



Office of Community Involvement



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## Central Community Budget Advisory Committee

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TO: Chair Jessica Vega Pederson and Board of County Commissioners (10) pages

FROM: Central Community Budget Advisory Committee (CCBAC)

DATE: April 17, 2026

SUBJECT: Central Community Budget Advisory Committee Report & Recommendations

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### **Executive Summary**

The Multnomah County Central Community Budget Advisory Committee (CCBAC) provides cross-departmental feedback on the County's budget and feedback on the CBAC system. Among our findings are recommendations for FY 26-27:

- We fully recognize that the County is struggling with repeated constraint budgets with cumulative cuts, significantly reducing service capacity even as demand for services continues to grow. However, solving a structural budget problem with year-after-year cuts is increasingly untenable as a solution. At the very least, the County should consider greater use of multi-year planning strategies to manage sustained budget reductions more effectively.
- An ongoing concern is the limited ability of the County to evaluate priorities across departments. Cross-cutting considerations lack visibility, adequate metrics, and an overall approach. Meanwhile, the County's internal cost "allocation" processes are not sufficiently transparent or accessible.
- Workforce challenges, including recruitment, retention, and workplace safety, are affecting service delivery across departments and should be addressed as a coordinated, countywide priority.
- While the County has begun integrating performance metrics and equity into budgeting, both efforts require greater consistency, specificity, depth, and practical application at the program level to meaningfully inform decisions.
- The planned centralization of internal functions presents opportunities for efficiency but will require careful implementation to avoid disruption and to ensure transparency.

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The CBAC system itself faces constraints from compressed timelines, limited early access to information, and annual turnover. Expanding CBACs to year-round engagement, improving onboarding and retention, and implementing modest standardization of operations would strengthen effectiveness across the system. The Central CBAC, in particular, could benefit from more year-to-year continuity, with members encouraged to serve multi-year overlapping terms.

## 1. Process

Under § 3.306 (B) of the Multnomah County Code, the Central Community Budget Advisory Committee (CCBAC) “is charged with providing feedback to the Chair, the Board and the public, that may cross departmental lines and affect one or more departments.” The CCBAC understands this charge to include not only feedback relating to the County’s budget, but also feedback relating to the operations of the County’s system of departmental CBACs, as established in § 3.300 – § 3.305. With members appointed through their Departmental CBACs, this CCBAC was established in January and has met online every other week to develop this recommendation letter.

## 2. Budgetary matters “that may cross departmental lines”

### A. The generalized problem of prioritization

The CCBAC’s charge “to provide feedback that may cross departmental lines” presumes an ability to have a good view of the relevant budget issues across departmental lines. The collection of transmittal letters from Department heads, and the collection of letters from departmental CBACs are rich sources of information for CCBAC, but the siloed nature of their organization demonstrates a fundamental weakness in the County’s budget process: very few budget-writing decision-makers have any cross-departmental view of program and budget needs, and the same goes for the public.

So while Department leaders (and departmental CBACs) are fairly well equipped to evaluate budget priorities *within* Departments, they are ill-equipped to evaluate relative priorities *across* Departments, leaving that difficult analysis to be done solely within the Budget Office and among the elected leadership.

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Moreover, this analysis is necessarily multi-dimensional. Budget priorities can be evaluated, for example, with a long-term or short-term lens, with a geographic lens, with an economic impact lens, a neighborhood impact lens, or through the lens of any number of vulnerable communities. The County's commitment to equity provides perhaps the most advanced example of cross-departmental budget prioritization, but even so, the County's equity analysis efforts appear to employ different metrics and methods for different departments and different programs.

Finally, complicating cross-departmental budget prioritization is the internal rate setting process to distribute costs of internal services. This process is, by definition, cross-departmental in impact, but there appears to be very little visibility into the process, or ability to control costs by Departments, much less CBACs. The DCHS CBAC expressed some confusion and frustration over how rates were calculated and what was being included. And, as noted in the DCA/DCM CBAC's letter, these rates are essentially fixed for the budget year in the fall, before most departmental CBACs are even organized.

## *B. Consecutive years of constrained budgets and the structural revenue-side problem*

For several years now, CBACs have been instructed as to the structural gap between lagging County revenues and increased County expenses. And for several years now, the County's response has been to broadly constrain the County budget across most, if not all, departments *and programs*. Moreover, there does not appear to be a lot of confidence that the structural gap will diminish in the immediate future. Solving the structural problem with cuts alone is increasingly untenable as a solution.

CCBAC's review of departmental CBAC recommendation letters found near universal concern for both the breadth and depth of the impacts in County programs caused by the constraints. Especially in the context of increasing needs in the County and the communities it serves.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Some examples from Departmental CBAC letters:

- DCHS "The FY'27 budget requires additional cuts at a time when services are increasingly in demand"
- Health - "community demand for health services continues to grow, particularly among populations already facing the greatest barriers to care"
- Health - "at a time when the need for equitable, responsive care has never been greater"

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More critically, multiple consecutive constraint budgets quite literally compound the impacts. Small cuts deemed tolerable for a single year can result in intolerable reductions in capacity and service when required three years in a row. As the DCS CBAC points out in their letter, “the cumulative impact of successive constraint years is an exponential reduction in service delivery.” The CCBAC worries that if Departments knew that full three years of difficult cuts would be necessary, perhaps different budget decisions may have been made earlier. While CCBAC isn’t recommending multi-year budgeting, we believe it would be wise to deploy multi-year financial planning strategies on programs thrown into an annual crisis when facing multiple years of cuts. The County’s rolling capital budget project planning is a specific example where multiple years of planning are made visible to the annual budget. Indeed, because the capital plan has some measure of cross-departmental multi-year clarity, it is unfortunately quite clear where the County’s funding for large projects is badly lacking: the animal shelter, the jail, a new elections facility, and more, currently have no financing and no prospects.

