

Memorandum



CITY OF DALLAS

DATE July 21, 2022

TO T.C. Broadnax, City Manager

SUBJECT Budget Priorities for Fiscal Year 2022-23

Dear Mr. Broadnax:

The single most important vote the Dallas City Council takes every year is the vote on our annual budget. And we are coming up on a consequential fiscal year for our city.

To paraphrase Moody's Analytics, Dallas had a remarkable 2021. Our city led the nation out of the economic upheaval caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. And thanks to the groundwork we have laid over the last three years, we are primed for continued growth in the years ahead.

I have been proud of our efforts to build a safer, stronger, more vibrant, more dynamic, and more resilient city. But it is clear that our city government still has many basic needs to address. And as the sole citywide elected official, it is my responsibility to advocate for an annual budget that reflects the best interests of our entire city.

Our critical city services — such as development services — must be run efficiently and effectively. Our infrastructure needs our continued attention and maintenance. Our environmental issues must continue to be addressed. And our neighborhoods need more safety and support.

Therefore, in Fiscal Year 2022-23, I strongly believe our annual budget must again get back to basics and provide real impact for our residents.

While not inclusive of everything that I would like to see in the budget, here are five key areas of focus that I believe should be prioritized in the general fund in your proposal:

1) Public safety: Last year, the Dallas City Council made a historic commitment to public safety in our city by committing to hiring 500 new officers over two years, funding market-rate salary increases for first responders, providing much-needed resources such as additional squad cars, restoring previous police overtime cuts, and investing in community-based solutions. This year, public safety must again be our top priority as we pursue our shared goal of becoming the safest major city in the United States. In addition to the requests outlined in my July 5, 2022 memorandum, here is what I believe is necessary to boost our public safety efforts in our budget:

a) Hiring and retention: We must continue to support police officer hiring and retention efforts — and even consider increasing our commitment, if that is what is required to make our city safer. To achieve our goals, we must also step up lateral hiring efforts. In addition, to be clear, I will not support any reduction from the 250-officer hiring plan or a reduction in overtime funds that are deemed necessary to implement the Dallas Police Department's data-driven violent crime reduction plan — especially considering our ongoing shortage of police officers.

b) Technology upgrades: As we continue to build back our police force, we should consider immediately boosting our spending on police technology, such as surveillance cameras and automatic license plate readers. I am working with our federal partners to secure additional funding, but support through our city budget could have an immediate impact by helping us apprehend and prosecute criminals.

c) Task Force on Safe Communities: We cannot rely on law enforcement alone to reduce crime. We must continue to fund the recommendations of the Mayor's Task Force on Safe Communities and discuss how we can scale our proven and data-driven efforts and our community engagement programs where appropriate.

d) Hate crime awareness and reporting: The attacks on a Colleyville synagogue and on our Asian-American community in northwest Dallas this year are tragic reminders that in this fast-growing and diverse city and region, we must stay on guard against hate-motivated violence. These incidents also illustrated why the work of the Mayor's Anti-Hate Advisory Council is so critical. But our community needs more help. And because of the unique and chilling nature of hate-motivated crime, we should consider allocating funds for anti-hate efforts, including awareness, prevention, and enforcement.

e) Dallas Fire-Rescue: Public safety also includes taking care of the men and women of the Dallas Fire-Rescue Department. I am pleased that we prioritized the mental health of our firefighters this year, and we should ensure that we continue to do so next year. We should also consider all options for ensuring that Dallas Fire-Rescue has all the equipment it needs, including reserve apparatus, modernized radio and dispatch systems, necessary health-and-safety equipment, and functional heating and cooling equipment at fire stations.

2) Property tax relief: It is imperative that a tax-rate reduction is included in your proposed budget. We have cut the tax rate every year since I have been mayor, and this year, a rate reduction is more vital than ever as property values have soared. While the state's cap on valuation increases limits our new revenue, our city's tax rate continues to rank as the highest among major cities in Texas. Regardless of the myriad differences between jurisdictions' revenue sources, we must be more competitive with our fast-growing and economically thriving neighboring cities. I am pleased that we have already supported increasing the senior homestead exemption this year, and I believe an across-the-board tax-rate reduction for all homeowners and renters — who bear the hidden cost burdens of hundreds of dollars every month in property taxes as part of their rent — is in the best interest of our residents and our city's growth in the years ahead.

3) Code Compliance: Our discussions over the past year about myriad city policies, ongoing concerns, and areas of need — such as short-term rentals, food trucks, blight remediation, environmental issues, and parking requirements — have made it clear that we must invest in hiring and training more Code Compliance officers. I believe a greater investment in code enforcement can keep all of our city's neighborhoods clean, safe, and beautiful and allow our residents to thrive.

4) **Streets and sidewalks:** Last year, the Dallas City Council committed to funding streets at a net-zero degradation level and to beginning to implement our Sidewalk Master Plan. We should do so again in this year's budget, and we should look for additional opportunities to leverage any available funds to replace aging traffic signals. And we should focus our efforts primarily on infrastructure deserts in our historically underserved and overlooked communities — particularly in the areas where we have focused our violent-crime reduction efforts.

5) **Inspector General:** The Dallas City Council last December voted unanimously for my historic ethics reform proposal, which included the creation of the city's first-ever Inspector General Division. With our inspector general now in place, we must fully fund the new office to ensure it is able to effectively monitor, investigate, and prosecute any unethical behavior in our city government. As we have seen in other cities, a well-resourced inspector general can ultimately save taxpayer dollars and can increase public trust in our city government.

Thank you for your consideration of these priorities ahead of a crucial fiscal year for Dallas. Our city is the place to be right now, and through the next fiscal year's budget, we can provide even greater safety and opportunity for Dallas residents.

I look forward to reviewing and considering your budget proposal in August, and I am excited to discuss how we can continue to move Dallas forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'E. Johnson', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Eric Johnson
Mayor

c: Chris Caso, City Attorney
Biliera Johnson, City Secretary
Mark Swann, City Auditor