

**City of Oceanside
City Council/Staff Interviews
Interview Themes**

Introduction

The purpose of these interviews was to gather input from each member of the Oceanside City Council and some members of the City of Oceanside team to prepare for the Council CIP priority setting workshop scheduled for March 4, 2026. Interview comments were summarized into key themes that emerged from the collective comments of everyone we interviewed for this project. The themes presented are not in prioritized order.

Elected Officials and City Staff

Interviewee
Mayor Esther Sanchez
Deputy Mayor Eric Joyce (District 1)
Councilmember Rick Robinson (District 2)
Councilmember Jimmy Figueroa (District 3)
Councilmember Peter Weiss (District 4)
Manuel Gonzalez, Director of Parks & Recreation Services
Jill Moya, Finance Services Director/Cindy Gersley, Budget Manager/Carol Bunt, Principal Management Analyst
Hamid Bahadori, Public Works Director/Nathan Mertz, Public Works Division Manager
Brian Thomas, City Engineer/Darlene Nicandro, Director of Development Services
Jayne Timberlake, Coastal Zone Administrator/Elise Wetherell, (new) Management Analyst
Jonathan Borrego, City Manager

Questions and Themes

1. What are some key CIP accomplishments of the City of Oceanside over the past year or two?
 - **Delivery of public safety infrastructure:** Completion of Fire Station 1 and its training tower was repeatedly cited as a major accomplishment. These projects enhance emergency response capabilities and reflect a strong focus on public safety.
 - **Parks and recreation upgrades guided by community input:** Significant improvements were made to parks and recreational facilities, including lighting at John Landes Park, upgrades to baseball fields, and community-driven projects like skateparks and futsal courts. These efforts aim to improve safety and encourage community engagement.
 - **Pool renovations and community centers:** Renovation of the Brooks Street pool and upgrades to other pools and community centers were highlighted. These projects serve underserved communities and extend the useful life of critical facilities.
 - **Beachfront and coastal improvements:** Beachfront projects, including pier view bridge work and new beach volleyball courts, were completed. Continued progress on RE:BEACH Sand Nourishment and Retention Pilot Project was noted. These improvements support tourism, the local economy, and community recreation.

- **Accessibility and ADA compliance:** ADA-compliant upgrades, such as accessible sidewalks, were implemented citywide, improving inclusivity and compliance with federal standards.
- **Roadway and infrastructure repairs:** Annual road overlay and slurry seal projects were completed, addressing deteriorating road conditions in several locations. However, concerns remain about the longevity of these repairs.
- **El Corazon Park development:** Progress on El Corazon Park Site 1 was commonly noted and the project expanded in scope to include additional amenities like pickleball courts and a mini soccer pitch, reflecting strong community input. Additional funding is needed to realize the entire park's potential (all El Corazon Park sites).
- **Deferred and stalled projects:** Projects such as the Loma Alta Detention Basin, College Boulevard widening, and Douglas Drive and Coast Highway bridges have been delayed several years, raising concerns about prioritization and execution.

2. What are your thoughts on prioritization criteria for identifying CIP projects?

- **Public safety as the top priority:** Public safety projects, such as police headquarters, fire stations, pier bridge, RE:BEACH, and flood control, are consistently identified as the highest priority. Safety concerns near schools, parks, and high-traffic areas also drive prioritization.
- **Citywide benefit and neighborhood connectivity:** There is a strong emphasis on addressing historically underserved neighborhoods and ensuring citywide distribution of projects. Connectivity improvements, such as overcoming freeway barriers and creating walkable, bikeable infrastructure, are seen as essential for community cohesion.
- **Strategic focus and limiting scope:** Interviewees commonly stressed the need to stick to adopted strategic priorities and educating residents about the CIP process, as well as to focus on fewer, high-impact projects rather than spreading resources thinly across many initiatives. Multiple comments pertained to the need to avoid chasing too many projects at once as staff capacity and financial resources are limited.
- **Infrastructure as economic investment:** The return on economic investment as criteria for prioritizing CIP projects was expressed during multiple interviews. Projects that demonstrably protect or elevate Oceanside's economy – in addition to other criteria – should be advanced.
- **Maintenance and long-term sustainability:** Projects should prioritize maintaining and rehabilitating existing infrastructure over “shiny-object” additions of amenities. Long-term useful life (minimum five years) and ongoing maintenance costs must be factored into decision-making.
- **Formalized criteria and transparent process:** Many called for formal prioritization policy with clear criteria and a transparent process that empowers departments to recommend projects and promotes citywide benefit and fairness (across districts). Current processes are seen as opaque and overly influenced by dais-driven politics and the loudest voices.
- **Funding and regulatory considerations:** Decisions should account for available funding sources, grant opportunities, and restrictions on Development Impact Fees (DIF). Projects tied to state or federal mandates and those with expiring grant windows should receive priority.
- **Community engagement, public communication and emerging needs:** Public input and trends in recreation are important but should be balanced against strategic priorities. There is interest in conducting community surveys and educating residents about the CIP process to

manage expectations. Regular public information and communication about prioritized CIP projects were expressed needs; additional staff capacity is needed (as it was reported that the City's current PIO is at capacity) to improve the provision of regular information to the public on a consistent basis.

