



FRESNO BARRIOS UNIDOS
Advocacy • Education • Wellness

April 30 , 2021

<sent via email>

Letter RE: 2021 Annual Budget Priorities & Guiding Principles for a Just and Equitable Economic Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic

Dear Mayor Dyer and City Councilmembers,

First and foremost, we appreciate all the work that you are all doing during this difficult year. The unforeseen pandemic has not only exacerbated existing problems but has shined a bright light on pervasive issues most prevalent in Fresno's low-income communities of color. We continue to consistently rank the highest in poor air quality and health outcomes, and the worsening quality of life of black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities.¹ Communities have been calling for **accountability of our local governments to begin funding and investing in projects, programs, and plans driven by the people that will allow for equitable growth and access.**

This process should be as transparent, accessible, and responsive as possible. The Council as well as the Mayor of Fresno should make a diligent effort to engage Fresno residents similar to Councilmember Arias' efforts who held four community budget meetings for his district. This list of priorities is in no way comprehensive and we recommend that budget allocation and conversations prioritize community voices through town halls and a participatory public process. We present our comments below and ask that you include these priorities into this upcoming budget:

A. \$15 Million Initial Funding for an Established Affordable Housing Trust Fund (AHTF)

Housing trust funds are distinct funds established by city, county or state governments that receive ongoing dedicated sources of public funding to support the preservation and production of affordable

¹<https://www.lung.org/research/sota/city-rankings/msas/fresno-madera-hanford-ca#pmann>

housing. They are flexible in nature and can be used for a variety of things including rental assistance, rehabilitation of older units, weatherization, or emergency repairs. There are more than 750 city and county housing trust funds in operation in the United States which includes cities such as Oakland, Los Angeles, Cupertino, and San Jose.

Program 5 in Fresno's Housing Element (HE) establishes an AHTF, which the City has yet to legally comply with. Establishing an AHTF is a huge step towards mitigating and preventing the residents continuing to lose their homes or live in inhabitable conditions simply to keep a roof over their family. Not only is this a requirement the City committed to in its HE, but every year the City misses out on funding dedicated to jurisdictions with housing trust funds. This includes programs such as California's Local Housing Trust Fund Program.

Implementing the AHTF should be available to all residents prioritizing the most vulnerable populations. For decades, systemic barriers were put in place that made it extremely difficult or near impossible for BIPOC and low-income individuals to access equal opportunities. We must close this equity gap and ensure families are able to obtain affordable, quality housing. The AHTF can be immediately funded with available federal, state, and local dollars including the American Rescue Plan, CARES, CDBG, and General Fund dollars. To ensure the long term sustainability of the AHTF, City Council and City Staff should work with housing advocates to identify an ongoing source of funding.

- **\$100k for Mobile Home Park Assessment Study to Comply with Fresno's Housing Element**

Recently, Councilmember Arias motioned and was supported by his fellow councilmembers for the City attorney to look into establishing an ordinance that would provide the City with authority to enforce basic health and safety standards in mobile home parks (MHP). We appreciate the Council's efforts to ensure habitability for all Fresnans, however, there also needs to be a process set up that would standardize this intent. Fortunately, Program 10A of the City of Fresno's HE is dedicated to the MHP maintenance and preservation of mobile homes. This program has also yet to be complied with. To remain in legal compliance, it is essential to dedicate funding to begin a Mobile Home Park Assessment. This assessment would determine the extent mobile home parks are being maintained and preserved and ensure residents are living in clean and safe environments with access to basic infrastructure.

This would help Fresno residents like those of Three Palms Mobile Home Park who have been dealing with contaminated drinking water and a failing septic system that has backed up onto their yards and roads. Though the owner has been responsive to address certain issues and the City Council recently approved an application to the State Water Board facilitating connection of this community, the City needs to ensure these conditions or worse aren't replicated elsewhere. As such, there needs to be a comprehensive review of the dozens of mobilehome parks along with solutions, funding sources, and an implementation plan to ensure all of Fresno's housing is safe and healthy. The findings from the study will guide the City and landlords on issues that are ongoing in MHPs and make sure they get fixed and maintained. This study should be a community driven process and residents of mobile home parks should be guiding the process and providing all initial feedback on the park survey, conditions, and next steps.

