



City of Fresno
2600 Fresno Street Fresno, CA 93721
June 2, 2022

<sent via email>

Letter RE: Fresno Community Priorities for the FY 2023 Annual Budget and Guiding Principles for a Just and Equitable Economic Recovery For All

Dear Mayor Dyer and Fresno City Councilmembers,

The undersigned community-based organizations work hand-in-hand with communities throughout the City of Fresno. We thank you for taking the time to read the following budget letter and welcome the opportunity to discuss our letter in further detail. The priorities and projects identified below were developed alongside resident partners through our ongoing collaboration as well as a series of recent community meetings.

The City of Fresno continues to consistently rank the highest in poor air quality¹ in the state, near last in the Trust for Public Land's park score² nationwide, houses some of the most burdened census tracts in all of California,³ and the existing housing crisis has only worsened making it

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

² <https://www.tpl.org/parkscore>

³ <https://oehha.ca.gov/calenviroscreen/report/calenviroscreen-40>

that much more unaffordable even for those earning salaries that equate to area median incomes.⁴ These data and statistics are not just numbers we cite, but the realities of a majority of the residents and communities you serve and represent. The City of Fresno, Councilmembers and Mayor Dyer must fundamentally shift the way decisions are made and meaningfully include all Fresno communities being especially intentional in including historically excluded groups.

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. The City of Fresno must fund and invest in projects, programs, and plans and implement legislation driven by the people for equitable growth and access getting us closer to one healthy Fresno. We present our comments below and ask that you include these priorities in this upcoming budget:

I. Affordable and Accessible Housing

A. Minimum of a 3-Year Funding Commitment for a Fully Funded Comprehensive Eviction Protection Program

We recommend an allocation of \$6 million dollars per year for three years each budget cycle (\$18 million over three years) for a fully funded and improved program. 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, many of whom speak and read languages other than English and are juggling multiple jobs and responsibilities, 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,

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/nov/06/fresno-housing-prices-rent-california>

- 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 a comprehensive eviction protection program now will lead to reduced expenditures on the cost of providing public benefits from job loss, costs associated with homelessness, the cost of social services and the lasting impacts of evictions such as marked credit scores making it difficult finding new housing. Initial funding could come from the American Rescue Plan dollars or other funding streams coming to the City of Fresno.

B. \$3 million Homeowner and Rent Assistance Program

We ask the City of Fresno to continue and improve upon the Emergency Rental Assistance Program as it has helped thousands of households. Staff should work with community leaders and advocates to ensure the program is effective and efficient. While the City has created homeownership programs and opportunities, those efforts have not reached some of the residents who would benefit most. This program should include robust engagement and outreach so Fresnoans who need it most can obtain access. Residents also recommend that any and all homeowner and rental assistance opportunities be made available to all lower-income households regardless of immigration status. The City should be partnering with financial institutions to support affordable and accessible loans to low-income potential homeowners with poor or no credit or ITIN. Homeownership provides our communities and families with the stability to remain and invest in their neighborhood, meanwhile breaking the cycle of generational poverty as it builds families' wealth.

C. \$3 million for Housing Improvement and Rehabilitation Projects

A \$3 million dollar initial fund for rehabilitation of older, blighted, and abandoned homes would help the City of Fresno face its housing crisis and climate crisis. As our climate crisis continues to increase extreme heat weather events, we urge the City Council and Mayor Dyer to appropriate funding for lower-income households to conduct weatherization improvements to their home. Additionally, this funding should be used to rehabilitate blighted, abandoned homes

and sell to lower-income households as another means to provide affordable homeownership opportunities. This could then be a revolving fund that sells upgraded homes at-cost allowing the program to fund itself. We request the City support and fund these programs and other similar ones prioritized in the Here to Stay Report such as the Land Bank Program, Community Land Trusts, and so on through this revolving fund.

D. Rent Stabilization Resolution

The City of Fresno's rental rates rank high within national and state rankings and rents are only getting higher. With an increase of 28% over the last year, the median price for a two-bedroom is approximately \$1,500 according to Rent.com. A family of four would have to make \$60,000 in order to afford this rent, however, US census data shows that Fresno's median household income is \$53,000. And while Fresno rents continue to increase, wages remain stagnant. Fresno is deemed to have one of the "[hottest](#)" rental markets in the state. Our longtime neighbors and friends are being displaced and losing their homes as these trends continue. Renters are faced with the choice to stay and pay exorbitant rents or leave their homes. Stabilizing rents is critical to the well-being of households and neighborhoods alike.

