

As you may have read, the City has a financial problem. Unless something changes soon, the City will spend about \$3.5 million more than it has in revenue in the upcoming fiscal year that begins in July. Spending more money than we take in doesn't work for our personal budgets, and, ultimately, it won't work for the City either.

Interim City Manager Sam Racadio made a valid point in his recent City Council budget presentation. He said it is not productive to find fault with prior decisions that have now contributed to our budgetary distress. The leaders making those decisions were trying to fix pressing problems that had their own fiscal ramifications. Employee turnover, for instance, was costing the City millions of dollars in lost "return on investment," and the employee contracts the Council inked went a long way toward reducing the loss of experienced employees.

When the City Council agreed to address the public safety pay and benefit inequities in Redlands they made a good business decision. In the Police Department alone, an average of five highly trained, tenured officers per year were leaving the department for higher paying jobs in the region. We were losing \$1 million per year in investment in their hiring and training and I was getting REALLY tired of other police chiefs thanking me for paying all the training costs for their "new" officers from Redlands!

For the most part, the decision to leave the RPD was a family-centered, financial one for the departing officers. They could easily make \$1,000 more per month by transferring to another area police department. That's a house payment for most young couples. As one officer stated during his exit interview, "I love the RPD and Redlands. But if I go work for this other nearby city, I can live in Redlands and raise my kids here. If I stay at the RPD, I have to live in that other city and deal with its higher crime rate, reduced city services and lower quality schools."

Today, instead of being a police department that serves as a training venue for other police departments – and as a result constantly struggling to hire officers – we consistently have a waiting list of highly qualified officers from other departments, and entry-level candidates, trying to get into the RPD. This is especially noteworthy given the tremendous shortage of qualified police officer candidates almost every department is experiencing today. California employment projections indicate that police departments will be short thousands of qualified candidates for police officer positions over the next decade.

I support the Council's past decisions regarding employee retention. But I must also acknowledge these decisions came with a significant price tag. Retirement, workers compensation and other employment costs have risen substantially in the last few years.

However, while increased employee costs have contributed to the City's current fiscal dilemma, it's clear there are other factors that helped us arrive where we are today. I believe it to be naïve at best, and disingenuous at worst, to lay the entire budgetary problems at the feet of the City's dedicated employees. We should, as the City Manager has urged, focus on solutions, not finger-pointing.

In any crisis there exists opportunity. In Redlands' financial situation we have an opportunity to re-examine our organizational structures, service levels and programs. We have an opportunity, as a community, to re-examine our spending priorities. And we have an opportunity

to engage our City government like never before to help our elected and appointed leaders find a solution to our dilemma.

In government, employees can get so used to long-standing, silo-like organizational structures and bureaucratic barriers that separate taxpayers from the effective and efficient delivery of services, that they work to maintain them at all costs. Sometimes, protecting turf becomes their principle focus and service simply an afterthought.

I strongly believe that the people of Redlands care more about outcomes than which departments manage their services. Do we think about, or really care, what department or organizational structure is in place when we turn on a faucet at home? Nope. We only care that water we can drink comes out of the tap. If you or a loved one experience a heart attack do you really care if a police officer, fire department or private paramedic or a caring neighbor shows up with an automated external defibrillator (AED) to restart your heart? Of course not. The only thing that matters is that the AED was used quickly to save your life.

Outcomes are what the taxpayers deserve. Process is what government frequently delivers. But our budget problems promise an opportunity to help the City re-focus on the outcomes important to Redlands – the citizens of Redlands, that is.

Please take an opportunity to convey to the City Council how you feel about City services and the outcomes you want from your city. After all, you are paying for them!

City Council members don't have the ability to read your minds. They can only represent your interests if you tell them what you think the City's priorities should be. Serving the people of Redlands as a member of the City Council is not easy. It's frequently tiring, thankless work. I have great admiration for those brave souls who step up to serve this great town for the right reasons. Help them serve you better by writing them, e-mailing, calling or speaking to them in open session about what is important to you.

The City's budgetary road ahead need not be as treacherous as some may think. Am I looking forward to a possible reduction in policing services? Of course not. But I am looking forward to a renewed discussion about how we can better deliver, or re-define, those services to keep Redlands safe. The members of the RPD are constantly seeking increased ways to leverage the taxpayers' investment in Redlands' public safety. We can, and should, consistently search for better ways to serve our community. Redlands deserves nothing less.

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