

May 23, 2018

Dear Evanston City Council members,

The Evanston Environment Board has given careful consideration to the recent proposed budget cuts. In addition to our individual responses to the survey, we wish to provide collective input on behalf of the Board.

We applaud the participatory process and recognize the effort devoted to identifying, ranking, and distributing a set of choices for budget priorities. We have committed to sharing the survey broadly within our own networks and encourage the City to actively engage all voices, especially those who are not often heard in the public debate.

Upon consideration of potential cuts to programs related to the environment, notably those to tree, bike, and sidewalk programs as well as the Sustainability Program itself, we are struck by two compelling discrepancies. One, environmental impact and livability were not used as criteria for assessing the options, seemingly at odds with the City and Council's recent commitments to both. And two, both the Sustainability Program as a whole, and the individual programs it influences and administers, provide a demonstrable economic benefit to the City.

Evanston was one of the early cities of its size to establish a dedicated Office of Sustainability with a full time director. Today, at least 185 US cities have a sustainability director. Our city's work in this area has led to our recognition as a national leader, earning multiple awards including the recent STAR Rating Category 4 renewal, the 2015 U.S. Earth Hour Capital award, and the Gold SolSmart Designation.

The practices and policies leading to these awards are among the many attributes of Evanston that attract new residents, businesses, and investment, expanding our tax base, leadership, and reputation as a prominent sustainable city.

While some programs related to sustainability may be delivered through other departments (forestry, transportation, community development), an Evanston Sustainability Office with dedicated staff that is established, reputable, and effective sends a strong signal. Potential investors can rely on our continued commitment to create the kind of environmentally-friendly sustainable and progressive community where they want to locate.

The economic benefits of our sustainability programs are plentiful, which is reflected in the staff assessment recognizing the community development attributes of the programs. Our new energy benchmark program is expected to reduce energy use significantly, as it has done in other cities where it has been implemented, freeing funds that can be used elsewhere in our local economy. A wide array of transportation choices and the infrastructure to support them (bike lanes, pedestrian amenities, and Divvy), allow more residents to reduce their reliance on

cars. The money saved on lower car ownership, gasoline, and excess parking are dollars that can be plowed back into Evanston's economy. Our recent STAR Community award boasts that over 35% of Evanston residents walk, bike, or take transit to work.

Evanston has been recognized as a Tree City USA for 34 consecutive years. It is well established that trees in an urban settings provide environmental benefits such as improved air quality, reduced storm water runoff, decreased urban heat islands, less need for air conditioning due to shade, and habitat for birds and wildlife. In addition, they contribute to aesthetics, livability, and increased property values. The economic benefits of Evanston's 33,000 trees on public land and more than twice that on private property can be calculated with robust peer-reviewed tools found on iTreetools.org. With costs ranging from \$500 to several thousand to take down a diseased tree, a more effective economic choice is to properly maintain our assets, and reduce the risk of damaging diseases that will likely exceed expected savings from program cuts.

Just last month Evanston received yet another distinction for sustainability efforts – our Complete and Green Streets policy ranked second in Illinois and among the best in the U.S. by Smart Growth America. Our commitment to bike infrastructure is central to our livability and economic choices. The number of Evanston workers biking to jobs, not to mention other trips, has doubled since 2000. Divvy bikes has taken off, with over 1,000 paid members since its establishment in 2016. Maintenance of bike infrastructure is not only a livability issue; it is a safety issue, providing a healthy cost-effective means of travel for workers, students of all ages, and recreationists. We've learned from recent proposed bus cuts that CTA and PACE bus availability may fluctuate, and some of our residents may need a bike option as potential backup.

Recent Sustainability Program achievements include the Energy and Water Benchmarking Ordinance; 100% renewable energy through electricity aggregation contracts; a multi-family recycling program expanding to 40% of eligible buildings; the Northshore Channel Habitat Project (\$100,000 in grants); deployment of EV charging infrastructure on City property; and the Disposable Plastic Bag Ban.

The program marshals other resources, such as resident volunteers for Clean Up Evanston (annual tree planting and community clean up); the annual Evanston Recycles Event (diverts hard to dispose of materials from the landfill); administration and coordination of the City's Thriving Earth Exchange (community environmental monitoring around the waste transfer station); a robust year-round internship program offering youth training in local government and sustainability public policy; and dozens of educational talks and workshops for community groups, schools, youth groups and ward meetings.

The Evanston Environment Board strongly advocates a budgeting approach that both recognizes the commitment on behalf of the City, residents, and businesses to livability and sustainability, and considers the economic co-benefits that accrue to both household budgets

and the city's tax base. We believe there is ample evidence of environmental and economic benefits that justifies full funding of the Sustainability Program, tree programs (best practice tree maintenance, tree permitting, Dutch Elm disease control), walkable communities (50/50 sidewalk program), and bike programs (Divvy and bike infrastructure).

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Scott Osborne
Co-Chair

Wendy Pollock
Co-Chair