

The Children's Agenda

Executive Summary

City of Rochester Budget Analysis

2019-20 Priority Recommendations

The City of Rochester's FY20 budget was proposed just after the release of "Rochester 2034," the City's Draft Comprehensive Plan for the next 15 years. The 2019-20 budget is a down payment on our long-term investments in that plan. It should reflect the fact that the future belongs to Rochester's children and youth; their healthy development is the foundation needed for the success and growth of our city.

The Children's Agenda urges the City to target resources toward 3 critical investments:

- Invest in children and the adults who care for or teach them;
- Invest in structural and regional strategies to create a future free from racial inequities;
- Invest in community collaborations that create a "village" where young people can grow and thrive.

We recommend that the City:

- **Build and strengthen Rochester's early childhood and youth development workforce, prioritizing it as a critical part of our future infrastructure;**
- **Help lead a high-level collaborative effort to create an annual community-wide advocacy agenda for kids;**
- **Adopt decision-making tools to ensure that City resources and programs reduce racial inequities;**
- **Make Rochester a "Restorative City." Equip all City employees who work with children, including police officers and DRYS staff, with on-going training on trauma-informed care and restorative justice practices.**

Priority Recommendation 1:

Build and strengthen Rochester's early childhood and youth development workforce, prioritizing it as a critical part of our future infrastructure.

Working with young people is often a low-wage job that does not reflect the fact that these workers are providing the foundation upon which the future of our city is built. But the foundation is crumbling, and we do not have what is needed to fix it: a pipeline of well-trained, well-compensated professionals who can look forward to a successful career in this field. We recommend:

- All City programs designed to boost business, job and wealth development should include strategies targeted to entrepreneurs and small businesses in the early childhood and youth development sector.
- All businesses of a certain size who utilize City economic development assistance should be required to write up a "Children's Impact Statement" that describes how the business will support the child care and/or after school needs of employees.
- The City should create a small revolving loan fund for small businesses and nonprofits in this sector, including home-based child care providers, who need equipment, facility repair, etc.
- Positions that directly interact with youth should receive upgrades to move them closer to a living wage, and City benefits such as tuition assistance, help in obtaining education, home buying, family-friendly workplace policies, etc. should be extended to all City employees, full- and part-time, who work directly with youth.
- A City office and/ or website portal for easy access to these supports should be created and promoted.

Priority Recommendation 2:

Help lead a high-level collaborative effort to create an annual community-wide advocacy agenda for kids.

City leaders have invested time and resources in a collective impact approach to fighting poverty and improving outcomes for children through its involvement in the Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative (RMAPI) and ROC the Future (RTF). An important missing piece, though, is robust advocacy that moves a consensus-driven community change agenda for children and families. The City should direct more advocacy resources toward this agenda, e.g., working with RMAPI staff to help advance its annual New York State policy agenda and directing the City's lobbyist to spend time on RMAPI policy goals such as eviction prevention, low income family tax credits, bail reform and transportation.

Commendations:

- The co-location of the “Creating Assets, Savings and Hope” (CASH) program with the Library’s new Business Innovation Center - an example of how the City can support a RMAPI policy goal to expand use of tax credits to support low-income working families.
- The City’s support for the community schools model. We urge more City investments in additional RCSD schools.
- The City’s creative use of staff and resources to support literacy programs, such as the Mayor’s “Community of Readers” initiative and the continued partnership among libraries, DRYS and RCSD to employ teen literacy aides.
- The City’s investments in the Rochester Community and Youth Sports Complex, which will expand needed opportunities for physical activity for Rochester’s residents.
- The City’s continued inclusion of a “Children and Families Funding” section in the budget document, providing a model that should be adopted by other levels of government. We also commend the annual appropriations for ROC the Future, GROW developmental screenings, the Parent Leadership Training Institute and Teen Empowerment.
- City spending on the conversion of part-time positions to full-time positions in the Department of Recreation and Youth Services (DRYS) and the library system.

Priority Recommendation 3:

Adopt decision-making tools to ensure that City resources and programs reduce racial inequities, with a particular focus on implementation of the City’s Comprehensive Plan. The City should also seek opportunities to expand this work toward a regional cross-governmental equity strategy involving the City, County, School Districts, RGRTA, City and County economic development entities, etc.

In January 2019, the City launched the Race Equity and Leadership initiative in collaboration with the Greater Rochester Chamber of Commerce. A natural follow-up would be adoption of a Racial Equity Impact Assessment tool that would be piloted with a segment of City activity such as housing, business development, and youth services. Any decision made by City Council in these areas would be considered through a racial equity lens to prevent future and reverse existing institutional racism that is inadvertently present in City policy, funding and regulation.

Priority Recommendation 4:

Make Rochester a “Restorative City.” Equip all City employees who work with children, including Police officers and DRYS staff, with on-going training on trauma-informed care and restorative justice practices.

With one-fifth of the City’s operating budget now devoted to law enforcement, the City must shift more resources toward prevention. Research clearly indicates that children’s health, behavior, and academic outcomes are linked to social-emotional skills, and City employees should support those skills in its youth programs and interactions.

While this training is already in place in some departments, its scope should be expanded with a goal of ensuring that all City employees who work with children receive continual training and coaching in these areas. For implementation, the City can tap internal experts within its own staff as well as external expertise that is abundant in our community.

June 2019



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