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The City of Kirkland is covering the 2013-2014 budget process



TUESDAY
October 16, 2012

BUDGET BYLINES



A CONTINUING CITY OF KIRKLAND REPORT ON THE 2013-2014 BUDGET PROCESS

Council goals, survey provide direction

Leaders say they are using citizen feedback to make budget proposals

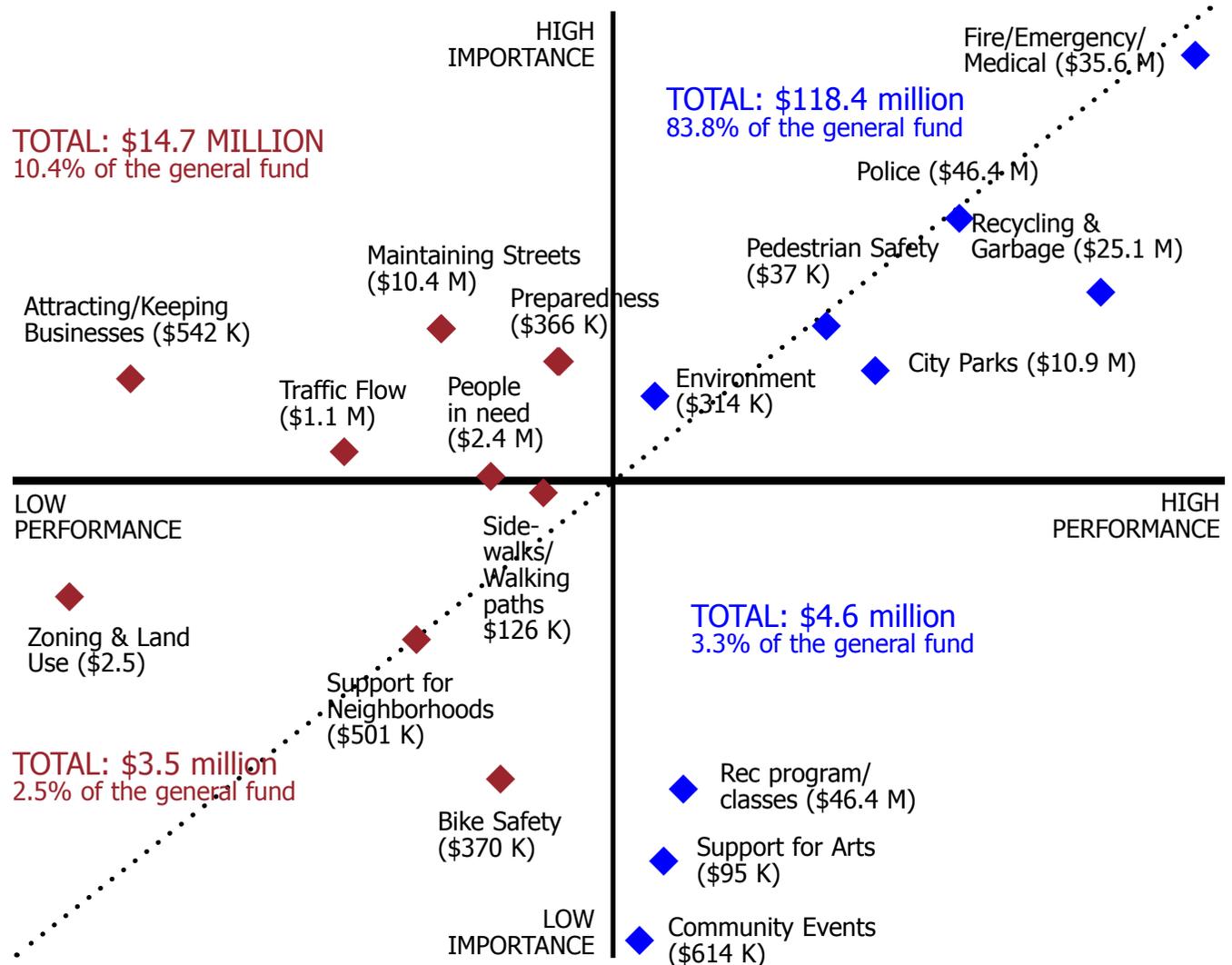
Budgets, to some extent, are a lot like endurance races. They result from a lot of details and discipline that most people prefer to avoid. But they reveal a lot about the priorities of the person completing them.

Kirkland City Manager Kurt Triplett proposed on Oct. 16 a [\\$540 million preliminary budget](#) to the public and to the City Council that reflects and reveals Kirkland's basic values.

