

CITY'S BUDGET CUTS NEED ANOTHER LOOK

Our city's budget cuts are drama and poor thinking disguised as data driven, evidence based discernment. A favored class of public servants has arisen and confusion regarding the true core competencies of a safe and thriving community resounds.

Elected and anointed folks with little formal training in leadership, economics, finance, governance, relevant sociology and criminology can be easily overwhelmed leading to under- serving a city while over-serving wrong interests.

Financial books are balanced by matching income and expense. However, cities and their citizens are not books. The cuts are far out of the balance that a safe, civil and thriving community warrants. We need to refocus on correct community core competencies and the consequences of not addressing them.

During this historic economic downturn, the city recently gave raises to all city employees and higher raises to the police going over budget by \$1.9 million. Cities must make up any CalPERS retirement entitlements that CalPERS cannot meet and CalPERS has had monumental losses. Those raises mean taxpayers just acquired more non budgeted long term costs. A mere fraction of those raises could support the arts and more community services.

The city also pays about \$3 million in yearly overtime costs. The majority goes to fire and police, a large portion of who earn over \$100,000 per year.

Fourteen million dollar Aquatic Centers that typically lose money will never wash away the sins that poor academic performance, horrible physical fitness, civil disobedience and broken families visit upon a city of our size and demographics.

Paying outrageous pensions and phenomenal benefit packages that exceed military service or comparable private sector situations is simply untenable and inherently wrong.

The arts are not just a nice to have luxury. The literature shows that they are a seminal core competency and one of the pillars holding up a safe and civil society.

Police and fire salaries are presently an unsustainable cost to the community. Suggesting such generosity is necessary to protect hearth and home is shameful. Six figure salaries and up to 13.5 percent pay raises do not buy us protection from felons. Freedom from fire's ravages can come at a much lower premium through smart time management and matching of talent to the true triage level of demands and calls.

Privatizing Fairfield Center for the Creative Arts is uninformed, bad business and poor management. Cooperation among artists, professional management and the city would pull in patrons and retail sales and enrich downtown and our lives. Private lessees on their own face herculean tasks with economic

needs directly competing with existent arts companies. Local companies and patrons would wither away but perhaps not before a final bow at the ballot box.

So what to do? Councilwoman Moy is dead on regarding not increasing Community Services fees. Taxes are traumatizing to tools which temper our community's civility and target investment in our most precious asset, our children. The Daily Republic editorial staff, and in particular Kathy L'Ecluse, are correct regarding prioritization of needs and wants, realities of public service and the brilliant allusion to the Gordian knot we are in. We must untie it with bold strokes as did Alexander the Great

Irrespective of the grants surrounding the aquatic center, we should "pave over paradise" for now, escrow what we can and publically beg forgiveness for losses. If we cannot rescind raises, begin modest furloughs. Stop outrageous overtime and selective police bonuses. Those sworn to serve will surely not punish us for our prudence in saving, as Vice Mayor Mraz put it, "the soul of our community"

Renegotiate pensions for all new hires and perhaps recent hires. Build; do not burn the arts and all services which redirect lives to healthier choices. Stop this madness now and lead. Failure to do so will drive us away from being a community and towards a place we sadly commute from.

Kevin Ryan is a retired Colonel, physician, musician and author who lives in Fairfield.