COUNCILMEMBER CHRIS CATE
CITY OF SAN DIEGO
SIXTH DISTRICT

MEMORANDUM

DATE: **January 7, 2021**

TO: **Councilmember Sean Elo-Rivera, Chair, Environment Committee**

FROM: **Councilmember Chris Cate**

SUBJECT: **2021 Environment Committee Priorities**

I appreciate the opportunity to share my Environment Committee priorities for 2021. I look forward to addressing San Diego's critical environmental issues to ensure local resources are protected for the enjoyment of future generations.

Review of Potential Water and Sewer Cost of Service Study

The Public Utilities Department (PUD) recently presented the Department's Five-Year Financial Outlook and indicated a potential need to come forward with a rate-case to cover potential future costs. Prior to proceeding with a rate case, the Committee should review the current rate structures, performance from the 2015 rate case, and an update on the current conditions of the Department's facilities. In addition, the Independent Budget Analyst should immediately engage with consultants to begin review of the analysis to be conducted by Raftelis.

Update on Condition of PUD Assets

The City owns and operates many facilities that are aging and require significant capital investments to meet state and federal requirements for the safe and reliable delivery of water. The Committee should work with the PUD Director to immediately receive updates on the status of any condition assessments that are conducted.

Overview of Water Wholesalers

The City of San Diego is the largest purchaser of water from our direct wholesaler, the San Diego County Water Authority (SDCWA). SDCWA in turn purchases water from the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California (MWD). It is important for this Committee to understand the delivery systems, financial conditions, and long-term financial and capital outlooks from these entities as their decisions directly impact the City of San Diego and its ratepayers. The Committee should receive presentations from both agencies and allow for a direct opportunity for members to ask questions and understand the current conditions facing each of them.

Receive an Update on Water Conservation and Rebate Programs
Although the region is no longer experiencing drought conditions at the level we saw in the past few years, water conservation continues to be a priority for Southern California and, specifically, San Diego. There are many water conservation and rebate programs that have been created and offered over the past few years by the City, the San Diego County Water Authority and the Metropolitan Water District. They include turf replacement incentives, rain barrel rebates, weather-based irrigation controller systems rebates, and many more. The Committee should request updates from staff and the water agencies regarding the status of these conservation programs. The Committee should also work to identify additional water conservation tools and programs to enhance current efforts.

Review the City's Use of Weather Based Irrigation Controllers
The City should evaluate its own use of Weather-Based Irrigation Controllers (WBIC). A commercial grade WBIC has been confirmed by the Environmental Protection Agency to save approximately 134,511 gallons of water per year. Currently, the City utilizes WBICs in Balboa and Mission Bay Parks, however, there is still a significant need to utilize this technology in parks throughout the City. The Committee should receive an update from the Park and Recreation Department identifying which City parks currently have this technology, including a cost-benefit analysis detailing anticipated installation costs corresponding with expected water savings.

Gas and Electric Franchise Agreement
The City's current Gas and Electric Franchise Agreement was originally set to expire in January 2021. The City Council voted to extend the current Franchise Agreement with SDG&E until June 2021 to allow for additional time to reinitiate the Invitation to Bid process. The Committee should work closely with the Mayor's office to ensure that this process is not delayed and lays out a clear timeline for the process that should include sufficient input from the public.

Explore the Creation of an Incentive-Based Illegal Dumping Reporting Program
Keeping the City clean and preventing illegal dumping in public right of-way has been an important priority for the City. There has been significant investment in the past several fiscal years to allocate funds to remove trash and debris from the public right-of-way as part of the CleanSD initiative. In order to ensure we are doing everything possible to effectively keep our City clean and prevent illegal dumping, the Committee should explore an incentive-based illegal dumping reporting program, similar to an existing City program administered by the City Attorney's office called "Spray and Pay." This program rewards residents up to $500 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of graffiti vandals with fines collected from offenders redirected to the reporting party. A similar program can be created which would reward San Diegans for reporting individuals who illegally dump debris in violation of the City's Municipal Code. This program will serve to further disincentivize illegal dumping while rewarding those who provide information to the City to better enforce illegal dumping laws.

Gas-Powered Leaf Blower Incentive Program
Many San Diegans continue to use outdated or inefficient gas-powered leaf-blowers. These leaf-blowers are adverse for the environment and the City should look for opportunities to incentivize their replacement. The Committee should explore a rebate program where residents may exchange

gas-powered leaf-blowers for electric ones. This program can be modeled after the successful County program which provided incentives to replace gas-powered lawn mowers. The Committee should explore potential partnerships with the County as well as identify other available funding opportunities.

Follow up on 2020 Street Sweeping Audit Recommendations

In 2020, the City Auditor conducted a performance audit of the Transportation and Stormwater Department's Street Sweeping Section. The audit made three key findings which found that the Street Sweeping Section was not using the data they collected to analyze operations in order to make adjustments to sweeping priorities and routes. It also found that some routes with high levels of debris were often swept less often than routes with less debris and that the current key performance indicators did not capture important data, such as the total amount of debris collected annually. The audit identified four main recommendations to address these findings. Since Street Sweeping is an essential City service that helps ensure high water quality and protects wildlife by keeping environmentally harmful debris and pollutants from reaching our waterways, the Committee should request an update from staff on the implementation of the audit recommendations.

Consider Pilot Program to Install Trash Capture Technologies for Stormwater Channels

In order to address the problem of trash, debris, and harmful pollutants from entering our waterways, the Committee should work with the Stormwater Department to identify new trash capture technologies that may help divert trash from entering storm drains and channels. Specifically, end-of-pipe netting systems should be considered for stormwater channels to collect trash and debris and prevent pollutants from entering the waterways. These netting systems would capture trash and debris that make its way through stormwater channels and collects it prior to entering the waterways. Use of this technology would help the City more effectively conduct channel maintenance and prevent flooding caused by backed-up stormwater channels. The Committee should also explore any potential grant funding opportunities, including from the U.S. EPA.

Consider an Alternative Transportation Program

The City currently offers a subsidy for public transportation, but only to employees who do not purchase a monthly parking pass and commute at least three days per week. Further, the City offers mileage reimbursement for work travel, but does not reimburse for work travel taken by public transportation. The increase of public transportation is critical for the City to achieve its greenhouse gas reduction targets. The Committee should work to revise the City's alternative transportation policy to further incentivize employees to take public transportation by reimbursing work travel and daily commuting by public transportation. The program should be funded by revenue generated by monthly parking passes from the City's concourse. In addition, department budgets should be amended to absorb work travel reimbursements similar to the process of mileage reimbursement.