To ensure it does, Triplett used two compasses to guide his proposals: [The City Council's goals](#) (see sidebar) and the [biennial community survey](#).

"The Community Survey has always been a key component," Triplett said.

But, he said, City administrators have never relied on it so directly to make the kind of budget decisions required to close a \$5.3 million gap.



Source: 2012 City of Kirkland Community Survey, EMC Research

City leaders relied on this chart from the last biennium to guide decisions for the upcoming biennium. The diagonal line is ideal performance relative to level of importance. Services near this line are performing optimally compared to how citizens value them. Items far left of the line may be improvement opportunities. Items far right may result in wasted resources with excessive focus.

"The City Council goals and the survey really are touchstones for the budget," Triplett said.

And they have been essential to a budget that has been fundamentally recalibrated by

one of the largest single an-

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nexations in state history, and one of the deepest recessions in national history.

“It’s the first full two-year budget with the new neighborhoods, with the full annexed area,” said Tracey Dunlap, Kirkland’s director of finance and administration. “Now we know what it takes to provide services in the area. We know what revenues are coming from the area.”

Though it’s the third straight budget of substantial cuts—the budget gap was \$5.3 million earlier this month—it’s Kirkland’s first budget since the economy seems to have bottomed out.

“We don’t seem to be declining anymore,” Dunlap said. “We seem to have turned the corner. But it’s a long way back to the peak.”

In the 2012 survey, pollsters asked a representative sample of Kirkland residents to rank the importance of the City’s various services and to also rank Kirkland’s performance in delivering them. Residents said the City’s performance in delivering most of those services—fire, medical and police protection, pedestrian safety and support for neighborhoods—align with their high expectations for them. But some

don’t. With some services, such as support for the arts and community recreation programs, respondents actually said Kirkland was out-performing their expectations for them. The services with which Kirkland’s leaders are most concerned are the ones residents say are important, but where performance is not meeting expectations.

Economic development is in this category. So are street maintenance, traffic flow and emergency preparedness. With improvement opportunities such as these, said Dunlap, the solution is to direct resources into areas where Kirkland is underperforming.

One of those areas is emergency preparedness. In the 2012 survey, 74 percent of the respondents said emergency preparedness was either important or extremely important to them. And yet, only 43 percent of them said Kirkland’s performance in ensuring preparedness was above average or excellent. The same survey revealed 70 percent of Kirkland residents were prepared for three-day emergencies, compared to the City Council’s target of 90 percent.

In 2011, Kirkland commissioned a team of experts to scrutinize its fire and building department. After 180 days of analysis, Emergency Services Consulting International

tracked Kirkland’s underperformance in emergency preparedness to a lack of resources.

“Given the number of tasks and functions required of managing an emergency management program, [Kirkland Fire and Building Department] is performing well considering the lack of [full-time employees] allocated to the program,” the report says. “However, this comes at an opportunity cost to the fire department by squeezing out other program needs.”

Given these perspectives, and the City Council’s adopted goal of preventative-based public safety, City Manager Triplett proposed an Emergency Manager position, tasked with coordinating emergency management with all of the City’s community partners, such as schools, hospitals, residents and the business community.

“We focused significantly on the opportunities for improvement that were pretty clearly indicated in the survey,” said Dunlap, Kirkland’s director of finance and administration. “We also focused putting all of those decisions in the context of the City Council’s goals and really trying to orient the whole document toward the goals. The City Council took a lot of time to articulate the goal areas and what they’re seeking.”

Council goal areas & how they work

Kirkland’s City Council adopted in 2009 and affirmed in 2011 10 guiding goals for the City. The goal areas:

- Neighborhoods
- Public Safety
- Human Services
- Balanced Transportation
- Parks, Open Spaces & Recreational Services
- Housing
- Financial Stability
- Environment
- Economic Stability
- Dependable Infrastructure

To better define and maintain accountability to each of these goals, City leaders developed a series of indicators of success, called performance measures. One of Public Safety’s performance measures is “Citizens are prepared for a three-day emergency.” The target for that performance measure is 90 percent. Kirkland’s performance with it is 70 percent.

OCTOBER 16

Preliminary budget provided to City Council and posted at kirklandwa.gov

OCTOBER 25

Special budget study session from 3 p.m. to 9 p.m., Peter Kirk Room, City Hall

NOVEMBER 7 & 13

Budget study sessions & public hearings (Nov. 13 occurs only if necessary)

NOVEMBER 20

Public hearing on prelim. 2013-'14 budget & prelim. 2013 prop. tax levy