

City Council's Own Budget Lacks Transparency

JACK HUMPHREVILLE / 18 JUNE 2020



LA WATCHDOG--The City Council's fully loaded budget of over \$55 million is less than transparent.

It does not include the "Supporting Data" as is the case with all other city departments (other than Garcetti's \$56 million opaque budget), any breakdown of other allocations of over \$8 million, or any information on its off balance sheet discretionary slush funds that are estimated to be over \$40 million a year.

After eliminating the estimated cost of \$10 million for the Chief Legislative Analyst (and its 48 positions), the remaining appropriations of \$45 million implies that each of the 15 City Council Districts chews up \$3 million of our money. This includes salaries of \$3.2 million for Council Members, or \$213,833 per member (not including generous benefits), reportedly the highest in the nation, and not by a little.

Underlying this \$45 million cost to support the City Council are salaries for almost 345 people, or 23 persons per office. This includes 15 members of the City Council, 45 Council Aides (three per Council District), and 285 "as needed" employees.

The members of the City Council also have control over their discretionary slush funds that they use to finance their bloated staffs and to "dip into for pet projects." The sources of the estimated \$40 million annual haul are former community redevelopment fees, the City's street furniture fund (advertising on bus stops), 50% of the proceeds of the sale of real estate in a district, tipping fees, and various franchise fees.

Ten years ago, Mayor Villaraigosa asked the Councilmembers to lend the City \$40 million from their discretionary slush funds to help shore up the City's depleted Reserve Fund as the City was grappling with a \$212 million budget deficit. You would have thought Villaraigosa was asking for their first born as they passed on his request.

Now is the time for the City Council to reduce its staffing requirements by eight persons per office, (especially Huizar, Wesson, and Koretz who are way overstaffed) and open up the books on its opaque budget and its under the radar discretionary slush funds.

But do not count on transparency from this City Council which refuses to embrace campaign finance reforms, which refuses to place a measure on the ballot to limit its ability to meddle in the planning process for fear of losing campaign contributions from real estate developers, and which refuses to take responsibility for approving the budget busting labor agreements that blew a \$2 billion hole in the City's finances over the next five years.

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