

City of Englewood, Colorado
Budget Advisory Committee
2021 Annual Report

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Introduction

Over the last year, the Budget Advisory Committee (BAC) had the pleasure of hearing presentations from the Administration, Police, Parks and Recreation, Community Development, Public Works, Finance, Utilities, Human Resources, and Municipal Court departments of the city of Englewood. Each department director was asked to provide an overview of department operations and budget, identify areas of financial strain, and highlight opportunities for growth. In this year's report, you will find both new ideas that came from our meetings with staff and specific recommendations on current budget requests. Our desire is to present useful, timely, and clear feedback on the FY22 budget from the citizens' perspective.

Recognition

The BAC commends Council, City Manager Lewis, and Directors for their diligence in protecting the city budget while fostering economic vitality in response to the COVID-19 epidemic. We applaud the city for its accomplishment in providing relief grants to Englewood's most vulnerable residents and small businesses, and being one of the first municipalities in Colorado to do so. The timeliness and nature of these grants reflect creativity, agility, and adaptability, and we believe Englewood's ability to recover from recent economic decline can be attributed to the financial support that was offered to the community.

We also recognize Council for responsible allocation of long-term asset reserves to eliminate the Englewood Environmental Foundation (EEF) debt and to support the Little Dry Creek Plaza Project, minimizing opportunity costs and diminishing returns.

Finally, the BAC thanks the Communications team for budgeting funds to recognize volunteers each year, and wants to highlight the success of the volunteer appreciation event at Pirate's Cove on June 10. The feedback among attendees has been quite positive and the BAC looks forward to this new format in years to come.

COVID-19 Recovery & Grant Opportunities

As stated above, the BAC thanks Council, City Manager Lewis, and staff for providing businesses and citizens with grant opportunities over the last 15 months, and being one of the first municipalities in Colorado to do so. We recognize that nimble allocation of funding from the CARES Act supported Englewood's small business community during this critical time and mitigated risk for some of Englewood's most vulnerable residents. Additionally, the BAC is pleased with the level of grant opportunities provided to the city for improvements to our parks,

e.g. the Roman's Park upgrades, and for enhancements to public rights of way, e.g. the Oxford Avenue Pedestrian Bridge and the US285/South Broadway Project.

We believe that collective consideration of grant benefits to the city of Englewood in recent years, and requests we heard from staff over the course of the last year, justifies the addition of a grant writer position, to be housed in the City Manager's Office. The purpose of this role is to 1) support departments in the pursuit of grant announcements, 2) coordinate all phases of the grant application process from Letter of Intent to submission, and 3) seek funding for and distribute grants to Englewood's citizens and business community.

High-level research indicates the annual salary for a full-time experienced grant writer in the Denver Metropolitan area is approximately \$75000/year.¹ While this position would not be grant-funded in and of itself, the position's salary and benefits would be offset by savings to operational and/or capital expenses from grant awards, and to a lesser degree by sales tax revenue from the city's thriving business community.

The financial benefit of a staffed grant writer to the city of Englewood is two-fold: 1) it would lower the amplitude of economic boom-vs-bust in the business community, and 2) generate more grant revenue for capital, infrastructure, and community development endeavors. While several departments mentioned the need for more grant-writing assistance on their teams, we believe the addition of one role that could support all departments is a more efficient solution. The BAC appreciates the city's intentionality in seeking out new funding sources and recommends adding a 1.0 FTE staff grant writer to the budget, but would support a decision to contract a 0.5 FTE grant writer in the interim.

Human Resources

This year, the BAC welcomed the Human Resources department for the first time and appreciated their candor about the challenges they faced due to a staffing level significantly below recent averages. We also recognize the important impact HR can have on the employees of the city of Englewood. At a time where about half of workers in America are unsatisfied in the workplace, we support the HR Department's budget request to add additional FTEs. This includes one HR Business Partner and one Training and Development. These roles will allow HR to better support the needs of our city and employees.

