

May 25, 2021

Mayor and Honorable City Council Members,

The Parks and Recreation Commission is writing in support of the proposed new \$10 entry fee for the Junior Museum and Zoo (JMZ). We are glad to see the Finance Committee has recommended to reduce admission from \$18 per entry to the \$10, and we support the associated lower annual pass rates ranging from \$110 to \$245. We recognize the serious financial challenges faced by our City as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic to a “new normal”.

We also request that the entrance fee schedule be reviewed on a periodic basis. When the local economy recovers, we encourage reducing fees to a level that is more affordable for all families and individuals.

We appreciate and commend the partnership between the Friends of the JMZ, City staff and private donors that has transformed this extraordinary facility. We want to ensure the JMZ continues to serve the broader community engaging and delighting children’s curiosity for science and nature.

Thank you for your consideration.

Parks and Recreation Commission

Baumb, Nelly

From: Raphael Semeria <raphael.semeria@icloud.com>
Sent: Tuesday, June 1, 2021 10:03 AM
To: Council, City
Subject: Art center budget cuts

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Be cautious of opening attachments and clicking on links.

Dear Alison Cormack, Eric Filseth, Lydia Kou, Greg Tanaka, and Greer Stone,

Hello, my name is Raphael Semeria and I am writing to you Palo Alto City Council members today regarding the significant budget cuts made this year, and more specifically why you should reconsider the most recent ones regarding Palo Alto's Art Center. Throughout the course of this year, we have all seen the immense consequences the pandemic has had on virtually every aspect of everyday life. Following the crash of the economy, it is understandable why so many cities like Palo Alto have implemented severe budget cuts. One of the many departments who has seen and continues to see significant cuts to their budget in Palo Alto, is the department of community services.

Although it is justifiable why the city has made this decision, you should reconsider the severity of the cuts made to the Art Center's budget due to its significance in the community. If the city were to continue reducing the funds allocated to the Art Center, the negative repercussions will be seen on its employees, students, programs, as well as its overall future.

Since the beginning of 2020, I have been taking wheel throwing pottery classes at the Art Center. Because of the pandemic and the shift to online classes, I was given the unique opportunity to keep a pottery wheel at my home whilst taking the classes virtually. Having a wheel at home enabled me to spend more time practicing, thus resulting in significant progress. Throughout the many uncertainties of the pandemic, having the option to sit down, express myself, and destress, meant the world to me and helped me get through a big portion of the year. I am extremely grateful for all the amazing people at the Art Center who made that possible for me, as well as for all the other students who participated in the program.

However, having this opportunity also came with a flipped side: Seeing the full extent of the budget cuts and how it affected those affiliated with the Art Center. Following the start of Covid-19, the Art Center has had to let go a majority of its incredible staff. Now, their numbers are the smallest in history. This, combined with the \$572,000 less in city funding compared to previous years, hinders survival of many courses held at the Art Center. Despite the fact that the programs are supported by numerous sources of funding, they still can not function without the city's aid. Losing these courses (like the one I am currently enrolled in) could have a plethora of negative consequences on both staff members as well as many students enrolled in them.

Firstly, the loss of these programs would increase the uncertainties many instructors already have relating to their employment status during the pandemic. Secondly, it could have numerous consequences on students: limiting the possibility for them to express themselves and the risk of negatively affecting youth mental health during a pandemic, to name a few. According to the American Art Therapy Association, artistic expression is shown to decrease anxiety, feelings of anger, and depression. Already, in the past year, I have seen firsthand a decrease in resources available for students due to the inadequate funds designated to the Art Center. As a consequence, this has significantly reduced the variety of art us students can create, overall limiting the expanse of our artistic expression.

If the decrease in funds were to continue, it would lead to the definite loss of many programs, further impacting youth mental health. The pandemic and its stressors have amplified the necessity to provide teenagers with adequate mental support and has emphasized the importance of activities tied to relieving stress. As many rely on artistic expression as a source to help maintain mental wellness, the absence of the Art Center's programs could have significant consequences on the community, in particular, younger populations.

As summer camps, group activities, and other events resume this summer, we are reminded of the importance and necessity community services, especially the Art Center, have in Palo Alto. If the city continues to neglect their presence by inadequately funding these services, we will no longer have access to them and to their countless benefits.

Sincerely,

Raphael Semeria

Baumb, Nelly

From: Kim Raftery <rafterykim@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, May 27, 2021 3:10 PM
To: Council, City
Subject: Fire station #2

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Be cautious of opening attachments and clicking on links.

Dear City Council Members,

I have owned a house in the College Terrace neighborhood for 31 years. It has come to my attention that our local Fire Station #2 might be closed. This seems very short sighted given the increase in forest fires in CA and the fact that this station is the closest station to the Palo Alto foothills, where the danger of forest and brush fires is the most prevalent.

Also, why would you eliminate the ability of EMTs to respond quickly to the needs of the residents in College Terrace, the Palo Alto Foothills, and nearby neighborhoods? Isn't this the most important use of our tax dollars, to save lives and property?

I hope you will reconsider closing Station # 2 and the elimination of services on nights and weekends that has already happened.

Thank you!
Kim

*Kim Raftery
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