

Anticipating a New Budget Season

March 17, 2013

Citizens for Fiscal Responsibility remain concerned about the fiscal challenges that the City of San Jose faces over both the immediate and the longer terms. The present time presents an extra level of uncertainty because Measure B remains in limbo as a consequence of court challenges.

As long as Measure B has not been implemented, the City should not restore the salary cuts or institute bonus programs. Either move could put future budgets at risk. It should be clear to those challenging Measure B that the resulting uncertainty is deferring the start of positive measures.

We recognize that there is consideration a one-time bonus for public safety workers. While the CFR is not unanimous, we recognize that such a move could have a beneficial effect on those who are carrying an extra load due to the recent attrition. It must be understood that this is a one-time event, not a commitment that would upset future budgets, and that the cost of the bonus fits within the envelope of currently available funds.

The staffing shortages in public safety are a concern, so the City must continue to recruit and train to fill the vacancies, always within the boundaries of the budget. There have been instances where the state or federal government has delivered a "bluebird," extra funding that could pay the salaries of officers or firemen for a year or so. Using bluebirds to enhance staffing is tempting, but the bluebird flies away, and new hires do not. One time funds should go to one-time expenses.

While the Los Angeles Police Department found themselves in a mess as a result of hiring a military veteran, that is emphatically an exception to the rule. The City of San Jose should establish a program that informs newly discharged veterans from this area that there are opportunities in the San Jose police and fire departments. That will be a move which benefits both the veteran and the city.

Finally, over the longer term, the City of San Jose should negotiate a two-tier pay system. That has become common for union-dominated work forces across the country.