

New Budget Targets Homelessness & Infrastructure

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Garcetti's \$9.2 billion city budget for fiscal year 2017-2017, which the city council approved on May 18th, includes new funding from two critical measures approved by voters last November to fight homelessness and to improve public transportation.

In the budget, which takes effect July 1st more than \$89 million of the \$176 million approved by voters to fight homelessness will come from Measure HHH for homelessness permanent supportive housing while another \$35 million, from Measure M, will go toward transportation improvements.

Los Angeles City Councilmember David Ryu said the city's upcoming budget will greatly enhance and impact city infrastructure, including in Ryu's Council District 4, by fixing roads, bolstering public safety, increasing transportation options and enhancing commuter experience and quality of life.

"Our roads have been in a perpetual state of neglect and disrepair for far too long and have been an incredible cost to pedestrians, cyclists, motorists, alike. This budget will provide millions for road repair and public safety on our streets, as promised to the residents of Council District 4 as part of Measure M," Ryu said in an email.

Additionally, Ryu said he feels encouraged regarding the most recent budget, which will increase funding to police and fire departments for more civilian hires, allowing 10,000 more sworn-in officers to be available for patrol and response. Additionally, the new city budget allocates \$10.5 million toward hiring more firefighters.

Regarding transportation, the budget has devoted \$14-million for an expansion of DASH bus service and another \$1

million for the extension of Metro's Purple Line, now under construction in Mid-City Los Angeles and which will ultimately end in Westwood.

Assistant City Administrative Officer Benjamin Ceja said the \$1 million will help pay salaries and benefits for support staff on the Purple Line project in 2017-18.

"This is on par to what was funded in 2016-17. In 2018-19, the city will begin funding its obligated match for the Purple Line. This amount will be about \$75 million over seven to eight years," Ceja said.

The subway funding will be an assist in ongoing construction activities such as the eight-to-12-week process of jet grouting, a process utilizing high-pressure air and grout to reinforce the soil with concrete to support tunneling, that began June 9 near Wilshire Boulevard and Highland Avenue.

The new budget also funds \$7.1 million for tree-trimming and \$2 million for 24-hour graffiti removal. It was unclear at deadline if the city had chosen specific neighborhoods for that service.

In response to recent lawsuit settlements, the city will now pay \$31 million annually to address sidewalk repair and \$20 million yearly toward handicapped-accessible housing.

The budget also accounts for the mayor's pet projects — high-profile initiatives such as Vision Zero—which aims to eliminate all traffic deaths by 2025, and in which \$17 million has been allocated—and \$3.6 million for the Great Streets initiative, which enhances the corridors considered the backbone of Los Angeles.

Another \$2.48 million infuses the Neighborhood Empowerment Fund, which supports the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment and establishes and aids the city's 96 neighborhood councils.

The amount that every neighborhood council will receive in 2017-18 will be \$42,000, consistent with the amount they each received in 2016-17.

The budget also earmarks \$2.88 million toward operation of the Los Angeles Zoo, in Griffith Park, including \$1.28 million for zoo marketing, which will complement the efforts of Greater Los Angeles Zoo Association (GLAZA), the zoo's fundraising arm. By comparison, GLAZA raised \$2.85 million for the L.A. Zoo at its annual Beastly Ball benefit in May.

Also, according to the new budget, the city's Dept. of Cultural Affairs, which awards funds for citywide artistic ventures, expects to dole out more than \$19 million toward cultural programming.

Those allocations include such Los Angeles council district 4 and 13 entities, such as Griffith Park's Autry National Center of the American West (\$50,000), the Ford Theatre Foundation (\$20,000), the Hollywood Arts Council (\$12,100 organizational and festivals), Los Feliz's American Film Institute (\$12,500), the Echo Park Film Center (\$12,250) and the mid-Wilshire based Craft + Folk Museum (\$12,250).

In March, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that Garcetti, despite an improving local economy, faced a 2017-2018 \$224-million budget deficit as the city incurred mounting expenses due to fresh labor agreements, court settlements and homelessness expenditures.

Less revenue returned this year from parking citations and from taxi franchises, presumably as Uber and Lyft take chunks of the market helped create the upcoming year's budget shortfall.

"Parking citation revenue is going down tied to a relaxation of the rules when it comes to parking enforcement on non-posted street sweeping areas and on the occasions when street sweeping does not occur. We received about \$11 million less than we budgeted (\$152 million to \$141 million) in 2016-17 and are assuming the same lower amount of \$141 million in 2017-18," Ceja said.

As for taxi franchise revenue declines, the \$1 million reduction is a “very minor portion” of the city’s \$5.8 billion General Fund, he said.

But with the help of \$70 million in bonds approved by city council earlier this year, the budget will maintain Garcetti’s 5% reserve fund commitments while attempting to reduce the deficit.

Ceja said that contrary to the city’s data earlier this year, property tax revenue has, in fact, climbed.

“Our last report indicated that we would exceed our budgeted number in 2016-17. Furthermore, property tax revenue is going up 2.2% from 2016-17 to 2017-18,” Ceja said.

Also assisting in this year’s budget stream is expected revenue boosts from taxes imposed on those renting their properties through Airbnb.