

Brian Duncan

[REDACTED]
San Rafael, CA 94901

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

As you know, we're in a watershed moment in our country, one catalyzed by the latest tragedy in a string of racist tragedies leading from the present moment back to the practice of slavery. It is a time where many of us feel hopeful that meaningful change will actually happen, but with one important caveat, that—in the words of black activist and entertainer W. Kamau Bell—"[We] can be hopeful as long as [we] do the work."

In a recent statement on racial justice posted earlier this month to the city website, you declared that "We are committed, as leaders in San Rafael, to better outcomes for our black community and all communities of color." But the proposed 2020-2021 budget staff report, in its current form, it looks like the exact opposite of what the city said it would do: disproportionate cuts to departments that uplift the community and have the greatest positive impact on "communities of color." No cuts to the unassailable police department, the largest expenditure, which has questionable positive impact for these communities. I respect the SRPD, but are we honestly saying there's no re-evaluation of the budget needed in light of current events? Overtime pay, situations where having someone show up with a gun is counterproductive? More community programming, public spaces and prevention?

I recognize that drastic cuts are unavoidable in the current COVID crisis, but the larger proportion of cuts goes to the Library and Recreation department, who provides programming for youth and seniors, community spaces, parks, affordable childcare, internet services for those without internet, and much more. While these services can be utilized by anyone, the positive impact is greatest on communities of color. How can we say "We will create better outcomes for communities of color" while disproportionately cutting the services utilized by those very communities? It doesn't add up.

The world is watching. Cities across the United States are re-evaluating what public safety means for them, without police at the center. Is San Rafael doing the same? It doesn't look like it. This is a chance to literally put the money where your mouth is, please don't settle for business as usual.

I respectfully urge the council to reject the proposed 2020-2021 staff report.

Sincerely,
Brian Duncan