
Correspondence for 6/8/26 Council Meeting. Agenda #25

From Sonja Berndt

Date Sat 6/6/2026 2:52 PM

To Gordo, Victor <vgordo@cityofpasadena.net>; Cole, Rick <rcole@cityofpasadena.net>; Hampton, Tyron <thampton@cityofpasadena.net>; Jones, Justin <jjones@cityofpasadena.net>; Lyon, Jason <jlyon@cityofpasadena.net>; Madison, Steve <smadison@cityofpasadena.net>; Masuda, Gene <gmasuda@cityofpasadena.net>; Rivas, Jessica <jerivas@cityofpasadena.net>; PublicComment-AutoResponse <correspondence@cityofpasadena.net>

Cc Harris, Eugene <eharris@cityofpasadena.net>

 2 attachments (239 KB)

FY2027 Proposed PPD Budget.City Council.pdf; FY2026 PPD Equipment appropriations.xlsx;

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Dear Council members and City Clerk staff:

Please see the attached letter and attachment to the letter I am submitting on Agenda #25 - The FY2027 Operating Budget. Please ensure it is made a part of the official record of the meeting. Thank you.

Sonja Berndt
Pasadena

06/08/2026
Item 25

SONJA K. BERNDT
Pasadena, CA

June 6, 2026

Mayor Victor Gordo
Members of the Pasadena City Council
Pasadena, CA
(By Email)

Re: City Council Meeting June 8, 2026, Agenda Item #25: The Recommended FY 2027 Police Department Operating Budget

Dear Members of the City Council:

A. Introduction

I am a long-time resident of Pasadena and an advocate for the unsheltered residents of our City. This letter is to express my deep concern about the FY 2027 Recommended Police Department Operating Budget. Year after year, the Pasadena Police Department (PPD) receives a grossly disproportionate level of General Fund appropriations as compared to other vital departments in this City. Critical services for our unhoused and especially our unsheltered residents are vastly underfunded because PPD, with its escalating salaries, pension and liability costs, continues to swallow up our General Fund, leaving insufficient crumbs for departments that serve our most vulnerable residents.

The Interim City Manager notes in his May 4, 2026 **budget transmittal letter**: “Without adjustments to service levels, staffing, or long-term financial strategies, the gap between revenues and expenditures will continue to expand.” The necessary “adjustments” need to start with PPD which receives over \$121 million from the General Fund. I do not believe in “de-funding” PPD. However, cost savings can be accomplished in that department with more cost-effective and smart policing in our City.

B. Background

The City’s budget discussions were supposed to be different this year – more insightful than in years past. At the budget workshop last December, the Council gave staff five basic priorities for funding in FY 2027. One of those was investing in a year-round shelter and transitional housing for our unsheltered residents. But the proposed FY 2027 Operating Budget contains no funding for either of those projects.

At a Council meeting later that same month, staff prepared an agenda report for the Council which stated in relevant part as follows: “The current Five-Year Forecast for the General Fund projects ongoing shortfalls, with annual pension obligations to CalPERS being a key contributor to rising expenditures.” The report also noted that the General Fund provides about 31% of the funding for the Miscellaneous (Pension) Plan while the General Fund supports more than 90% of the funding for the Safety (Pension) Plan. “Personnel and pension costs are the largest portions of the General Fund and play a significant role in expenditure growth until FY 2031 due to increasing UAL [Unfunded Accrued Liability] payments.” (M. Hawkesworth 12/15/2025 Agenda Report, Item #11.) While the Council authorized an additional discretionary payment of \$7 million to CalPERS to pay down the Unfunded Accrued Liability of the Safety Plan, the five-year forecast still shows budget shortfalls.

C. Gross Inequities in General Fund Support for Critical City Services

The Recommended FY 2027 Operating Budget shows the following appropriations from the General Fund:

- Police Department: \$121.70 million (92.3% of its total proposed FY 2027 appropriations of \$131.91 million);
- Housing Department: \$2.66 million (4.59% of its total proposed FY 2027 appropriations of \$58.02 million); and
- Public Health Department: \$2.54 million (14.36% of its total proposed FY 2027 appropriations of \$17.69 million).

PPD has had, and continues to have, skyrocketing increases in total appropriations, General Fund appropriations and personnel expenses over the last three years.

