

## Communication from Public

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# Budget Advisory Group: An Excellent Idea

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**LA WATCHDOG** - Budget and Finance Chair Katy Yaroslavsky has asked the “City Council [establish an Advisory Group](#) on the City's Finances and Budget, to assess the city's financial status and advise the Budget and Finance Committee on steps to secure the long-term fiscal health of the City.”

This is an excellent idea given the City’s fiscal crisis and its structural deficit, but only if the City Council and Budget and Finance Committee are willing to accept the findings and recommendations of the Advisory Group (“AG”). In the past, commission reports and their recommendations related to the budget have never seen the light of day. This was certainly the case with the blue ribbon LA 2020 Commission where many of its excellent recommendations did not even warrant a council file or discussion.

Achieving fiscal stability and truly balanced budgets will allow the City to live within its means and provide core services such as public safety and a functional infrastructure. This will be a difficult process because of all the competing special interests, will take many years and will most likely involve ballot measures.

According to Yaroslavsky, the five “Advisory Group members shall have substantial professional experience in municipal finance and budgeting, economic development, real estate, liability management, government efficiency, deliberative democracy, and/or civil service systems.”

These qualifications are too limiting and mean that only government insiders will be considered. However, the City is a large, unwieldy \$14 billion enterprise with over 30,000 employees and will benefit from private sector input.

The members must also be independent of the City and its affiliates and not dependent, directly or indirectly, on taxpayer dollars. There should also be a member of the Neighborhood Council Budget Advocates.

The AG must have the necessary funding and access to the resources of the City. This will allow the Group to hire, if needed, independent experts, hopefully on expedited manner.

There must be transparency for both the AG and the public.

The AG must have access to all information on a timely basis. It must also have access on a priority basis to City personnel who are involved in the budget process and who have knowledge of the City’s sources of revenue, departmental expenditures, and its overall financial condition. This includes outstanding indebtedness, deferred maintenance, capital expenditures and projects, unfunded pension liabilities, and contingent liabilities. The departments would be reimbursed from the AG’s budget.

While the AG reports to the Budget and Finance Committee, it must keep Angelenos in the loop by holding meetings at convenient times, not only during working hours, but also in the evening and over weekends, and in various locations around the City. This would also include from time-to-time position papers that would outline issues and suggestions and the overall progress of the AG.

The AG, with proper support from the City, has the potential to provide valuable insights and recommendations to help eliminate the structural deficit and stabilize the City’s budget and finances. It will also begin the process of restoring trust and confidence in the City Council that is essential if it wants the support of the voters. Let’s go.

<https://www.citywatchla.com/la-watchdog/31025-budget-advisory-group-an-excellent-idea>