe my constituents would be best served by the Mayor's office taking a long, hard look at where the city needs to be - and re-evaluate the choices of the recent past to determine how we invest our limited funds to achieve those goals.

And if nothing else, if nothing comes to pass of these requests, finally I implore the mayor to get those public restrooms installed and at least let the Disabilities Commission use the braille already.