

BUDGET MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 17, 2025

TO: Members of the City Council, Mayor, and City Administrator

FROM: Councilmember Janani Ramachandran, District 4

SUBJECT: Councilmember Janani Ramachandran's Budget Priorities to the FY 25-27 Budget

We are experiencing one of the worst financial crises in Oakland's history, and there is no doubt that difficult decisions must be made to balance our budget. With an unprecedented structural budget deficit in our General Fund in the forthcoming budget cycle and additional shortfalls in other funds, I recognize the urgent need to effectively prioritize the issues that speak most urgently to Oakland residents – most notably being public safety. I am determined to pass a budget that helps re-build public trust in City Hall, funds basic city services, generates revenue, and builds safe neighborhoods where every resident can thrive.

While contemplating ways to balance our budget, it's imperative to re-iterate the limits of local government and the reality that *we cannot do it all*. In these dire financial times, the City of Oakland should be limited to funding what is necessary to the core functions of a municipality. As a result, I believe it is critical that City leaders act as proactively as possible to identify external sources of funding – including from county, state, and federal agencies, as well as through partnerships with philanthropy and the private sector – that can help fill the gaps for programs that our General Purpose Fund cannot afford to cover.

A theme that has emerged throughout my budget priorities is *economic development*. I believe that the more the City invests in core services such as public safety, illegal dumping removal and an efficient permitting system, the more we can build safe and clean public spaces and economic corridors that are ripe for commercial activity, as well as create living-wage jobs for our residents. The more commerce that returns to Oakland, the more revenue we can generate to close our structural deficit and resume funding comprehensive services. Oakland has such a vibrant culture that deserves to be preserved, amplified, and celebrated on an international platform, and I believe that focusing our present budget on core services will in turn allow our musicians and artists, diverse small business owners, parks and public squares, and restaurants and nightlife to thrive.

These budget priorities have been co-created based on the stated needs and lived experiences of everyday Oaklanders, with input from a wide range of city-wide stakeholders and community organizations. I look forward to working with all my colleagues to ensure that we are spending every precious dollar of our limited funds in the most efficient, evidence-based, and impact-driven ways possible. This includes setting clear, defined, and measurable expectations for how we allocate our funding to City departments and external contracts, as well as ensuring transparency around voter-passed ballot measures.

1. Public Safety

- a. Police: At a minimum, ensure OPD sworn staffing complies with levels authorized by the voter-passed initiative Measure NN. Prioritize proactive OPD patrols to assist with crime prevention - especially in commercial corridors - as well as investments into technology and personnel (both sworn and non-sworn) to assist with investigations. Ensure overtime expenses are kept at a minimum. Fund vacant 911 dispatcher positions and relevant technology to better respond to emergencies.

- b. Fire: Keep all 25 Oakland Fire Stations open. At a minimum, ensure OFD sworn staffing complies with levels authorized by the voter-passed initiative Measure NN.
- c. Community Safety Ambassadors: Fund safety ambassador programs in business corridors across Oakland to assist with community security and stimulate commercial activity.

2. Revenue Generation

- a. Economic Development: Fund budget initiatives to stimulate economic activity in both Oakland's downtown and small business corridors – including fundamental public safety services, homelessness prevention, permitting, code enforcement, and clean streets. Support existing BIDs and those in the process of formation. Help small business owners stay in compliance with City laws and enact fee structures that are equitable and fair.
- b. To ensure sustained growth and prosperity, the City must formulate a unified approach to public safety and economic development strategies. By improving safety, we create a more attractive environment for businesses to invest in, leading to the development of new revenue streams. This, in turn, supports the expansion of vital City services. A comprehensive strategy that balances both long-term and short-term goals will drive economic vitality while simultaneously ensuring that the community remains secure and welcoming for all residents and investors.
- c. Revenue-generating roles: Ensure that all staff positions across departments responsible for revenue generation are filled and supported with adequate resources and financial technology. These roles include - but are not limited to - parking enforcement, permitting, code enforcement, human resources, and grant writing.
- d. Tax Collection: Invest in relevant staff positions and technology to ensure full collection of taxes and fees, as well as improve upon current systems that prevent full collection.

3. Street Safety and Infrastructure

- a. Fund traffic calming initiatives in high-impact intersections, economic corridors, school zones, and senior living facilities, through a variety of evidence-based tools to improve safety for pedestrians, bikers, and drivers.
- b. Invest in comprehensive and expeditious street paving, and ensure special funding is available for pothole patching during predictable storm seasons.
- c. Fund staff, technology and physical infrastructure that prevent irresponsible and destructive behavior, including sideshows and illegal dumping.

4. Housing and Homelessness

- a. Support city services that allow transition of unhoused residents to temporary and permanent shelter while liaising with Alameda County to identify efficiencies in funding these services.
- b. Identify as many state and federal funding sources as possible to assist with the construction of affordable housing units or housing rehabilitation programs to expand Oakland's affordable housing stock. Lobby for additional federal Housing Choice Vouchers to prevent displacement of Oaklanders while filling the City's growing number of vacant units.

5. Wildfire Prevention, Parks and Public Spaces

- a. Fund implementation of Oakland's vegetation management and continue to proactively explore state and federal grants to assist with this work. Ensure that regular wildfire inspections continue. Improve awareness and utilization of our local and regional emergency preparedness systems.

- b.** Fund services that ensure our city parks are safe and clean for residents to enjoy. Support programming at recreation centers for youth, seniors, and vulnerable populations, and continue to fund animal services.
- c.** Improve city-owned public spaces so they can be used as a tool for both recreation and revenue generation through community events.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Janani Ramachandran". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Janani Ramachandran

Oakland City Councilmember, District 4