- **\$6 Million for Central Southeast Specific Plan Implementation**

The release of the final Central Southeast Specific Plan (CESP) later this year should have funding allocations attached to it. The CESP has community-identified priorities and goals that should be funded demonstrating the City's commitment to the community's efforts by implementing this plan. Allocating

this initial funding to the CSESP will ensure that the Specific Plan will be implemented and not simply another plan on a shelf. **For example, the \$6 million allocation could support one of the following found in the draft CSESP:**

1. Transforming Kings Canyon Corridor from Peach to Orange into a unique, walkable, and vibrant mixed-use corridor. This can be accomplished by beginning with complete streets improvements.
2. Expand housing supply to accommodate households of all sizes by investing in the revitalization of Orange Street, Butler Avenue, and Kings Canyon Corridor as described in the plan.
3. Rebalance existing roadways to create a network of safe, connected, and accessible Complete Streets for all users, including bicyclists, pedestrians, transit vehicles, and motorists along the Kings Canyon Road which proposes a protected bike lane and buffered bike lanes along Orange Avenue.

This is not a comprehensive list and the community should be engaged to expense this and future allocations. This initial funding will help kickstart ongoing implementation as this plan will guide the development of Southeast Fresno for the next 20 years. We also recommend that the CSESP have an implementation committee to guide investments and implementation of the plan. The committee should be derived from residents, business owners, and community based organizations similar to the CSESP steering committee. This will ensure projects and programs are being implemented in a timely manner and with community guidance at the forefront.

- **3-Year Funding Commitment for a Fully Funded Eviction Protection Program**

With a recently approved resolution establishing an Eviction Protection Program, we urge City Council to follow suit and commit funding to this program for the next 3 years. Fresno’s tenants need to be protected against evictions and provided support when facing inhabitable housing, retaliation, and illegal rent increases. Renters have only become that much more vulnerable during the pandemic as they lost their jobs, couldn’t leave their homes, and were stuck with some of the highest rent increases. We ask for \$6 million dollar for 3 years for a fully funded and fleshed out program—this would be a total of \$18 million. All over Fresno, tenants continue to face illegal eviction proceedings, verbal and physical harassment, and retaliation tactics from property managers and landlords. Tenants facing unlawful detainers must navigate a complicated legal system with little to no assistance, which is hard for any person even with formal higher education and English fluency.

A fully established Eviction Protection Program in the City of Fresno includes:

- A city-wide, multi-language public awareness and targeted outreach campaign,
- Public education workshops and mobile clinics, in multiple languages, on tenant and landlord rights and responsibilities,
- A hotline to support tenants with notices from the landlords (e.g. 3-day notice, notice of rent increase) or other housing related questions and assistance,
- Legal representation for tenants facing unlawful detainers,

- Real-time/same-day legal advice and representation at the Fresno County courthouse on eviction court days

An investment in eviction diversion now will lead to reduced expenditures on educational costs associated with children experiencing homelessness, child welfare, the cost of providing public benefits from job loss, costs associated with homelessness, and the lasting impacts of evictions such as marked credit scores making it difficult finding new housing. Initial funding should come from the incoming American Rescue Plan dollars or other funding streams coming to the City of Fresno. To ensure the success and ongoing sustainability of this essential program, the City should work with advocates for a long term funding plan.

- **No less than 10% General Fund Allocation for the Parks and Recreation Department**

After 3 years of appeals, fights, and losses, Measure P will finally begin to collect funds to improve our local parks, facilities, and our neighborhoods. The citizen-led measure, which will raise around \$38 million per year for parks, youth and veteran jobs, programs, and other activities. We ask that there be continued commitment for the parks and recreation department above what is required per Measure P language. **The City should allocate no less than 10% of the City's General Fund dollars or the required amount as set in the ballot language, whichever is more.**

- **\$700k to begin Partnership with Community Based Organizations**

The recent violent attacks against our neighbors have been heartbreaking and difficult to process. No one should fear going to work or walking in their own communities. The City should allocate resources to create an association for resident safety that is led and guided by members of the community. To aid any community safety efforts, we suggest allocating \$700k of the proposed budget to implementing recommendation 55 of the Fresno Commission for Police Reform Report and Recommendations. This recommendation aims to “support the partnership with local community-based organizations”. As stated in the report, the City and the CBO’s will convene a team responsible for initiating a comprehensive and strategic plan that would improve overall safety, health, and wellbeing of the community in lieu of the Homeless Task Force.

- **Fully Fund Advance Peace Programs and Activities**

Regarding community safety, we ask the Advance Peace programs and activities receive complete funding and support from the City to continue implentening and expanding the program. Community Safety goes beyond police, firefighter and even neighborhood watch. It also involves the preventative aspect of community safety which allows youth and residents to occupy their time crafting skills and participating in activities that will grow their leadership, professional, and relationship skills. Advance Peace helps young men of color in the City of Fresno gain these skills. The funding would demonstrate this City’s commitment to advance racial equity and community-driven solutions that address the historic injustices that have been inflicted in our BIPOC communities.

