INFORMATIONAL BRIEF

Budget Implications of Council Expansion

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Core Question

The purpose of this brief is to calculate the budget implications of expanding the council to 25 seats and analyze how these expenditures compare to what other large U.S. cities are doing.

Summary of Topline Findings

Using the Los Angeles Times estimated figure, a 25 seat council funded at the current rate of $2.1 million per district would cost the city $52.5 million each year.[1] $52.5 million represents 0.404% of the current overall city budget. Under these estimates, the expansion would cost the city an additional $21 million. If we use the City of LA's open budget 2024 data, city council expansion to 25 seats would cost the city $63 million, which would represent 0.48% of the current $13 billion budget.[2] Therefore, the cost of city council expansion under either figure represents less than half of a percentage point of the overall city budget.

Other large U.S. cities, such as Philadelphia, Chicago, Houston, and San Antonio, are allocating a similar percentage of their city's overall budget to governance—less than half of a percent.

Background & Information

1. Los Angeles City Council current funding structure:

Mayor Bass signed the City Council approved $13 billion budget for the 2023-2024 fiscal year. LA's 2023-24 $13 billion budget represents a $1.31 billion, or 11%, increase, from the prior fiscal year's budget. According to the Los Angeles Times, the city allocates about $31.5 million to the council, or $2.1 million for each district, which is mainly to fund staffing. This means that currently, 0.242% of the $13 billion overall city budget is allocated to the council.

Using the Los Angeles Times figure of $2.1 million allocated to each district, a 25-seat council scenario would cost the City $52.5 million each year. This $52.5M figure would represent approximately 0.404% of the current $13B budget, meaning a council expansion still represents less than 1% of the overall budget allocated to governance. This figure is corroborated by Fair RepLA's research, which shows funding for a 25 seat council at the current rate would still constitute less than half of a percentage of the city's overall budget.

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[1] Wharton, D., & Bhattacharyya, A. (2023, October 2). *If L.A. adds city council seats, how would it work? These charts show the possibilities*. Los Angeles Times. https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2023-10-02/los-angeles-city-council-expansion

[2] *La City Open Budget*. Los Angeles | Open Budget. (n.d.). https://openbudget.lacity.org/#!/year/2024/operating/0/department_name/Council/0/program_name?vis=barChart

The City of Los Angeles' self reported open budget data reflects a slightly different figure. The open budget portal indicates the City Council received $37.8 million in 2024, which would mean that approximately $2.5 million is allocated to each district. This $37.8 million represents 0.29% of the current overall budget.

2. How other large U.S. cities' budgets compare:

Similar to LA, there is not a single other large US city that is spending a full percentage point of their overall budget towards funding their City Council. If the Los Angeles City Council was expanded to 25 seats, the funding would be most similar to the percentages allocated by San Antonio and Philadelphia to local governance.

EDITABLE Canva illustration

US Large City Budget Comparison

Money Spent on City Council by City ($ and %)

CITY NAME	CITY & COUNCIL SIZE	$ ALLOCATED	% ALLOCATED	LINK TO BUDGET
Los Angeles	15 Council members 3.8M population $13B	$37.8M $2.5M per district	0.29%	FY 2023-24 Budget
Los Angeles (under council expansion)	25 Council members 3.8M population	At current rate of funding ($2.5M each), the City would allocate $63M	0.48% (2023-24 budget)	Open Budget Tool
Chicago	50 Council members 2.7M population $16.6B	$29M (2024 recommend.) $550,000 per member	0.175%	2024 recommendations
Philadelphia	17 Council members 1.6M population $6.2B	$21.8M (2023) $1.28M each	0.39% of $5.6B 2023 budget	FY 2023 Budget
San Antonio	10 Council members 1.45M population $3.7B	$15M $1.5M each	0.41%	2024 Adopted Budget
Houston	16 Council members 2.3M population $7.7B	$15M $1.94M per member	0.194%	2024 Budget Tool