

Public Testimony for the Boston City Budget, June 11, 2020

By Lisa Jeanne Graf

There is a window for change now that we all have a moral obligation to step up to. With this year's city budget we need to make sure that money is going directly to those who need it the most, especially those who have been given the least equity and the least access for the longest time. Especially for those who have their health and economics harmed by racism. We can't just mend the consequences from racism, we need to address some of the financial root causes, including underfunding public education and over funding the police budget. In thinking about the budget this year I support the following changes.

Police Budget:

- Severely reducing the overtime budget. This change alone could make a huge difference in fully funding BPS.
- On a related note, ending contracts with the Boston Public Schools, and the BRIC (Boston Regional Intelligence Center) would help protect student privacy, and help avoid deportation. This would also help dismantle the school to prison pipeline.
- Some items in the budget could be frozen in the next year, including new hires, new vehicles, and new equipment to allocate money for more helpful uses. In addition more roles could be filled by staff in other departments like the Boston Public Health Commission to fund positions like social workers and mental health professionals moving forward.
- Items that are not necessary and/or are overly expensive could be sold (like police helicopters), or donated to support the community (like the police ice-cream truck) possibly bringing in new funds to the city budget, and supporting the community better.
- Items that are harmful should no longer be purchased, let alone used, like tear gas rubber bullets, and facial recognition technology.
- Some reallocations for department oversight would have value, including:
 - A civilian review board with subpoena powers
 - Expanding the use of body cams to be mandatory for special events like parades and protests, as well as making it mandatory to share that footage within 24 hours
 - De-escalation and anti-bias training that includes clearly defining what are brutal and escalating behaviors are, and what the consequences for those behaviors would be, including job termination and the loss of benefits.

BPS Budget:

- When schools reopen, all schools need equity in being able to open safely, including offering good ventilation, and windows that can open in all classrooms.
- Investments in creating more safe bike routes to schools (through investments in Safe Routes) would be appreciated by parents who want to cut down on school bus travel but do not have a car.
- Fund all school budgets fully and equitably, starting with a foundation budget and then adding funding for increased student needs.
- To save money and expand opportunity, eliminate the Terra Nova Test for the “Advanced Work” program and invest in the “Excellence for All” program for all students (merging with the best aspects of the “Advanced Work” program). Also don’t fund a new test for admission to the exam schools. Instead BPS could offer seats through the lottery along with Pilot and Open Enrollment schools. That would be truly equitable.
- Provide more funding towards increasing digital access throughout the city quickly by adding funding from the Boston Resiliency Fund.

- **Streets Budget:** Don’t rebuild the Northern Ave Bridge, or wait to do it in a year. Also if it is built, only have it be built for pedestrians and for cyclists. The cost of having it include cars is too high and these funds are better invested elsewhere.

- **City Parks Department:** In the next year prioritize planting trees and adding more green space, especially in neighborhoods that have the least.

- **City Engagement:** Provide funding for city meetings to get closed captioning through a stenographer. This will allow for better accuracy, and make it easier to create useful transcripts. Also this would make translations easier to create as well.

- **Increase funding** to directly support food access, housing stability, job stability, and health care, for all residents, with a focus on equity. Increase funding for the Boston Public Schools, the Public Health Commission and the Arts and Culture departments specifically.

Remember that you can all band together to vote down the budget to push for changes, for how the city is funded. Now is a time that change is really possible. Please seize this moment and use it well.

Thanks for your time and your advocacy!

