



KENT REPORTER

SOUND PUBLISHING, INC.

KENTREPORTER.COM

FRIDAY, AUGUST 21, 2020

Mayor plans 'status quo' budget for 2021

Also proposed is a new race and equity manager job for the city.

By STEVE HUNTER
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It appears no cuts or plans for additional revenue will be part of the city of Kent's 2021-2022 budget that Mayor Dana Ralph will bring before the Kent City Council on Sept. 29.

"When we made our COVID-19 budget cuts, we were very deliberate to make sure we were cutting deep enough to get us through 2020 as well as the 2021-2022 biennium barring some new 2020-type things that could happen. We were pretty confident," Ralph said at a budget mini-retreat virtual meeting on Aug. 10 with the council. "That's why I use the term status quo budget because we are not anticipating additional revenue or having to make any major cuts."

Ralph eliminated 11 positions in May as part of a solution to a \$15.2 million shortfall due to COVID-19. The mayor also decided to use \$5 million from the general fund reserves to help cover the loss of revenue from sales tax, business and occupation (B&O) tax, utility fees, permit fees and licenses. She reduced the capital budget transfer fund from the general fund by \$3.2 million. The final step to cover the deficit included using \$1 million from the city's Health and Wellness

Fund.

In total, city departments made \$5 million in ongoing reductions and \$1.5 million in one-time cuts.

All of those moves should put the city in position, as Ralph said, for a status quo budget that she presents next month to the council. The council will deliberate about any budget changes to make prior to voting to approve the budget in November.

Ralph does plan to propose to add a new race and equity

manager job to the budget to help address issues faced by the city.

"We have already started the conversation around a race and equity manager position," Ralph said. "That is in the works and will be coming to you as part of the upcoming budget."

Several council members said they support the new position.

"I think the racial and social justice manager or whatever you

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Group demands city leaders defund Kent police

By STEVE HUNTER
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About 60 peaceful protesters demonstrated outside of Kent City Hall and the Police Department on Monday evening (Aug. 17) to demand city leaders to defund the police.

The group ForFortyTwo, named for the number of Kent schools, also demanded that city leaders drop the lawsuit to stop officer inquest hearing changes implemented by King County Executive Dow Constantine and invest more money in Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) communities as well as in youth and students.

"It was great to see our community come together and continue building people power together," said Nica Sy, 21, a University of Washington student who grew up in Kent and graduated in 2017 from Kent-Meridian High School. "It was great to see so many young people out. Our focus is to center the voices of Black, Indigenous and people of color and young folks, so to see the audience here tonight was really exciting."

Sy, one of the leaders of ForFortyTwo, said she decided to become involved after participating in a peaceful protest march through downtown Kent in June following the killing of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer. She also had participated in community organizing in Seattle and around the UW area, and decided she needed to bring those efforts to her hometown.

"I think it has become this norm that radical change can only happen in big cities like Seattle," Sy said during an interview after the protest. "I think I was really motivated to be able to create that kind of change for my community in Kent."

ForFortyTwo gathered signatures at the event in support of each of their four demands in an effort to spread its message.

"We have been active on social

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Nica Sy speaks at the ForFortyTwo (number of Kent schools) rally Aug. 17 outside of Kent City Hall and the Kent Police Department.

media, which has been effective, but this next step was to get the word out to the public about our demands and as a direct dialogue with the city," Sy said. "We are right here in front of City Hall and the Police Department and that's intentional because we want them to know that we are speaking to them when we say these demands. These are things we are demanding of them as our city leaders."

Kent Mayor Dana Ralph and the Kent City Council haven't made any proposals to defund police. On

Monday, Ralph announced she had dropped any plans for a ballot measure to raise property taxes in order to hire as many as 30 more officers, increasing the force to about 195 officers from 165. Ralph said she dropped the ballot measure because she didn't want to raise taxes during these challenging times. The police department has a \$48 million budget for 2020.

"That's good to hear, but that is not a success on the part of our demands," Sy said. "We continue to push to

defund by 50% and cutting ties between KSD (Kent School District) and KPD (Kent Police Department)."

The group wants school resource officers removed. Kent Police and the King County Sheriff's Office (deputies) each to the district.

"Students deserve a learning environment in which they are not being policed every second of the day," said Baeza Lakew, a Kentlake High School senior who spoke at the protest. "They deserve a learning environment

in which disciplinary action is not simply a detention or school suspension, but a positive method of solving behavioral issues to get them back on the right track."

Lakew said she would like to see money used for mental health counselors, nurses and more support for students with disabilities.

Kent Police Chief Rafael Padilla plans to bring a police equity and social justice reform resolution to the

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REI still leaving Kent HQ, but not for Bellevue

By STEVE HUNTER
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REI still plans to leave its headquarters in Kent, but the specialty outdoor retailer won't be going to Bellevue.

REI announced Aug. 12 that it is pursuing a sale of its newly completed corporate campus in the Spring District neighborhood of Bellevue with the intention of shifting to a less centralized approach to its headquarters presence in the Seattle area.