Residents of all walks of life have been urging this Council and Administration to adopt a comprehensive Rent Stabilization Ordinance that would allow landlords to gain reasonable profits while keeping families housed. This City can lead in the San Joaquin Valley by adopting a resolution that includes 'Just Cause' eviction language; a rent control board that allows landlords and tenants to make requests such as higher rental increases; and for single-family homes excluded by the Costa-Hawkins Rental Housing Act. We are recommending that the Council adopt one rent stabilization policy with a suite of interrelated components to ensure that in the immediate and short-term, we keep people housed.

E. \$1 million for a Tiny Home Community Pilot Program

As our homeless population continues to grow, we must provide a healthy, safe transition from houselessness into permanent housing. The first step comes by providing shelter in order to provide the stability a home can bring to get folks the support and assistance they may need. A tiny home pilot program would provide houseless community members with shelter, basic amenities, and a community to support their transition from not having a stable home. Tiny homes are an innovative, affordable, and scalable solution for our ongoing housing crisis. One of

the many empty lots the City of Fresno owns can serve as the location for 30 tiny homes for 1 to 2 individuals. Tiny homes should provide heating, air-conditioning, and 1 to 2 beds. Further, onsite showers, case management workers, housing navigation, and mental health services should be provided on-site in order to transition folks into permanent housing and launch their own personal development.

II. Climate Resilient Infrastructure and Park Improvements

The City must invest in climate-resilient infrastructure improvements in neighborhoods that rank the highest on CalEnviroScreen for pollution and poor health outcomes and are most vulnerable to climate change. Existing neighborhoods have not seen improvements for decades on their already deteriorated roads and parks, and lack bike and pedestrian infrastructures like complete sidewalks, bike lanes, lighting, and greening. We ask the City Council to support and prioritize community-identified and community-driven projects including the ones listed below, which also align with the Housing Element Program 27.

A. Community Identified Transportation Improvements

For years, long-standing communities have asked for investments in their communities, and now is the time for the City of Fresno to make those investments in much-needed transportation improvements. Below are transportation projects your constituents have identified as top priorities for their communities.:

- a. Bike lanes need to be placed around the following areas:
 - i. Complete protected bike lanes beginning on NW Olive and Hughes and going along Hughes to Mckinley. This would be conducive to a safe biking path to Addams Elementary (District 3)
- b. Complete Street projects need to be completed around the following areas:
 - i. Complete streets on Olive between Hughes and Marks (District 3)
 - ii. Cedar Ave between Mckinley Ave and Jensen Ave street needs to be repaved and maintained, as well as bike lanes (District 5)

- iii. Butler Ave between East and Hazelwood Avenues needs to be repaved. (District 5)
 - iv. Local roads in the Winchel and Sequoia area need to be repaved such as Fifth Street from California to Ventura Avenues. (District 5)
- c. Traffic lights need to be placed around the following areas:
- i. Traffic lights on Olive and Hughes as there have been fatal accidents at that intersection. (District 3)
 - ii. Fremont Elementary School on Weldon and Tellman needs a traffic light. Lots of students and families cross this dangerous intersection for school. (District 3)
 - iii. Comprehensive safety upgrades near Calwa Elementary: For years, the community and the parents of Calwa Elementary have asked the City to place stop lights on the corners of Cedar and Jensen, Jensen and Rowell, and a safe crossing path on Jensen between Cedar and Rowell. This will create a safe walking path for children, who have experienced near collisions with traffic. (District 5)
- d. Street lights need to be placed around the following areas:
- i. Near Addams Elementary neighborhood to ensure safe and secure travel for residents, especially after dark (District 3)
 - ii. On Mckinley between Marks to West Ave (District 3)
 - iii. On N Golden State Blvd between 3 Palms mobile home park and Olive (District 3)
 - iv. On S. Crystal from Sunset Elementary to W. Kearny Blvd (District 3)
 - v. All corners at the intersection of Willow Ave and Tulare Ave need adequate street lighting (District 7)

- vi. Street lighting is needed on Tulare Ave between Chestnut Ave and Peach Ave (District 7)
- e. Bus upgrades need to occur along the following routes:
 - i. Higher bus frequency with Route 35 that goes to Addams; and protected bike lanes that go along Cambridge starting from Blackstone to Clark (District 3)

