

Item 4.1

City of Santa Rosa

Dear Mayor and Councilmembers,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the FY 2026–27 budget.

I recognize the City's challenging fiscal conditions, including pressures related to public safety, wildfire risk, and rising labor costs. I write to offer peer-city context and raise questions about alignment and equity for your consideration.

Under the proposed budget, approximately 65% of Santa Rosa's General Fund, about \$151 million of \$233 million, is allocated to Police and Fire. This proportion is notably higher than in comparable California cities. For example, Napa allocates roughly 44% of its General Fund to Police and Fire, while Santa Barbara remains below 55%, even in deficit years. Davis also maintains a more balanced distribution between public safety and community services.

While Santa Rosa's wildfire exposure is serious, it is not unique among peer cities, many of which rely more heavily on mutual aid, regional coordination, and reimbursements rather than embedding wildfire-driven overtime into base budgets. In Santa Rosa, Fire overtime appears to have become structural, with \$2.5 million added to the base following projected \$3 million overruns this year.

At the same time, community-facing services appear disproportionately affected. The Recreation budget reflects a 38.6% year-over-year reduction, raising equity concerns about access to preventive services that can reduce long-term public safety demand.

More broadly, the City faces a structural imbalance: revenues are projected to grow 3.6% while expenditures increase 7.7%, resulting in a \$17.5 million deficit. This gap, rather than service expansion alone, is driving ongoing fiscal strain.

I offer these comparisons respectfully and encourage the Council to consider how Santa Rosa's budget choices align with peer cities, and whether fiscal adjustments are being shared as equitably and sustainably as possible.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Anonymous