<u>Total Operating Budget</u>	<u>Total General Fund Appropriations</u>
FY 2024 Actual = 110,919,589	FY 2024 Actual = \$ 100,318,066
FY 2025 Actual = \$117,166,398	FY 2025 Actual = \$ 107,775,235
FY 2026 Adopted = \$121,471,180	FY 2026 Adopted = \$ 111,336,250
FY 2027 Proposed = \$131,909,702	FY 2027 Proposed = \$ 121,697,000

Personnel Expenses

FY 2024 Actual = 90,612,112
FY 2025 Actual = 95,106,187
FY 2026 Adopted = 101,819,978
FY 2027 Proposed = 111,480,506

The FY 2027 proposed budget notes 95.41% of the Housing Department’s budget as coming from federal (mostly), state and (minimal) local sources. This is significant since

the Trump Administration has threatened substantial cuts in federal funding for programs benefiting our unhoused residents. Recent media reports state that HUD's discretionary budget authority will be cut by \$10.7 billion starting this October. It is unclear how that will affect the substantial funding our Housing Department hopes to receive from the federal government. For example, at the May 6, 2026 Housing, Homelessness and Planning Committee meeting, staff advised that no funding has been found to replace federal funding for Emergency Housing Vouchers for 42 Pasadena households. There must be a full discussion of this BEFORE the FY 2027 Operating Budget is approved.

The 2025 Pasadena Point in Time Homeless Count showed 581 unhoused individuals – 342 of which have no shelter at all, which is a 7% **increase** from 2024. Yet there is no plan stated for accomplishing the goals set forth in the Continuum of Care's Homelessness Plan other than the City will administer whatever Measure A or other non-City-generated funds come its way. This is unacceptable. The continued neglect of our unsheltered residents is inhumane.

Likewise, Pasadena's Public Health Department (PPHD) is severely unfunded. Almost half of all FY 2027 appropriations are proposed to come from grants at a time when both federal and state grants are at great risk. Nine grants sunset by the end of this calendar year, including grants for homeless outreach (which is already severely underfunded). There is a decrease of 21.54 FTE's from FY 2026 and unfunded personnel costs of \$510,000. The failure to adequately fund PPHD has severe ramifications on its health and safety programs which face potential further cuts from the federal government.

While both PPHD and the Housing Department are severely underfunded from City-generated sources, PPD's General Fund appropriations have increased by over \$10 million over last year's adopted budget with a nearly \$10 million increase in personnel costs. The year-after-year steep increases in PPD salary, pension and liability costs are unsustainable.

Significantly, cost savings could be achieved by decreasing the number of PPD officers while maintaining public safety in our City. In FY 2021, there were 5,766 PPD calls for service listed as "transient-related." In just the first six months of FY 2025, documents produced by PPD in response to my Public Records Act request show over 4,100 calls for service listed as "TRST," i.e., "transient" related! In the "Cleared By" (i.e., disposition) column of a very lengthy spreadsheet, over 4,000 of those calls for service were listed as "no further action needed/resolved" (the vast majority), "gone on arrival," canceled," and "unable to locate." Instead of incurring the huge expense of responses to calls for service related to unhoused individuals, PROVIDE HOUSING FOR THEM in the first place! This would decrease PPD salary and pension costs and at

the same time alleviate suffering and promote health and wellbeing. Moreover, these calls for service may not need responses by uniformed police officers. Deploying trained civilians would be cheaper in both salary and pension costs.¹

D. Huge PPD Equipment Expense

PPD salaries and pension benefits are not the only drivers of skyrocketing PPD expenses. Attached to this letter is an excel spreadsheet that shows just some of the appropriations PPD received for equipment thus far in FY 2026. This is on top of years of appropriations for multi-year contracts related to license plate readers, helicopter equipment, etc. which have added significant expense to PPD's budget. The City Council approved every piece of equipment that PPD requested in FY 2026, most of which is to be paid from "existing & future General Fund appropriations" at the expense of critical community programs and human suffering on the street.

Two of the equipment purchases, the mobile data computer replacement and 12 police dispatch radio communication consoles, were paid for with the budget surplus from FY 2025 for a total of \$2,996,424 – money that could have been used to shelter our unsheltered residents. There was no mention in the staff report of whether these items could have been purchased with funds from the Asset Forfeiture Fund which are specifically restricted for law enforcement purposes. I personally have never heard a council member ask staff whether funds are available in the Asset Forfeiture Fund to pay for law enforcement equipment rather than using funds from the General Fund needed for other critical City services.²

One particularly egregious example of appropriations for PPD equipment was for the purchase of two new helicopters to replace functioning "airworthy" helicopters. The City had a total of five "airworthy" helicopters (to be reduced to four) at the time the Council appropriated \$12.54 million for the two new ones along with two multi-year service contracts. While the downpayment of \$4 million is to be paid from the Asset Forfeiture Fund, the balance is supposedly going to be lease financed with debt service to be paid from the Asset Forfeiture Fund and the Foothill Air Support Team. (See Agenda Report, 12/8/25 Council Meeting, Agenda # 2.) This is confusing because slide 8 in the PPD PowerPoint presentation for the May 28, 2026 Public Safety Committee meeting shows a

¹ I have been informed by staff that currently, calls for service in which a "suspect" is involved are responded to by a uniformed police officer. Civilian Community Services Officers respond to calls without suspect information such as traffic collisions, burglaries, etc.

