



Michael Macor / The Chronicle

Savannah Harris, 16, plays drums at the Oaktown Jazz Workshop run by Khalil Shaheed (center, with trumpet).

OAKLAND

Red ink paints harsh picture for arts grants

By **Matthai Kuruvila**
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Oakland prides itself on its arts scene, a place where hip-hop thrives, Burning Man installations are born and strapped artists actually make a living.

But city funds that help keep many of the city's artists and organizations afloat are shriveling. City administrators have proposed halving the money for arts grants to help Oakland bridge a \$42 million shortfall in its \$400 million budget.

"It would be devastating," said Khalil Shaheed, founder and director of Oaktown Jazz Work-

shops, which teaches jazz music and history to children ages 10 to 18. On a meager budget of \$150,000, the roughly \$10,000 Shaheed says he gets from the city is critical. "Everything we get is hand to mouth."

Roughly 85 percent of the city's budget, minus debt service, is devoted to police and fire, according to City Administrator Dan Lindheim. In addition, a variety of voter mandates compel the city to spend a set amount of money on things like libraries and children's programs.

That leaves only \$18 million to \$32 million in discretionary money, depending on whom you

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talk to.

There's so little undedicated money left, City Council President Jane Brunner said, that anything the city cuts will now touch something voters are passionate about, like libraries, senior programs and the arts.

Cutting police funding when crime rates have been steadily decreasing for the last 15 months is not tenable to many city leaders.

"Crime in Oakland is finally going down," she said. "It's not the time to cut police."

Under the proposed budget, arts grants would be cut by 50 percent, leaving around \$490,000. City Council staff budgets, by contrast, would be cut by 15 percent.

Councilman Ignacio De La Fuente has proposed restoring the arts funds by using \$150,000 in billboard revenue and saving \$384,000 in rent money by moving a public works office into a city property.



Michael Macor / The Chronicle

Evan Pizzichillo, 16, plays trumpet with Khalil Shaheed (left), who runs the Oaktown Jazz Workshop.

"One thing we cannot do is just dismantle everything and cut every single department to the bone," said De La Fuente, adding that police and fire cannot remain sacred cows. "We cannot just cut arts and libraries and not touch police."

More than 580,000 people — including 7,195 public school students — attended activities funded by this year's arts grant budget of \$974,647. The money provided for more than 19,000 events.

Grants have gone to organizations like the Creative Growth Center, which received \$44,221 to give studio arts training to adults with developmental, physical and emotional disabilities.

They've also funded projects by individual artists with grants of \$4,999 or less.

Favianna Rodriguez received \$4,999 to create posters based on the stories of immigrants she interviewed in her Fruitvale neighborhood. They were dis-

played in galleries and nonprofits in Oakland and also at MACLA, a contemporary Chicano art gallery in San Jose.

"The art became a way to humanize and give dignity to the story of immigrants," said Rodriguez. The grant "allows artists like myself to develop cultural projects that really engage the community."

Like many other artists, Rodriguez questions the logic of treating police budgets as sacrosanct. She said arts programs keep youth away from more destructive paths.

Rodriguez, 32, said she is an artist because of Oakland's nonprofit and city-subsidized arts programs, which she was introduced to as a kindergartner.

"When you're cutting the arts," she said, "it's equivalent to cutting away services that help critical thinking."

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