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Deanna Dawson

October 28, 2014

The Honorable Larry Phillips
Chair, King County Council
516 Third Ave, Rm. 1200
Seattle, WA 98104

Dear Chair Phillips and Members of the County Council:

On behalf of the Board and the 36 member cities of the Sound Cities Association (SCA), I am writing to share our cities' priorities as the Council prepares to adopt the 2015/2016 biennial budget. We applaud the Council for your openness and transparency in the budget process, and appreciate the opportunity to provide comment. As our members have reviewed the Executive's proposed budget and discussed areas of potential impact on cities, three priorities have emerged for our cities: transportation, public health, and public safety.

We are very pleased to see that the Council is taking another look at the budget for Metro Transit, and has signaled that it will not be making the cuts to service proposed for 2015. Our cities commend the Council for your ongoing efforts to find efficiencies and cost savings to avoid cuts to transit. As you are well aware, King County is one of the fastest growing counties in the nation and residents throughout the County rely on transit to get to their jobs, school, and medical appointments. Transit service is important to the quality of life for our residents, and our local economy. We are supportive of the Council taking a hard look at its existing reserve policies, and the revisions to policy proposed by Metro on the revenue stabilization reserve. Having appropriate levels of reserves is fiscally responsible. But we encourage the Council to not build overly conservative reserves at the expense of existing, needed service.

To that end, we would also urge the Council to take a look at the cuts to Metro service made in 2014. Our cities have already begun discussions with Metro and the Executive's office to find alternative services that could provide cost effective ways to restore service on routes that may not be viewed as productive on existing measures (including the route in Burien serving Highline Medical Center, and routes in Auburn serving the Muckleshoot Reservation and Orion Industries), and those cities hit hardest by the cuts (including Mercer Island, whose routes were cut by 75%, and Snoqualmie, whose routes were cut by 66%). We are very encouraged by these conversations and believe that we may be on the road to finding solutions that could restore needed service, and provide a model for future right-sizing of the system. The budget proposed by the Executive contains a placeholder of \$6 million for the biennium for alternative transit service. We would encourage the Council to look at that as a starting point, and to provide sufficient funding to restore service to those communities and routes hit hardest by the 2014 cuts.

We are also pleased that the County is looking for ways to avoid the proposed closure of health clinics in the County. We know that the budget for the Health Department is at a crisis point, and our cities are committed to working with the County to find sustainable funding for public health. In the meantime, we encourage the Council to do all that it can to avoid closing clinics. This is especially critical for the Auburn clinic. Closure of this clinic would appear to conflict with other initiatives at the County such as the Health and Human Services Transformation Plan and Communities of Opportunity, where the County is focusing resources in areas with inequities in income, race, and health, and where services are most needed. The County has articulated the need to focus in on prevention in order to address these inequities and to create healthy communities. Closing health clinics would be a step in the wrong direction. Ensuring that these clinics remain open as we work together toward long-term solutions on funding for public health is a top priority not just for Auburn and neighboring communities, but for all our cities.

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Our cities were also very concerned about the proposal to raise the costs of inspections for farmers markets and vendors at community festivals. This proposal would be a hardship to small vendors, and would stifle efforts to support local farms and create healthier communities through providing fresh, local, healthy food to our residents. It would also place an undue burden on local community festivals and events throughout the County. We are pleased to hear that this proposal is going back to the drawing board and is off the table for consideration in the budget. We look forward to working through this issue with the Board of Health to ensure that fees do not hamper the success and sustainability of farmers markets.

Finally, our cities are concerned about the potential of rising costs in the area of public safety. Many of our cities contract with the County for police service, which has benefits for cities and the County. We know that the County has been struggling to get a handle on the costs of providing those services, and we encourage you and Sheriff Urquhart to continue to do so, so that these services continue to be a cost-effective option for cities and taxpayers throughout the County. In addition, the Executive's proposed budget notes that the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention has requested an additional \$5.2 million in the biennium to address growth. The budget does not contain that additional funding, but rather proposed to convene a task force to manage the jail population. We are concerned that cities were not invited to join that task force, and would welcome the opportunity to work with the County on this important issue. We would encourage the Council to ensure that any proposals that come forward from this task force are carefully evaluated to ensure that they do not shift burdens from the County onto cities, as well as to ensure that they do not unnecessarily jeopardize community safety.

We are extremely impressed by the level of responsiveness we have had from the County Executive and staff from the Office of Performance, Strategy and Budget (PSB) in sharing information and answering questions for our cities. Dwight Dively met with SCA's Finance Committee, and also shared written responses to our cities' questions. I've attached those questions and Mr. Dively's responses, as they may be helpful to the Council in their budget deliberations.

We thank you for taking the time to listen to our cities' priorities. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact our Executive Director Deanna Dawson at (206) 433-7170, or at Deanna@SoundCities.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John Marchione". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J".

John Marchione
President, Sound Cities Association
Mayor, City of Redmond

Cc: King County Council
Dow Constantine, King County Executive
Dwight Dively, Office of Performance, Strategy and Budget
Sound Cities Association Board of Directors
Sound Cities Association Member Cities