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# Community Involvement Committee

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To: Chair Jessica Vega Pederson and Board of County Commissioners

(6 pages)

From: Community Involvement Committee

Date: May 20, 2025

Subject: Infrastructure Subcommittee 2025 Recommendations

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## Background and Process

### **What is the topic and why did the Community Involvement Committee (CIC) choose this topic?**

The Community Involvement Committee (CIC) subcommittee chose to focus on strengthening resources and infrastructure for Multnomah County staff to improve community engagement capacity and processes within the county. This involves developing clear communication, feedback, training, education and evaluation mechanisms to ensure effective community involvement in county decision-making. It includes more clearly defining the role, responsibilities, and scope of the Office of Community Involvement (OCI), increasing its resources and capacity.

The CIC subcommittee chose to focus on the topic of strengthening County infrastructure for community engagement because of the need for more structured, coordinated, and meaningful engagement between the county government and the community. By improving communication and feedback loops, clarifying OCI's mission and duties, and increasing its capacity to train and support County staff and volunteers, the CIC aims to increase county resources and preparedness for community participation and to ensure that community voices are heard and considered in decisions that affect them.

### **Process:**

This subcommittee met eight (8) times between October 2024 and May 2025 to hear from county staff to better understand how County Departments and staff involve community members in County decision making. Together we:

1. Reviewed past work to build the infrastructure for community involvement and engagement, including:
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- a. Multnomah County Code Chapter 25, which specifies the roles of the OCI and the CIC
  - b. Resolution 2021-036
  - c. 2020-2024 CIC recommendations
2. Interviewed former Commissioners, OCI Chairs, and Community Engagement Leads for County Departments currently doing broad and diverse community engagement.

The subcommittee met with:

- Staff from the Office of Sustainability and the Joint Office of Homeless Services (JOHS) who presented robust and successful community engagement practices related to different programs to the CIC over the last year.
- Former Commissioner Lori Stegmann, D4
- Chair staff Stephen Herrera, Senior Policy Advisor for Community Involvement
- Former OCI Directors Dani Bernstein and JR Lilly
- Current OCI Director Amara Pérez

## Findings:

1. Multnomah County has some mechanisms in place for community engagement, and could improve opportunities for broad and diverse voices to be involved in county plans and decisions in a more equitable way.
  - a. Mechanisms in place include community advisory groups consisting of volunteers willing to donate a significant amount of time. Advisory groups also require a significant investment of staff time and resources to function well, and need to be properly resourced.
  - b. County Departments and staff engage community partners and residents on plans and decisions, however these practices and the training and capacity to engage varies significantly by department.
  - c. Equitable engagement opportunities for broad and diverse voices to be heard on plans and decisions can be improved.
2. The Office of Community Involvement is uniquely positioned to both support community advisory groups as well as department staff as a hub for community engagement resources and support.
  - a. OCI is currently limited by a lack of clear articulation of its role and responsibilities in Multnomah County Code Chapter 25, a lack of resources to fulfill its role and responsibilities supporting community advisory bodies, and a lack of shared understanding of how it can support decision makers across and staff county departments.

## Recommendations:

In light of the findings, our subcommittee offers three recommendations for the County Board of Commissioners to implement and four recommendations for the Office of

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**Subcommittee members:** Pau Thang (co-chair), Jen Mair (co-chair), Renai Bell, Brian Outlaw, Lung Wah Lazum **Staff:** KellyAnn Cameron

Community Involvement to implement. All seven recommendations are devised to advance effective and meaningful community engagement across Multnomah County Departments.

**1. Update Multnomah County Code Chapter 25 to clarify OCI's role and responsibilities.**

- Update Multnomah County Code Chapter 25 (§ 25.820) describing the duties of the Office of Community Involvement to reflect the current duties of supporting CBACs (as well as the CIC) and provide OCI the staff and resources to do so.

**2. Increase OCI's Capacity to support the Community Involvement Committee (CIC) and Community Budget Advisory Committee (CBAC) programs, as well as their capacity to support County staff practicing community engagement.**

- **Staffing:** Prioritize staffing for OCI to meet its responsibilities. Staff should be equipped to manage training and support for both community advisory groups and county department community engagement initiatives.
- **Capacity Building:** Support OCI to develop training resources and infrastructure to support staff across county departments. This could include community recruitment, education, and engagement tools, the development of engagement standards and frameworks, and support and resources for community workshops and other engagement activities.
- **Liaison Role:** Assign liaisons within OCI to work closely with Board members and county departments to understand and support their community engagement efforts. This both ensures alignment and streamlines resources across departments.

**3. Commit financial resources to OCI to meaningfully support consistent community engagement in Multnomah County** through proper staffing, developing and implementing frameworks, and funding the appropriate tools and technologies.

