



City of Cambridge

59.

IN CITY COUNCIL

January 6, 1997

- COUNCILLOR TRIANTAFILLOU
- VICE MAYOR BORN
- COUNCILLOR DAVIS
- COUNCILLOR DUEHAY
- COUNCILLOR GALLUCCIO
- COUNCILLOR REEVES
- COUNCILLOR SULLIVAN
- COUNCILLOR TOOMEY

WHEREAS: Citizens are frequently concerned about how their tax dollars are spent; and

WHEREAS: The information is frequently found in the budget which is not usually accessible to vast numbers of people; and

WHEREAS: The City of San Mateo, California has recently instituted a policy of providing Citizen Benefits Statements (see attached article); now therefore be it

ORDERED: That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to investigate the possibility of providing such a statement to Cambridge citizens with their tax bills; and be it further

ORDERED: That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to report back to the City Council on said issue at its first meeting in February.

In City Council January 6, 1997
 Adopted by the affirmative vote of nine members.
 Attest:- D. Margaret Drury, City Clerk.

A true copy; *D. Margaret Drury*

ATTEST:-
 D. Margaret Drury
 City Clerk

Citizen Benefit Statement Reinforces Value of City Government and Services

59.

by Arne Croce

One of the challenges facing a city is how to inform the public how much revenue their house generates to the city and how much it costs to provide basic property related services. This is particularly difficult in California where the property tax is set on a statewide basis and billed as a lump sum by the county. This year the city of San Mateo, Calif. (population 94,000), decided to take an innovative approach to this issue.

In October, every owner-occupied single family parcel received a personalized and customized "City Benefit Statement." This statement was generated from the property tax

rolls used by San Mateo County and its mailing coincided with the distribution of property tax bills by the county.

The Benefits Statement specifically identifies the owner's property, how much property tax is paid in total, and how much of the total property tax comes to the city of San Mateo.

Also included in the Benefits Statement is an analysis of the average cost per parcel to provide basic property related services—such as police, fire, library, parks, and public works. This cost is broken down to show the percentage of the city's budget going to each service. Additionally, the property tax generated from the specific parcel is

broken out in the same proportion as the funding of city services.

In doing this analysis, some very interesting statistics were revealed and shared with the residents. While the average cost to provide general services to a city parcel is \$1,554, the median amount of residential property tax which the city receives is \$208. Only 18 single-family residential parcels generated more to the city in property taxes than the average per parcel cost of service. This reinforces the importance of other city revenues, primarily business derived revenues, in main-

taining important city services for San Mateo residents. It also reinforces the value received for the property taxes paid.

The Citizens Benefits Statement has been very well received. A message box on the City's 24-hour response line was set up to capture citizen comments. The responses have been overwhelmingly positive. Typical of the comments received are:

"Excellent, Terrific. A good illustration. Will use to explain to my kids where money goes."

"I think this statement is a very good step toward helping people paying taxes understand where the money goes."

"I think this is a great opportunity for us to learn more about what is going on in the city and where our funds are going."

For the city of San Mateo, the Citizens Benefits Statement has proven to be a good way to communicate basic financial information to residential property tax payers and to reinforce the value citizens receive for the property tax value they pay to the city. ■

Arne Croce is city manager of San Mateo, Calif. For more information, contact him at (415) 377-3300; fax, (415) 377-3301.

59

January 6, 1997

Councillor Triantafillou

Resolution Regarding the Provision of Citizen Benefit Statement with Tax Bills

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Whereas the information is frequently found in the budget which is frequently not accessible to vast numbers of people;

Whereas, the City of San Mateo California has recently instituted a policy of providing Citizen Benefits Statements (see attached article); now therefore be it

Resolved, that the City Manager be and is hereby requested to investigate the possibility of providing such a statement to Cambridge citizens with their tax bills and further that the City Manager report back to the City Council on said issue at its first meeting in February.

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COUNCILLOR TRIANTAFILLOU

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Consent Order #59

14-CM

Born, Davis, Dineen, Galluccio,
Reeves, Sullivan & Toomey

Councillor Triantafillou re: Provision of
Citizen Benefit Statement with Tax
Bills.

In City Council January 6, 1997

ORDER ADOPTED