

Sunnyvale City Council Summary - Tuesday, March 25, 2025

The Sunnyvale City Council meeting was held in person and online (via Zoom) on March 25, 2025, beginning at 4:30 PM.

The following council members were present at the meeting:

- * Mayor Klein
- * Vice Mayor Sell
- * Councilmember Cisneros
- * Councilmember Srinivasan
- * Councilmember Chang
- * Councilmember Lay
- * Councilmember Millinger (excused absence)

I. Special Events Study Session:

- Reviewed Sunnyvale's special events permit process, addressing lengthy lead times (8 weeks) and cumbersome applications.
- Applicant feedback emphasized streamlined applications, cost reduction, and enhanced support; high party rental equipment demand was noted.
- Proposed solutions included simplified applications, cost reductions, improved applicant support, and lead time reductions (potentially a sliding scale).
- Improvements involved kickoff/post-event meetings for large events, streamlined applications for repeat events, and site diagram/templates. The new single-page application was praised.
- Concerns remained about fire marshal approval inconsistencies and stage requirements.

II. Community Events & Neighborhood Grants Program Enhancements:

- Proposed budget increase of \$100,000-\$200,000 to increase grant amounts, recipients (7-15 more), and create a twice-yearly application process.

- City-sponsored events will receive city insurance and waste management coverage; expansion of this coverage for all sponsored events is underway.
- Discussions included additional fee waivers (potentially a one-time waiver for first-time applicants), resource sharing of party rental equipment, and city support for event promotion.
- Council favored grants over fee waivers due to administrative burdens; events charging admission fees remain ineligible.

III. Staffing and Budget Considerations:

- A full-time Recreation Manager position was proposed to improve special events oversight and reduce reliance on higher-level approvals.
- Additional part-time/overtime staffing was requested to support event-related tasks (e.g., banner hanging, inspections).
- The proposed budget increase covers Community Events and Neighborhood Grants Program enhancements, the new manager position, and overtime costs.
- The new Recreation Manager will enable proactive event planning and facilitate early communication with organizers; potential for monthly drop-in hours.

IV. Improving Community Engagement and Event Support:

- Focused on improved communication and streamlined event planning; suggestions included a mailing list/website, city channels (utility bills, newsletters), and leveraging successful neighborhood associations.
- Council emphasized clearer applications (including peak crowd volume), best-practice templates for crowd control and event layout, and a clear advertising policy.
- Providing a list of rental companies was favored over a city-sponsored rental program; the creation of an event handbook was suggested.

V. Fee Waivers and Application Process Clarification:

- Fees are adjusted annually based on CPI; further increases are not currently planned.

- Council discussed the complexity of fee waivers and administrative burden; a one-time fee waiver for first-time applicants was favored, pending objective criteria.
- The council generally preferred the grant program over fee waivers due to administrative complexities; decisions regarding fee waivers will require council approval for individual cases after a one-time waiver.

VI. Additional Event Support and Resources:

- Councilmembers expressed support for increased funding for community grants.
- City-owned party equipment (roadblocks, barricades) could be provided to organizers instead of requiring purchase.
- Marketing assistance was suggested, utilizing methods like Horizon magazines, websites, and social media.
- Alternative, cost-effective marketing solutions beyond expensive banners were discussed. The Downtown Association and Chamber of Commerce were highlighted as successful long-term partners.

VII. Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) Ordinance Update:

- The ordinance updates ADU regulations to ensure consistency with state law and improve readability. Key changes include increased ADU allowances for single-family and multifamily properties.
- Streamlined ADU categories are expanded to simplify the review process. Clarifications were added to objective development standards (front setbacks, mechanical equipment, solar analysis).
- The Planning Commission unanimously recommended the staff's proposal. Discussions included accessibility requirements and tree replacement.
- A 15-gallon replacement tree is required for every protected tree removed in non-streamlined ADUS, per consultation with HCD. Requirements for resource alteration permits for heritage trees were removed due to state law limitations.
- The ordinance aims for consistency with state legislation, improved community/staff understanding

of ADU requirements, and furthering city general plan goals for housing.

- The ordinance was passed unanimously by the council. Collaboration with the Planning Collaborative will focus on clarifying the ADU process for residents.

VIII. Public Comment on Grass Management in Sunnyvale Parks:

- Multiple residents advocated for transitioning to regenerative grass management practices.
- A video presentation highlighted cost savings (nearly 3x reduction) and environmental benefits.
- Speakers emphasized healthy soil, negative impacts of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, and potential effects of traditional methods on Sunnyvale's water supply.
- A request was made to transition at least two athletic fields to regenerative practices before the completion of the ongoing study.

IX. Appeal Decision on Accessory Structure Variance:

- Appeal of Planning Commission decision to deny a variance for an 112 sq ft accessory structure with reduced setbacks.
- Applicant (Scott McLennan) argued substandard lot size, negative impact on neighbor privacy and heritage tree roots. He requested a study to allow for smaller studio offices on small lots in the heritage district.
- Staff found the property not substandard, code allows flexibility in accessory structure placement, but noted concerns from multiple neighbors and the fact that the structure was built without permits. An ADU conversion was suggested as an alternative. The structure's height exceeded code, lacked permits and electricity, and lowering it was deemed structurally unsafe.
- Council upheld the Planning Commission's denial of the variance. Discussion included neighboring cities' more lenient regulations for similar structures. The applicant reiterated their request for a study into code inconsistencies. Public comment was received both in-person and remotely.
- Council members expressed sympathy for the applicant's situation but upheld the denial due to code violations and lack of permits. The applicant's request for a study on detached office spaces was noted.

X. VTA Strike Update:

- The VTA bus and light rail drivers are on strike.
- The VTA board offered a contract that would place workers among the highest-paid in the nation with comprehensive benefits.
- The VTA stated it would not discipline employees for striking.
- Negotiations are ongoing; Council expressed sympathy for those affected by the disruption to public transit.

XI. Other Discussions:

- Potential improvements to the 17-page application (cover sheet and usability review) and the need for a fully online application process were discussed.
- The city's role in promoting non-city-run events on the city website requires further clarification.
- Better definition of event types (charitable, community, outdoor festivals) and clarifying city support for traffic management (especially for large events like the Sunnyvale Art & Wine Festival) were suggested.
- Potential locations for electronic banners (Matilda & El Camino, Caltrain station) were mentioned.
- A thank you to the city was expressed for the Sunnyvale Suns community scavenger hunt.