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CITY OF IRVINE
CITY MANAGER'S OFFICE

Memo

To: Mayor and City Council
Marianna Marysheva, Interim City Manager

From: Larry Agran, Councilmember *LA*

Date: April 15, 2021

Re: Allocation of Funds from the American Rescue Plan Act

Introduction

This Memo is in response to the Interim City Manager's invitation to suggest ideas for allocating the \$53 million that the City of Irvine will soon receive under the provisions of the recently enacted American Rescue Plan Act.

In Irvine, as elsewhere, the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed institutional gaps and deficiencies in our municipal government that require immediate and sustained attention if we are to ultimately "Build Back Better" — the slogan of the Biden administration — in the aftermath of the pandemic.

In preparing these recommendations my office directly surveyed 186 Irvine residents. The survey results reveal that affordability and health are top of mind for Irvine residents as the City sets a course to move past the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, respondents expressed that allocation of these funds be prioritized in areas such as affordable housing, healthy school environments, Irvine's COVID-19 response, small business supports, climate action, child care, and more. (For more details on this survey, please visit www.theofficeofcouncilmemberlarryagran.org.) In an effort to respond to these prevailing concerns, I have consulted experts across the City and County; conducted extensive independent research; and collaborated with my team of commissioners, appointees, and staff to recommend the following.

Recommendations

I suggest we focus much of the \$53 million coming to Irvine on building institutional capacity in order to alleviate hardship, restore the health and welfare of our community, and speed the City's recovery and prosperity in the next two years and beyond.

Specifically, I suggest the following:

1. Establish a City Hall Office of Public Health - \$6 million over two years.

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed that our City — which now has a resident population of nearly 300,000 people and a workday population of approximately 500,000 people — began the year 2020 with no institutional public health capacity. We have been reliant, instead, on the Orange County Health Agency which itself has been overwhelmed by the pandemic. The cities in Southern California that appear to have done better in meeting the public health challenges of the past year include Pasadena (pop. 141,000) and Long Beach (pop. 463,000) — both of these cities have their own Public Health Departments, built up over the years. I suggest the City establish an Office of Public Health (OPH), initially comprising a chief health officer and several highly trained public health professionals. The OPH would undertake a needs assessment — preferably in consultation with the University of California – Irvine (UCI) — and then recommend policies, programs and best practices for citywide adoption and application. In addition to the ongoing COVID-19 response, the OPH could also address mental health and absorb other existing City-driven public health campaigns.

2. Establish a City Office of Small Business Assistance - \$4 million over two years.

During the pandemic, the City has served as a pass-through for millions of dollars in federal and state funding to assist hundreds of Irvine businesses. The City, however, lacks the capacity to proactively assist small businesses to navigate the maze of state and federal programs that can help businesses to survive and succeed. An Office of Small Business Assistance could include a chief officer and several experienced professionals, such as “navigators” who specialize in helping small businesses to access Federal and State resources.

3. Establish a City Office of Emergency Housing Assistance - \$10 million over two years.

The pandemic has turned the chronic problem of inadequate affordable housing into a looming emergency. Instead of outsourcing the administration of millions of dollars in federal and state emergency housing assistance, the City should have a small professional staff to secure housing funds and efficiently distribute millions of dollars in ways that support distressed renters and homeowners, and avoid evictions and homelessness.

4. Invest in School Nurses & Resource Officers - \$6 million over two years.

IUSD and TUSD will be receiving tens of millions of dollars in support under the American Rescue Plan, which may include funds for school nurses essential to the reopening and continued safe operation of schools and addressing the mental health needs of children. Currently, IUSD and TUSD are staffed with

school nurses at roughly half the nationally recommended standard of one nurse: one school. Irvine currently provides nearly \$10 million per year in both in-kind aid and cash-grants to IUSD and TUSD for school nurses and for the deployment of School Resource Officers — highly trained police officers — in Irvine high schools and middle schools. Recognizing improved school health translates into better community health, the City should enter into an agreement with IUSD and TUSD to expand our support to schools attended by Irvine residents to help eliminate the shortfall in school health and safety services. The City should also recruit and deploy at least five additional School Resource Officers in Irvine high schools and K-8 schools. In short, annually this would amount to approximately \$2 million for school nurses and \$1 million for school resource officers.

5. Improve Participation & Access to City Council, Commission, & Committee Meetings - \$2 million over two years.

The pandemic has introduced the use of Zoom technology for live-commenting over Internet and phone, improving public participation options in City Council meetings beyond pre-pandemic standards. As in-person participation at City Council meetings resumes, this participation should continue and be expanded from City Council to the City's Commissions, Committees, and Advisory boards. Additionally, over a two-year period, the viewing and commenting experience should be standardized across City Council, Commissions, and Committee meetings — with all meetings broadcasted live on Facebook and YouTube. These improvements will ensure residents do not need to attend in-person to be heard by their elected representatives and do not need to acquaint themselves with multiple web applications and access protocols to keep up with City affairs. Finally, to maximize accessibility for the elderly and hard of hearing, closed captioning should be made available on all City broadcasts.

6. Expand Support for Child Care - \$4 million over two years.

City-supported childcare programs and facilities should be expanded and made more affordable and accessible through lower sliding-scale fees and additional scholarships for lower-income families. In order to recruit and retain outstanding childcare workers, the City should support higher compensation for hourly workers.

7. Accelerate Implementation of Irvine's Climate Action Plan - \$10 million over two years.

In cooperation with UCI and other institutional partners, the City should accelerate the preparation, adoption and implementation of a comprehensive City of Irvine Climate Action Plan. This should include funding of select investments in pilot project programs (e.g., converting the City transportation fleet to electric vehicles) that can demonstrate an impressive return on investment in terms of de-carbonization. In turn, this will help establish Irvine's leadership role in combating climate change.

8. Support Irvine’s Senior Centers & Programs – \$2 million over two years.

9. Accelerate Design/Construction of the IBC Trail System – \$2 million over two years.

This may include seed money for planning purposes to improve access to outdoor spaces, active transportation, and otherwise turn the IBC into a more sustainable, resident-friendly community.

Cost summary*

#	Item	Two-year cost
1	Establish a City Hall Office of Public Health	\$6M
2	Establish a City Office of Small Business Assistance	\$4M
3	Establish a City Office of Emergency Housing Assistance	\$10M
4	Invest in School Nurses & Resource Officers	\$6M
5	Improve Participation & Access to City Council, Commission, & Committee Meetings	\$2M
6	Expand Support for Child Care	\$4M
7	Accelerate Implementation of Irvine’s Climate Action Plan	\$10M
8	Support Irvine’s Senior Centers & Programs	\$2M
9	Accelerate Design/Construction of the IBC Trail System	\$2M
	Total	\$46M
	Unallocated	\$7M

*To maximize City investments, where applicable, the City may consider a range of funding options including but not limited to: public/private partnerships, matching grants for eligible organizations, and the direct transfer of City relief funds to qualified community partners. City staff may also be encouraged to apply for additional COVID-19 pandemic special assistance funding available via Federal and State resources.