When discussing their current challenges and risks, HR mentioned lack of controls around implementing Colorado Intergovernmental Risk Sharing Agency (CIRSA) Audit recommendations. It appears HR facilitates the audit report, but no one is ultimately responsible

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<https://www.eri.com/salary/job/grant-writer/united-states/colorado/denver#:~:text=Salary%20Recap-,The%20average%20pay%20for%20a%20Grant%20Writer%20is%20%2472%2C117%20a,Denver%2C%20Colorado%2C%20United%20States>

for ensuring each department has implemented any recommendations from it. As the department expands, the BAC feels this is an important responsibility to assign to the appropriate role.

With job satisfaction numbers as they are in this country, we encourage HR to explore proactive strategies on workplace engagement and employee satisfaction, including metrics to track improvement in key areas.

Currently, the defined benefit retirement plan presents two main challenges. First, it is a manual process, which takes time and opens up the potential for human error. Second, there is no record of an audit ever occurring. During our discussion with HR, they shared that under the current manual system retiree payroll and some benefits continue to be deposited until the city is notified by a family member or financial institution that the retiree has passed away. This can and has resulted in payments continuing long after the retiree is no longer living. The BAC recommends council request a comprehensive review of the Defined Benefit Retirement Plans, including potential solutions to automate the process while implementing proper audit controls. A more complete analysis will allow the BAC and Council to provide better recommendations in future budget cycles.

Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion (DEI)

Englewood's demographics are changing and we see value in our city staff being engaged and trained in DEI best practices to ensure all feel welcome to live, work, and play in our city.

We support an investment in DEI in this year's city budget. While we appreciate the HR Department's request for an additional role to serve this function, we caution against adding a new FTE year over year without a thoughtfully formed DEI strategy and vision. We recommend beginning an RFP process to engage a consultant with expertise in municipal approaches to DEI on a short-term contract basis, for the purpose of shaping a shared DEI strategy. This will help ensure that our city's approach to this important issue is substantive, rather than performative; and strategic, rather than arbitrary.

Including a DEI investment in this year's budget creates the opportunity for Englewood to not only be more representative, but more competitive as well. We believe Englewood deserves the best staff available and would like to see the city's HR department develop a plan for diverse sourcing to recruit and retain talent that reflects our city's population. Leveraging a diversity of perspectives ensures our city can best serve the citizens and will attract new businesses, grants, and recognition.

We encourage the city to engage with the Colorado Municipal League, the Colorado City and County Management Association, and the Government Alliance on Race & Equity to glean best practices as this workflow is scoped and scaled.

General Recommendations

Board & Commission Training

The BAC supports the City Manager's \$9,000 request for improved Board and Commission training. As members of this committee, we see the need for more training to ensure community volunteers have the context, resources, and education necessary to effectively serve our city and provide guidance to Council in this capacity.

Internships

In the City Manager Office's presentation to the BAC in September 2020 they indicated that with a \$5,000 budget increase, they could start a city internship program for college and university students in the surrounding area. Recently, the City Attorney's office made a request for a \$10,000 legal internship program. We feel that if the budget allows for it, these types of learning opportunities should be provided to students because they offer exposure to local government for the next generation of leaders and they offer assistance to city staff on projects that may otherwise go unattended.

Translation services

We support the City's Manager's ongoing request for \$20,000 to increase service delivery and equity in city communications through improved translation services.

Childcare Program Director

We support Parks & Recreation's request for the addition of a part time Childcare Program Director. We see this addition as a powerful opportunity to provide a needed service, foster community engagement, and generate meaningful revenue. We commend Director Underhill for responding to citizen's needs in a useful and sustainable manner.

Restorative Justice

The BAC supports the innovative Restorative Justice program and appreciates the city's investment in alternative approaches to criminal justice. We believe this program has significant cost-savings and ROI potential and support the program's \$5,000 budget request to ensure it is set up for success.