3. What are your top CIP priorities for the city in the next year?

- **Pier rehabilitation:** The concrete portion of the Oceanside Pier is nearing the end of its useful life (almost 100 years old). Repair or replacement is considered a critical priority by many interviewees due to its iconic status, public safety considerations, and economic importance for tourism.
- **San Luis Rey River flood control:** Long-standing flood control needs along the San Luis Rey River require attention as conveyed by multiple people. Funding has been partially allocated, but the project remains incomplete and is essential for public safety, protection of private property, and regulatory compliance.
- **El Corazon Park development:** Many interviewees expressed continued development of El Corazon Park Site 1 as a major priority, including sports fields, pickleball courts, and trails. There is a push to make the park feel more natural and accessible while addressing design and parking challenges.
- **Police Headquarters and public safety facilities:** Construction of new Police Headquarters and Fire Station 8 is repeatedly cited as a top priority to improve emergency response and public safety infrastructure.
- **Roadway repairs and traffic management:** Street maintenance and overlays are critical, with a citywide PCI of 62. Traffic calming measures, especially near schools and parks, and improved traffic management systems are emphasized.
- **Coastal sand replenishment and retention:** Sand replenishment and retention projects, including RE:BEACH, are considered vital for maintaining beaches, supporting tourism and the Oceanside economy, and protecting coastal infrastructure and private investment.
- **Connectivity and mobility improvements:** Safe routes to school, protected bike lanes, and completion of the inland rail trail are priorities to improve connectivity and reduce e-bike safety issues. Enhancing downtown walkability was also highlighted.
- **Parks and recreation:** Upgrades to aging parks (e.g., baseball fields on old landfill sites), Title IX compliance for sports facilities, and development of dog parks and lit fields are key equity-driven priorities.

4. What do you see as impediments to accomplishing Council's CIP priorities?

- **Volume of CIP priorities:** Projects are often added to the unfunded project list without removals, driven by community pressure. The cause is backlog accumulation and the desire to "do more and more" and satisfy everyone by having their projects make the list. The effect is diluted focus, unrealistic promises/expectations, and confusion about feasibility. Clarification is needed on how to move projects from the unfunded list to a priority CIP project.
- **Guarding reserves and funding discipline:** Reserves should not be treated as extra money. New projects should not be funded by reserves unless necessary, and any changes to the budget must be justified openly to maintain trust.

- **Phasing and design-first approach:** New requests often involve design rather than full construction, and phasing strategies are common. Having shovel-ready projects is critical for pursuing grants without letting plans go stale.
- **Transparent process and public education:** Interviewees described too many one-on-one conversations, limited public dialogue, dais-driven additions, and insufficient transparent accounting. Additionally, participants asked to clarify maintenance versus rehabilitation versus rebuild and what DIF (Development Impact Fee) or enterprise funds can and cannot cover. There is a need for consistent communication and education of the public and the City Council about the impact of shifting priorities. Staff reporting and regular updates help ensure informed decisions, transparency, and accountability.
- **Consider mandates and public interest:** Federal and state mandates, as well as broader public interest, should weigh heavily in trade-off decisions. Projects tied to compliance or urgent community needs should move up the list. The city needs to focus on priorities that best serve the community, rather than individual projects and interests (move beyond politics).
- **Staff bandwidth and project overload:** Project managers reported case load, with turnover and fragmented engineering, can exacerbate delivery challenges. The cause is limited staffing and competing priorities. It was suggested that project management loads of ≤ 10 per engineer is more appropriate. The effect is prolonged timelines, stale designs, and quality pressures.
- **Major weather events.** Major weather events, like significant rain or storm surges causing flooding and related property and infrastructure damage, could shift priority and funding away from important CIP projects (e.g., RE:BEACH, San Luis Rey River flood control, etc.) that would protect against these events to address emergency rebuilding.

5. When new factors surface during the course of a year that shift priorities, what trade-off considerations would you recommend for elevating a new priority CIP project in exchange for an existing one?