Rather than a single location, the REI's "headquarters" would span multiple locations across the region, and the recreational equipment company will lean into remote working as an ingrained, supported and normalized model for headquarters

employees, offering flexibility for more employees to live and work outside of the Puget Sound region and shrinking the co-op's carbon footprint, according to the company's website.

"The dramatic events of 2020 have challenged us to reexamine and rethink every aspect of our business and many of the assumptions of the past," said REI President and CEO Eric Artz, in a video call with employees Aug. 12. "That includes where and how we work. As a result, our new experience of 'headquarters' will be very different than the one we imagined more than four years ago."

A company spokesperson confirmed by email Aug. 13 that REI will leave its Kent headquarters, 6750 S. 228th St.

"We will not be keeping the

Kent campus," said the spokesperson. "We have a purchase and sale agreement with Bridge Development Partners for our Kent headquarters, but do not have any additional details to share."

Chicago-based Bridge Development Partners is a privately owned firm that focuses on the acquisition and development of Class A industrial real estate in the supply constrained core industrial markets of Chicago, South Florida, Northern New Jersey, Southern California, the Bay Area and Seattle.

The company has been active over the last year or so in the Seattle area and the Pacific Northwest with the acquisitions and developments. Bridge Point Kent 100 is the latest in a series of acquisitions and developments for

Bridge in the Seattle area and the Pacific Northwest. Within the last eight months, Bridge also has announced plans for Bridge Point Lacey in Seattle, Bridge Point Sumner 60 in Sumner and Bridge Point I-5 in Portland.

Late last year, Bridge Point announced the acquisition of an 11.45-acre property at 701 15th St. SW in Auburn, where it plans to launch the development of a single, 206,155-square foot flexible industrial building called Bridge Point Auburn 200.

REI transitions to remote work

In response to a rapidly changing COVID-19 pandemic, the

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Budget

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want to call that person is critical so we can see how we can bring someone in to

help us with strategy," Councilmember Bill Boyce said.

The council indicated reserve funds could be used to pay for the position, but will look to Ralph and Chief Administrative Officer Derek Matheson to figure

out how to work the position into the budget.

The council also supports the possibility of hiring a consultant to analyze police data to provide reports to the public. Council members didn't discuss specific

details about what the reports would contain, but looked to Police Chief Rafael Padilla to oversee what statistic analysis people are seeking and what numbers could be put into a report. The council indicated using

reserve funds to pay for that.

The mayor and council are looking at about a \$103 million general fund budget for 2021 and a \$107 million general fund budget in 2022 when revenues are expected to slightly increase, mainly

from the city's B&O tax. Revenues are projected to be down about \$15 million in 2021 from 2019 and about \$3 million from 2020.

General fund reserves are expected to be at about \$31 million by the end of 2020.

Defund

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Kent City Council in September. De-escalation and duty to intervene are two policies under review. More specifics will be revealed during Padilla's presentation to the council on either Sept. 1 or Sept. 15.

"Chief Padilla is being reactionary and not reacting to needs from the public that we have long had, but rather reacting to the attention being put on the injustice that is being done by our police departments," Sy said. "When the (Kent Reporter) article came out (last week) about his intention to create equity and social justice reform, we know reform doesn't work when our police departments are rooted in racism when police in America were slave patrols. We know what will help our community stay safe is by decreasing the size and scope of our police officers



STEVE HUNTER, KENT REPORTER

A display at a protest rally Aug. 17 outside of the Kent Police Department shows photos of men who died in encounters with police.

and instead investing into safety, thriving and feeling for our BIPOC communities."

The protest had a minor interruption when four vehicles decorated with large American flags drove past City Hall with their horns honking to make it hard to hear the speakers. The vehicles circled around the block a few times before leaving.

"Instead of honking, I wish

they would stop and listen," one speaker said.

Throughout the evening, several Kent police officers stood back by the entrance to the police station, which was closed because it was after hours. Officers wore their regular uniforms. None wore riot gear.

Inquest hearings

ForFortyTwo members stated at the protest they want the cities of Kent, Federal Way, Renton and Auburn to drop their legal opposition to inquests of officer-involved deaths.

State law authorizes, and the King County Charter mandates, the investigation of any death involving a member of law enforcement in the course of their duties. Constantine revised the inquest hearings after residents expressed serious concerns about the inquest process in the county and the seeming lack of transparency and accountability. The suits by the cities have stopped the changes and several inquest hearings have remained on hold for a couple of years, including cases involving the Kent, Auburn and Federal Way police departments.

King County Superior Court Judge Julie Spector indicated she could make a decision in the case this week, said Kent City Attorney Pat Fitzpatrick

in an email Tuesday. He said no ruling had been received yet by the city.

ForFortyTwo background

Leaders of the ForFortyTwo group include Sy and Kent residents Keliesha Lovelace, Kendrick Glover and Daniel Marin.