- **Funding for the Zero Fare Clean Air Act**

Earlier this year, the City passed a Zero Fare Act which made all FAX buses fare free for Fresno residents. This proposal has helped parents, students, and community members get to their destinations without worrying about the cost for taking multiple buses to get to the doctors office, the grocery store, or COVID-19 vaccine appointments. Now is the time for the City to allocate and plan a sustainable, long term funding and expenditure plan to extend this Act past its suspension which is set to occur when the

Emergency Order is lifted by Council or when Fresno County returns to the “yellow tier” for a period of ninety days. Before these occur, there needs to be community conversations to discuss the needs and priorities of FAX riders including switching over to a long term funding source to keep Fresno transportation free, while also switching over from diesel to an 100% electric powered fleet. The City should utilize various funding options coming in such as from the American Rescue Plan, CARES, and General Fund dollars.

- **\$10 million for Infrastructure Projects for Environmental Mitigation and Pedestrian Safety**

The City needs to invest in infrastructure improvements in neighborhoods that rank the highest on CalEnviroScreen for pollution and poor health outcomes. Relevant investments include urban greening to mitigate the environmental impacts created by sources of pollution. Additionally, substantial investments in adequate pedestrian and bike safety infrastructure are necessary to mitigate climate impacts. This includes but is not limited to complete streets, bike lanes, community youth centers maintenance, bike safety education, and vouchers for protective bicycle gear. These investments will also support HE compliance of Program 27 to “track infrastructure projects in the City to assess the distribution of projects in the different areas and seek out funding to address infrastructure and public service deficiencies in high-need areas”.

Below are community-identified infrastructure projects:

- ➔ Complete protected bike lanes beginning on NW Olive and Hughes and going along Hughes to Mckinley. This would be conducive for a safe biking path to Addams Elementary. (District 3)
- ➔ The communities of Central and Cherry Avenues, and Central and Orange Avenues need complete street, and water and wastewater infrastructure. The City has committed to seek funding for bike and pedestrian safety infrastructure and water/sewer connectivity to the city. Since the development of more industrial facilities, safely walking in this community has become difficult and dangerous with distribution trucks passing by at dangerous speeds. (District 3)
- ➔ Better transit systems for parents who have children who attend schools near low income areas such as: Sunnyside and Roosevelt High Schools (District 5), Edison High School (District 3), Gaston Middle School (District 3), Baird Middle School, and Patino High School (District 7). The majority of parents come from neighborhoods in Southeast and Southwest Fresno, so better connectivity from these areas to these schools needs to be sought out. This can look like protected bike lanes from Addams to Edison and Gaston, and Calwa to Roosevelt and Sunnyside; higher bus frequency with Route 35 that goes to Addams; and protected bike lanes that go along Cambridge starting from Blackstone to Clark.
- ➔ Street lights need to be placed throughout the community between Jensen/Church and Fruit/Walnut region and immediately around the Addams Elementary neighborhood to ensure safe and secure travel for residents, especially after dark. (District 3)
- ➔ West Jensen Ave from MLK Jr to West Fresno Regional Sports Complex that includes complete sidewalks, lighting and protected bike lanes so that West Fresno residents can actually walk or bike safely to the park without having to drive. (District 3)

- **American Rescue Plan Allocations and Participatory Process**

Finally, as the City of Fresno receives their allocation of American Rescue Plan dollars, it is important to implement a participatory budget process on how to allocate these unforeseen resources. Participatory budgeting is not a new concept and has even been successfully implemented here through the Transformative Climate Community (TCC) process. Over the past year over \$100 million have previously been allocated and partially spent, however, there was no public input from residents and workers who were most affected by COVID-19. With the recent American Rescue Plan allocation, the City needs to conduct a meaningful participatory budget similar to that done through the TCC process so dollars can fulfill residents needs.

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2020 is a year we must not forget simply because a sense of normalcy is in sight after the deadly pandemic. We cannot forget the tens of thousands of lives lost which disproportionately killed BIPOC populations, destabilized their housing situation, and widened the wealth gap between white and non-white households. We must not forget the continuous lynching of BIPOC bodies, especially black men and young women, and the civil unrest that stemmed from this demanding for equal treatment and accountability of our local governments and police departments. Again, we ask that the FY21-22 Budget be done through a transparent, meaningful, and responsive public process so as to ensure equitable investments for all Fresnoans regardless of zip code, income, race, gender, immigration status, and housing circumstance. The City of Fresno is on the path to leading the San Joaquin Valley and to continue to do so, bold initiatives, policies, and investments should be made addressing the years of systemic oppression against BIPOC communities.

Sincerely,

Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability

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