A. Community Identified Park and Community Center Projects

- a. Extend Maxie L Parks Community Center. The south wall within this community center needs constant maintenance and shading is needed (District 3)
- b. Community residents and parents of the Addams community have asked for a park nearby for several years and have identified vacant lots for a green space that they want to be able to design as a community. (District 3) The following spaces have been identified:
 - i. Southwest corner of Mckinley and Marks
 - ii. Northeast corner of Mckinley and Marks
 - iii. Using the ponding basin behind Addams Elementary to place a Community Center

B. \$9 million for Youth and Community Resilience Centers

If the pandemic has highlighted anything, it is that community gathering spaces are crucial for a community's quality of life. Communal spaces are critical to people's health and well-being and have served to provide Fresnans with COVID tests and vaccinations, food distribution centers, and other necessary resources. Further, community centers are critical in times of excessive weather events, especially as cooling is not readily available in every housing unit. Youth especially need spaces to play, connect and socialize, in safe, enriching, and non-judgmental environments and they need these spaces more than ever after a year and a half of disrupted social development. Now is the moment to expand access to youth and community resilience

centers for low-income communities in Fresno that have not seen requisite investments in their neighborhoods. Access to quality community gathering spaces should not be a privilege only available to some.

Recently, the state has appropriated several rounds of funding to support and build climate resilience centers throughout the state. It would be a missed opportunity for the City of Fresno to not allocate funds towards this to be able to leverage statewide resources.

III. Northpointe Settlement Agreements

In 2021, the City of Fresno came into a settlement agreement with South Fresno Community Alliance legally committing the city to mitigate the industrial impacts surrounding this community and improve the overall quality of life. We ask this Council to appropriate funding to complete the projects that City has already committed to completing:

- a. A crosswalk and pedestrian signage and push buttons at the intersection of East Central Avenue and South Orange Avenue.
- b. An installation of a High-Intensity Activated Crosswalk (“HAWK”), with push and kick buttons to promote accessibility, at the intersection of East Central Avenue and South Cherry Avenue. The HAWK installation will include signage in advance of the intersection advising traffic of the upcoming stop. The City Manager will issue a written request to the County Chief Administrative Officer to cooperate on the attainment of East Central Avenue Pedestrian Safety Improvements, and the City will make its best efforts to work proactively with the County to complete the East Central Avenue Pedestrian Safety Improvements.
- c. Funding a public process for the development and adoption of a plan to determine pedestrian and bicycle safety needs and priorities in the area bounded by Highways 41 and 99, and the Southern border of the City’s Sphere of Influence.
- d. Provide for the installation of traffic control signs on East Central Avenue, East North Avenue, and South Cherry Avenue directing truck traffic to preferred truck routes on East North Avenue and South Orange Avenue and away from East Central Avenue and South Orange Avenue.

III. Inclusive & Transparent Public Process

Finally, as the City of Fresno develops its City budget including appropriating the rest of the American Rescue Plan dollars along with other federal and state funding sources, it is imperative to implement an inclusive, transparent, and responsive public process. We highly recommend participatory budgeting as the City has implemented such a process before through the Transformative Climate Community (TCC) process.

The City and Councilmembers should conduct inclusive participatory processes to meaningfully and intentionally include all Fresno residents. We invited all South Fresno representatives to a budget town hall where we hosted staff. Of 5 council members invited only 2 councilmembers' staff attended: Councilmembers Esmeralda Soria and Miguel Arias. While residents appreciate Council Staff's presence, they want to ensure their elected officials are hearing the priorities directly from them to ensure they fully grasp their neighborhood's needs and solutions.

We do want to note that constituents appreciate Councilmember Arias' efforts to engage his constituents across District 3. Residents look forward to seeing priorities and projects raised during conversations be reflected in this year's budget.

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2022 is a year in which the City of Fresno must create change and move past the status quo. We have the priorities, the funding, and the revenue, all we need is the drive from the City Council and the Mayor to move the City of Fresno into a state of equitable opportunity. We respectfully ask that the FY22-23 Budget process be transparent, meaningful, inclusive, and responsive so as to ensure equitable investments for all Fresnans regardless of zip code, income, race, gender, immigration status, and housing circumstance. Now is the time for the City of Fresno to lead the San Joaquin Valley with bold initiatives, policies, and investments, and start to address the years of systemic oppression against BIPOC communities.

Respectfully,

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