

**From:** [Jill Harris](#)  
**To:** [Andrew McCullough](#); [Gary Phillips](#); [John Gamblin](#); [Kate Colin](#); [Maribeth Bushey](#)  
**Cc:** [Lindsay Lara](#)  
**Subject:** Vote to Reject 2020-2021 Budget Staff Report  
**Date:** Sunday, June 14, 2020 11:06:04 PM

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Dear Mayor, Vice Mayor, and Members of the San Rafael City Council,

Full disclosure: I am a City of San Rafael employee and work at the downtown Library. I am also a resident of San Rafael. These past few weeks, our nation has been gripped by protests calling for a rapid reevaluation of the role of police in our communities, and an end to racism and anti-Blackness. The timing is such that the City's budget for 2020-2021 is being decided as these protests continue, and amidst the need for drastic cuts due to loss of revenue during the COVID-19 crisis.

I urge Council to reject the proposed 2020-2021 budget staff report. We have a huge opportunity at this moment. For the first time in memory, it is becoming politically possible for cities to sincerely examine their police department budgets. This is a moment when our City needs to show that it's at the forefront of a massive and powerful nation-wide movement to reimagine the role of police and policing in our community.

Time and again, when the City is in a time of austerity, departments and divisions such as Recreation, Childcare, Community Development, Housing, Homelessness, Sustainability, and Public Works have borne the brunt of cuts, with SRPD seeing either minimal or no budget cuts. This cycle of defunding City departments and divisions that address a huge range of human need in San Rafael while leaving the SRPD budget untouched does a huge disservice to our community.

Our PD, like so many across the country, are expected to be too many things to too many people in our community. Highlighted in a recent episode of Last Week Tonight with John Oliver, former Chief of Dallas Police David Brown described this division of labor in a way that is equally applicable to our City:

“Every societal failure, we put it on the cops to solve...Not enough mental health funding, let the cop handle it. Not enough drug addiction funding, let's give it to the cops...Schools fail, give it to the cops...That's too much to ask. Policing was never meant to solve all those problems. I just ask other parts of our democracy along with the free press to help us.” (Link to [YouTube](#))

I call on City leadership to re-allocate significant funds away from SRPD and towards programs proven to more effectively promote a safe and equitable community: community-based mental health services, substance abuse treatment services, affordable housing programs, and solutions to the affordability crisis in our City.

We are so fortunate to have existing City staff, programs, and departments with the skill and expertise to move the needle on these issues, but they need far greater support and funding to do so. If properly staffed and funded, divisions such as homeless outreach, our community centers, community development, and (near to my heart, of course) the library, could address the needs of our most vulnerable community members with greater nuance, compassion, effectiveness, and at a much higher return on investment for the City.

Finally, there is the matter of white supremacy in policing and the ineffectuality of police reform to address police violence. I urge City leadership to quickly address this greater crisis and enter a process similar to what is being enacted by the City Council in Minneapolis, which recently resolved to enter a year-long process to develop a new community safety model. Minneapolis City Council member Alondra Cano stated, "We acknowledge that the current system is not reformable — that we would like to end the current policing system as we know it." ([article](#))

I sincerely like and respect my colleagues in the SRPD and appreciate their progressive aspirations and intentions. And at the same time, speaking from my heart after much long-overdue listening and learning these past few weeks, I have come to believe that policing as an institution is beyond reform.

I urge Council to prove that Black and Brown lives matter in San Rafael. Please have the courage to be a leader in this movement, and place our City firmly on the right side of history. Defund SRPD and reinvest in our community.

Sincerely,

Jill Harris

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