**These 3 actions taken by the board would enable the Office of Community Involvement (in partnership with other departments as relevant) to implement the following four recommendations:**

**1. Clearly articulate the Mission, Values, Purpose, and Duties of OCI**

- **Mission & Purpose:** Clearly articulate the mission, values, and purpose of OCI to ensure consistent understanding both internally (county personnel) and externally (community and advisory boards).
- **Role Clarity:** Define the scope of OCI's duties, powers, and authority, distinguishing between its role as a **centralized hub** and as a **support/consultant** for other County departments.
  - **Central Hub:** OCI serves as a guiding body for community engagement, ensuring County departments are resourced to follow best practices in public participation. OCI supports onboarding, education, and coordination of advisory bodies as well as county staff who do the same.
  - **Consultative Role:** OCI provides tailored strategies, tools, and support to departments on community engagement initiatives. OCI supports county

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and community vision and future priorities and is a resource for deliberating significant policies.

## **2. Develop and Embed Community Engagement Standards and Best Practices**

- **Establish Standards:** Encourage departments to develop clear, standardized community engagement plans with measurable outcomes (also called for in the 2021 Resolution and previous CIC recommendations).
  - OCI can help define and support these standards, using well established frameworks like International Association for Public Participation (IAP2).
  - OCI can help departments develop community engagement plans and strategies, and provide resources to execute plans effectively.
- **Community Involvement Framework:** Establish a clear, consistent framework for community involvement that includes engagement types (e.g., town halls, surveys, focus groups) and defines expectations for involvement in decision-making.
- **Evaluation Metrics:** Create clear metrics to assess the success of community engagement activities, both for OCI and the departments it supports. Define measurable goals such as public participation rates, satisfaction levels, and impact on decision-making.

## **3. Develop Community Engagement Infrastructure and Resources for Advisory Boards and Staff**

- **Offer Training and Education for Engagement:** Offer training for community volunteers, advisory bodies, partners, and county employees on the County's engagement processes and how to engage effectively, providing tools such as guides and checklists for various community involvement activities.
- **Develop Resources for Education and Engagement:** Develop training materials, guides, and templates for department staff and advisory bodies to facilitate structured and meaningful engagement.

## **4. Build Strong Communication Channels and Tools**

- **Centralized Information Hub:** Develop a centralized platform or calendar of activities that communicates community engagement opportunities across the county. Include information on advisory body meetings, volunteer recruitment, and County initiatives.
- **Clear Reporting Tools:** Standardize reporting tools and templates to ensure that departments and advisory bodies provide consistent, transparent feedback on engagement activities.
- **Transparent Feedback Loops:** Develop a system where advisory bodies and community members can track the implementation of their recommendations, ensuring that their voices are heard and acted upon.
- **Annual/Periodic Evaluation:** Create an annual/periodic review process for community engagement work across county departments, assessing its success based on predefined goals, community feedback, and the effectiveness of engagement practices. Ensure that community engagement goals and activities align with the broader county vision and the needs of the community.

## Conclusion:

By implementing these recommendations, the county will improve community engagement processes, and create a more connected and informed community. This framework will provide the clarity, support, and accountability necessary to drive long-term success in community involvement.

## Backgrounds and Life Experiences of Subcommittee members:

**Pau Thang, subcommittee co-chair**, came as a refugee in 2009 and belongs to the Zomi community/ Community of Myanmar. He worked as an Asian Pacific Islander Youth Advocate at Immigrant & Refugee Community Organization (IRCO), connecting refugee families with resources for 2 years. Currently, he has been working as a Program Coordinator for 3 years. He is also serving as a Secretary at the Zomi Association of the United States, focusing on uplifting the voice of the Zomi community/ Communities of Myanmar living in Portland OR. *1st term ends 09/09/2024*

**Jen Mair, subcommittee co-chair**, grew up in Oregon and is a facilitator and community engagement practitioner who works with local, state, and federal agencies to collaborate together and engage community members on challenging planning and policy issues. She previously taught Communication Studies with a focus on fostering dialogue and deliberation around relevant and challenging topics. *1st term ends 8/17/2026*

**Renai Bell** works in the software and technology sector, currently leading the development of analytics and decision support tools to identify and implement high-impact river restoration projects at a local nonprofit. In addition, she volunteers as a math tutor with the Multnomah County Library, helping adults achieve their GEDs. She's passionate about applying her experience with technology and process improvement to increasing Multnomah County's capacity to engage and involve the community in decision making. *1st term ends 06/27/2027*

**Brian Outlaw** is the Executive Director of Portland Free Play, which provides opportunities for underserved youth to play in nature. He is also an Educational Assistant at elementary schools in Portland and facilitates youth BIPOC affinity groups. *1st term ends 6/23/2025*

**Lung Wah Lazum** is a Community Health Director of East County Community Health which is an initiative of Rockwood CDC. Lung Wah blends medical and management expertise, having earned a medical degree from the University of Medicine (1), Yangon, and an MBA from George Fox University. He was born and raised in Myanmar (formerly known as Burma) and moved to the US in 2019. His background includes supporting Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Myanmar's conflict-ridden regions, where he provided healthcare services and inspired healthy behaviors. This experience ignited his passion for community health, a journey he has continued in Portland. He is also a certified community health worker, medical interpreter for the Burmese community, and Community Engagement liaison for Asian communities. Lung Wah is a vital advocate for Health Equity and Health Promotion, notably in tobacco prevention and social determinants of health (SDOH) projects, in Multnomah County and Portland. *1st term ends 6/23/2025*

**Additional CIC members consulted on this advisory committee** (attended fewer than half of meetings): Brian Romer, Quay'Roene Matthews

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