



## **Councilmember Constant Working Diligently on Budget Proposals**

During the month of May, the Mayor and City Council review the proposed city operating and capital budgets for the coming fiscal year. Following two weeks of budget study sessions the City Council submits budget proposals to the Mayor's office. The Mayor reviews these proposals and drafts his recommendations that are approved by the City Council in mid-June. Councilmember Pete Constant submitted three proposals geared toward crime prevention, operating efficiencies and truth in budgeting.

### **Crime Prevention**

Gang violence and graffiti are on the rise in San José and Councilmember Constant is working with the Mayor to address the problem. This is increasingly difficult as budget forecasts show operating deficits well into the future. With this in mind, one of the most disturbing cuts to this year's proposed budgets was that of critical crime prevention programs like Challenges and Choices. This is an anti-gang education program that teaches elementary and middle-school students alternative dispute resolution and anger-management skills. The program's primary goal is to encourage kids to stay in school and out of gangs.

"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," stated Councilmember Pete Constant. "Preserving this program is a no-brainer. Gangs are recruiting elementary and middle-school aged kids and we need to be sure that our children are armed with the information and confidence to resist."

Mayor Chuck Reed has accepted this proposal as part of his 2008/2009 Budget Proposal.

### **Police Department Efficiencies**

Constant also proposed an operating efficiency that would reinstate civilian positions in the San José Police Department which have fallen prey to budget cuts over the last 3 years. This proposal would put cops back out on the street that are now working administrative jobs in the department, thereby maximizing the time sworn officers spend patrolling our neighborhoods. The civilian positions are significantly less expensive than the same number of officer positions. This type of operating efficiency reduces the cost of adding officers, which are desperately needed.

In addition to suggesting operating efficiencies, Councilmember Pete Constant recommended increasing funding to hire more police officers. The need for these positions has been identified by the Police Chief and will become even more critical as we seek to curb the City's escalating crime rate and deal with a large number of pending retirements.

Fortunately, this proposal was also accepted by Mayor Reed's office and will be part of his upcoming Mayor's Budget Proposal.

### **Truth in Budgeting**

Every aspect of City Government deserves scrutiny when looking at ways to bring the city budget crisis under control. And that includes reviewing the expenditures of the Mayor and City Council Offices. To encourage openness and transparency in governmental budgeting Councilmember Constant recommended that the City Council General Fund be reallocated to the Mayor and City Council Office Budgets.

The City Council General Fund is a fund that few outside of City Hall know about. It pays for many of the direct costs for operating a council office, but that are not evident to the public. For example, Councilmembers' salaries as well as the salaries of their administrative assistants are paid for out of Council General. It also pays for all of the retirement and fringe benefits for the Mayor, Council and their employees. With this type of budgeting it appears to the public that Council offices operate on approximately \$250,000, but the actual cost to run a Council is in excess of \$650,000. In recent years this fund has run a surplus of over a half of a million dollars, but that money is not being used to address the City's growing deficit.

Councilmember Constant feels it should be easy for the public to see how much money each office is spending and on what. In addition, giving Councilmembers control of all of the money that it costs to run their office will encourage them to find cost-saving operational efficiencies. For example, a council office can save a great deal of money on neighborhood cleanups by sending flyers out through a mail house rather than using city copiers, paper and staff to prepare the mailings. If every office adopted this one example it would save the public thousands of dollars a year.

"Closing our budget deficit starts with being honest with what services cost, so that we have reliable information when we look for operating efficiencies," explained Constant.

Unfortunately, Mayor Reed did not accept this as part of his 2008/2009 Budget Proposal.