Lovelace and Glover helped organize the June 11 peaceful protest march through downtown Kent that drew an estimated 2,000 people following the May 25 killing of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer. Glover is co-founder of GEM (Glover Empower Mentoring) - a community based organization that supports youth and young adults in the area. Lovelace attended Kent-Meridian High School when Glover worked there as a counselor from 2012 to 2014. Marin went to Kentridge High School, according to Facebook pages. The group lists 225

members so far, including state Sen. Mona Das, D-Kent; Sonia Joseph, mother of Giovanni Joseph-McDade, who was fatally shot by a Kent police officer at the age of 20 in June 2017 after a short vehicle pursuit; Gwen Allen-Carston, executive director of the Kent Black Action Commission; and Elizabeth Watson, a former Kent City Council member.

Denise Daniels, a Kent School Board director, withdrew her support Monday after reading the current plans of the group. She emailed the following comment to the Kent Reporter.

"I joined this group with the understanding that it was to fight against systemic racism in Washington and support our students," Daniels said. "It was brought to my attention that my name was mentioned as a member in an article about a rally to defund the police. I do not and never have supported that cause, and have since removed myself from the group and sent a message of

REI

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co-op swiftly transitioned to nearly 100 percent remote work for its headquarters staff in early March. REI originally announced plans for the new headquarters in 2016, to be built on an 8-acre site in a developing, transit-oriented neighborhood called the Spring District. Construction began in 2018 for an intended mid-summer 2020 move-in date.

"[This year] we learned that the more distributed way of working we previously thought untenable

will instead unlock incredible potential," Artz said. "This will have immediate, positive impacts on our ability to attract and retain a diverse and highly skilled workforce, as we continue to navigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond."

While the decision to move away from a traditional headquarters model was motivated by recent learnings and a desire to create more flexibility for employees, the sale would also have financial benefits for the co-op, according to the company.

The co-op was among the first retailers to proactively

close all its retail stores in early March and one of the last to fully reopen, under stringent health and safety guidelines. The co-op undertook a number of cash preservation measures throughout the spring, including tighter inventory management, elective pay cuts by Artz and the board of directors, reductions in headcount and focusing around a streamlined set of priorities. These measures both stabilized the co-op, and allowed REI to invest in customer and staff-facing programs and innovations, as the co-op community adapted to a "new normal," according to the company.

The sale of the Spring District campus would enable important investments in customer innovations, REI's network of nonprofit partners, and the co-op's carbon goals, according to the company.

"I am confident that the sale of the Spring District campus would have a positive impact on REI's future — and yours," Artz told employees. "This year has shown us our home is not a building. Our home is wherever we find ourselves doing our best work, pursuing our outdoor passions, serving our communities. Serving each other. That is what we will build around as we

move forward — and as we accelerate into what's next."

In July, Kent-based REI said it reduced staff at its retail stores across the nation by about 400 employees. Nearly all 162 stores in 39 states operated by the outdoor retailer reopened as of July 6, according to a company spokesperson. Those stores closed in March because of COVID-19 and 90% of the employees were placed on unpaid furlough, but if eligible, received fully funded benefits.

REI employs about 13,000 at its retail stores.

In April, the company laid off about 300 employees

at its Kent headquarters because of the economic impact of COVID-19. The company employs about 1,000 in Kent, although most of them have been working from home during the outbreak.

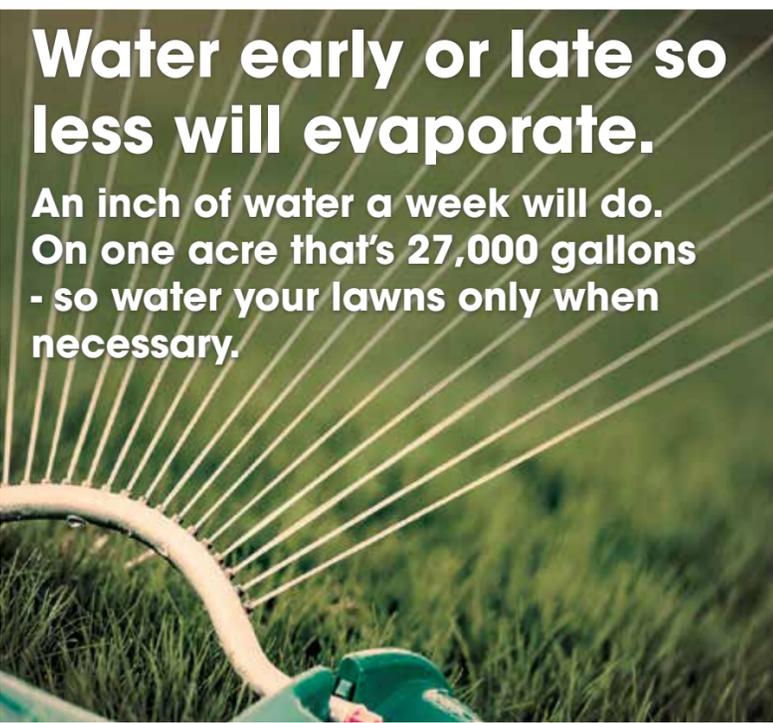
The company announced the move to Bellevue in 2016 because it had outgrown its space in Kent and wanted to build a campus in Bellevue that will serve as a gathering place that fosters creativity and connects thousands of increasingly mobile employees.

REI opened its headquarters in Kent in 1988. The company was founded in 1938 in Seattle.

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