- **Guard reserves and insist on funding discipline:** Interviewees cautioned against funding new projects from reserves without broad consensus and affirmed that reserves should not be treated as “extra money.” New projects should avoid using reserve funding unless necessary, and any midyear budget changes must be transparent, justified, and consensus based.
- **Prioritize public safety and regulatory compliance:** When tradeoffs are required, choose options that advance public safety (e.g., addressing crash hot spots, coastal and flood protection, avoid anticipated catastrophic impacts, etc.) and meet federal/state mandates; decisions should remain objective.
- **Apply a swap rule: if you add, remove:** Elevating a new priority should come with a corresponding de-prioritization or deferral; “if you take something in, you must take something out” to prevent list bloat and protect budget integrity.
- **Require staff validation and full feasibility checks:** Before elevating a new item, have staff confirm necessity and feasibility (including environmental and compliance steps such as AB52 reviews) and clearly convey the tradeoffs to City Council.
- **Phase design versus construction to avoid stale plans and favor shovel ready:** New requests often begin as design efforts; leverage phasing strategically (so plans do not expire with code changes) yet prioritize shovel ready projects to compete for grants and avoid plans going stale. Maintain and reference the city’s list of shovel ready projects.

- **Ensure consistent process, reporting, and Council education:** Provide regular status updates and staff reports to the City Council on projects and educate Council on the impacts of changing priorities, so mid-year pivots are informed, consistent, and accountable.
 - **Consider budget capacity and timing constraints:** Conservative budgeting can leave year-end balances, but uncertainty about available capacity makes mid-year shifts difficult. Evaluate timing, grant windows, and General Fund implications when elevating new priorities. Several of those interviewed recommended full accounting and operation and maintenance (O&M) impacts before elevating any new priority, aligned with General Fund capacity.
 - **Factor in community interest and economic impacts:** Weigh broader public interest, citywide benefit, and business community health; support projects that sustain local revenues, demonstrate return on investment, and respond to community needs without undermining long-term fiscal stability. Ensure fairness of infrastructure investment across the city.
 - **Acknowledge delivery capacity and staffing constraints:** Elevate projects that can realistically be delivered given current capacity, or pair new priorities with resourcing adjustments.
6. Once the Council establishes several top CIP priorities, what can you do as a Councilmember or staff member to help the full Council (or City) stay on track with the CIP program?
- **Regularly review and clean the unfunded list:** As shared by multiple interviewees, the unfunded CIP list needs regular review and update to remove projects that are no longer necessary or feasible. This will reduce confusion and maintain focus on the adopted CIP.
 - **Commitment and transparency in budget changes:** If the Council commits to an adopted budget, any changes should be openly justified. Funding for one project should not be administratively shifted to another. Transparency in shifting priorities is essential to maintain trust and accountability.
 - **Clear communication and reminders about priorities:** Council members and staff should reinforce the approved CIP plan through regular public communication, reminders, and education about limited resources and trade-offs.
 - **Structured review and status updates:** A formal structured review process of CIP projects is recommended by many interviewed with regular status updates to the City Council and public. Public Works should be involved in reviewing projects as they progress.
 - **Accountability and staff support:** City Council members should defend decisions, support staff, and avoid placing excessive demands on the system. Staff responsiveness, capacity and collaboration are key to staying on track.
 - **Limit mid-year additions and use phased approach:** New items should generally be deferred to the next year unless they are emergencies. A mid-cycle CIP check-in could help manage expectations and avoid ad hoc changes.
7. What other issues would you like to discuss at the workshop?
- **Clarity on funding sources and restrictions:** There is confusion about where CIP funding comes from and what restrictions apply. Clearer communication is necessary to make funding more understandable for the public and City Council.

- **Review and rationalize the unfunded list:** The unfunded CIP list seems daunting and needs to be reviewed (review *funded* versus *unfunded*). Interviewees want to address what to do with these projects, possibly removing outdated items and creating a more transparent process.
- **Park enforcement:** There is a desire to discuss the lack of a ranger program to enforce park reservations. A feasibility study is underway to establish the program, which would cost \$2.5M to start and \$1M annually to operate.
- **Ongoing maintenance and staffing capacity:** For the priority-setting workshop, there is a request for workshop material to include an understanding of how CIP planning includes maintenance costs as well as facts about the current project delivery staff and their capacity to deliver CIP projects (including future large projects like RE:BEACH, San Luis Rey River flood control, etc.).
- **Support for local businesses and economic vitality:** There is a desire to discuss strategies to support local businesses and to understand the return on economic investment as part of CIP priorities.
- **Arts and community engagement:** Arts, murals, and cultural projects are considered important for community identity, as is the creation of free “third spaces,” and should be part of CIP discussions alongside infrastructure priorities.
- **Equity and historically underserved neighborhoods.** Interest in discussing CIP needs in areas of the City “that haven’t been touched” and connect communities split by roads/freeways. There is also interest in upgrading parks and recreation facilities consistent with Title IX as well as fair field allocation reinforcing equity.
- **Homelessness and community support:** Dedicated spaces for families experiencing homelessness, such as tiny homes or shelters, are identified as emerging needs alongside urban agriculture and community farm initiatives.