² The appropriation approved for the mobile data computer replacement was \$1,507,109. However, Mr. Hawkesworth's December 18, 2025 memorandum to the City Council states that \$2.1 million was allocated for that project. Please ask staff to explain this discrepancy to determine whether some of the surplus funds from FY 2025 are available for our unsheltered residents.

FY 2030 Forecast for the Asset Forfeiture Fund of (-84,761), long before the helicopters and service contracts will have been paid in full.

At a time when hundreds of our residents languish on our streets and City budget shortfalls are predicted for years to come, why does our City need four helicopters? How many other cities of our size have four helicopters? City appropriations for PPD equipment must be reined in. The City Council cannot expect to keep rubber-stamping all the PPD appropriations for equipment without community push back.

In fact, there was community pushback at the May 28, 2026 Public Safety Committee meeting regarding enormous past PPD equipment expenses and huge additional expenses expected going forward: active intelligence center, new equestrian unit (was disbanded in 2005), drones, technology, etc. Significantly, Chair Vice Mayor Rivas confirmed with Chief Harris that, as for all the proposed technologies in the work plan, the contracts will come through Public Safety Committee as well as the City Council “and that’s where we can really dig into the specifics of what’s proposed.” (5/28/2026 Pub. Safety Mtg., at timestamp 1 hr. 19 min.)

E. Huge Spike in General Liability Expense

Finally, slide 6 of PPD’s PowerPoint presentation for the May 28, 2026 Public Safety Committee meeting notes “General Liability increased \$4.1M -- Claims spike in FY25 and new methodology for Outside Legal allocation.” General liability expenses were \$3.05 million in FY 2025 and for FY 2027 is budgeted as over \$8.87 million! At the May 26, 2026 Public Safety Committee meeting, staff gave an explanation for the huge spike in this expense. This needs to be discussed by the entire City Council and this expense needs to be carefully monitored going forward.

F. Conclusion

In conclusion, the enormous General Fund appropriations for PPD and the huge increases in those appropriations year after year leave other critical departments of our City chronically and severely underfunded. The City Council **as a whole** needs to undertake a serious examination of the proposed FY 2027 PPD Operating Budget to look for ways to decrease PPD’s General Fund appropriations. Additionally, the City Council must scrutinize PPD equipment and technology requests going forward and approve only those that are truly NECESSARY and time sensitive as opposed to simply desirable and/or that can be deferred.

For the reasons discussed in this letter, please request PPD staff to do the following:

- Find cost savings in PPD’s proposed FY 2027 Operating Budget to create and fund a year-round shelter and interim housing for our unsheltered residents;

- Explore on an urgent basis ways to decrease expenses associated with calls for service involving our unhoused residents; and
- Diligently look for greater grant funding opportunities through its Grant Procurement Unit.

Thank you for your consideration of this letter and your service to our City.

Sincerely,

/s/

Sonja K. Berndt

Pasadena

Cc: Eugene Harris
Chief of Police

Attachment

DATE	ITEM	APPROPRIATION	NOTES
7/21/2025	HCI ENVIRONMENTAL AND ENGINEERING	\$1,777,750 -existing & future GENERAL FUND appropriations	Crime scene cleanup services. For three years.
7/21/2025	AIRWAVE COMMUNICATIONS	\$750,000 -existing & future GENERAL FUND appropriations	Police vehicle upfitting. For three years.
9/29/2025	CAL OFFICE OF TRAFFIC SAFETY	\$545,000 - GRANT	Support traffic safety programs.
10/6/2025	VITAL MEDICAL SERVICES	\$1,607,250 - existing & future GENERAL FUND appropriations	Medical services for inmates in Pasadena jail. For five years.
12/8/2025	CNC TECHNOLOGIES	\$12.54 million; \$4 million Asset FF down payment; lease financing for balance	Two NEW helicopters + two 5-year service contracts. Asset Forfeiture Fund and Foothill Air Support Team Fund pay debt service.
12/15/2025	CDW GOVERNMENT, LLC	\$1,507,109 - from \$10.1 million 2025 budget surplus	Mobile Data Computer Replacement (laptops). (Discrepancy from memo.)
12/15/2025	MOTOROLA SOLUTIONS INC.	\$1,489,315 -- from \$10.1 million 2025 budget surplus \$750,000 -- existing & future GENERAL FUND appropriations	12 police dispatch radio communication consoles, installation, and training.
2/23/2026	LEHR UPFITTERS OPCO, LLC		Police vehicle upfitting. Up to three years.