Finally, in Multnomah County, demand for County homeless, health and human services remains stubbornly high. As several departmental CBACs continue to recommend in one way or another, difficult budget years call for greater emphasis on resilience, prevention and upstream solutions.

## *C. Staffing and workforce issues are impacting service delivery*

The CCBAC’s review of departmental CBAC recommendations found that multiple county departments are struggling with maintaining the staffing and workforce necessary to deliver services in the constrained budget environment. But the issues are not all necessarily traceable to limited funds. Workplace security and safety, including psychological safety, remains a

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- DCJ - cuts will restrict the department's ability to respond to an "increased demand for services," specifically noting that community needs will likely exceed state forecasts "at a time when budgets and services are being reduced"
  - DCS - "the cumulative impact of successive constraint years is an exponential reduction in service delivery", "There is a limit to how much a department can cut without threatening the viability of the entire enterprise"
  - HSD - "closure of nine shelters (675 shelter units)" and "significant layoffs - not just at HSD but at numerous service providers"
  - DA - Current environment "means there aren't the resources to fund things that are truly important in terms of the value of human life"

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concern in the workforce, especially in public-facing positions. And recruitment and retention of qualified personnel in critical and high-turnover positions remains a challenge. The level of concern expressed across departments suggests that the workforce issues need to be elevated in priority and treated as a countywide problem to be solved, rather than leaving Departments to fend for themselves.

## *D. Accountability and transparency in budget prioritization is a work in progress*

As it is still in the early days of the County's new strategic plan, the application of metrics, outcomes, and performance measurement is still new to the County's budget development process. And the CCBAC recognizes that much work still needs to be done. But our review of Departmental CBAC letters confirms our initial impression that the current metrics are often not detailed, specific, or expansive enough to assist very much in budgeting yet.<sup>2</sup> At other times, the metrics may be detailed and specific but simply quantitative measures of work that don't give insight into real outcomes. The CCBAC supports continued improvement in the County's effort to refine and expand the use of strategic measures. Further, CCBAC suggests that a detailed annual review of the relevant metrics should be a precursor to the budget process in each Department (and Departmental CBACs should be participants in that review).

## *E. Equity as a core value needs consistency in theory and specificity in application*

CCBAC and the Departmental CBACs are uniformly supportive of the County's continued commitment to equity, and leading with racial equity, in all facets of County government. We were pleased to see that the new format for submitting program offers this year retained an equity statement component. But to advance the equity efforts, CCBAC suggests that the County should improve the consistency and program-level application of the equity lens in budgeting.

We acknowledge that this topic is worth more study than CCBAC had the time to do, but in review of departmental CBAC recommendations and by scanning program offers, the vast majority of equity statements fit into three main categories: (1) Equity and inclusion in the

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<sup>2</sup> For example, the DCA / DCM CBAC notes, "Unfortunately, the CBAC has no way of evaluating the severity of these cuts or the risks resulting from them, as indicators in the County's new Strategic Plan are insufficient for this purpose."

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workforce;<sup>3</sup> (2) Equitable access to services and spaces;<sup>4</sup> and (3) Embedding equity in systems and processes (including contracting).<sup>5</sup> It might be worth acknowledging these consistent categories and ask that program offers be more specific about the equity considerations within these categories.

## F. Planned centralization of internal functions will be complex and will require care

The CCBAC is aware that by next year, in FY28, the County will be implementing a substantial centralization of many internal functions, and positions, currently located in individual Departments. This centralization presents a good opportunity for consolidation and savings and deduplication of effort across County government. But the effort carries risks in properly delineating what may be centralized and what may need to remain in the Departments. And budgeting may become significantly complicated during the transition as FTEs transfer between departments on an uncertain schedule. CCBAC hopes that the County will engineer the transition so that efficiencies can be gained, but with transparency, clarity, and care for the workforce.

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<sup>3</sup> The DCHS CBAC emphasized that equity requires investing in the specific care of workers providing direct services to vulnerable groups. They pointed out that this workforce faces "a high rate of burnout and turnover," and argued that these staff "are not interchangeable" when it comes to serving marginalized communities" The Health Department CBAC provided a concrete example of workforce equity by defending the Community Health Worker Training Program, and specifically categorized it as a "legacy equity program" because it serves as a critical pipeline for "culturally responsive workforce development"

<sup>4</sup> The Non-D CBAC urged the County to move beyond vague commitments by providing a specific metric, "Nearly a quarter of the county's population is disabled;" to ensure equitable access, they explicitly recommended that all offices "provide PDFs and materials accessible" to blind, low-vision, deaf, and hard-of-hearing residents on all county websites. The DCS CBAC argued against eliminating the physical Voter Pamphlet, noting that a digital-only approach would have a "disproportionate impact on marginalized communities, including those with unreliable access to the internet, individuals who are homebound, and those experiencing homelessness"

<sup>5</sup> The DA CBAC suggested how equity must be embedded in the budget evaluation process itself, noting that their committee intentionally "centered who might go unrepresented or underrepresented in the data that was utilized to prioritize this budget."

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## 3. CBAC operations and effectiveness

### A. CBACs continue to struggle with the timeline for providing recommendations

As previous CBACs have noted, the timeline for providing input on the budget is extremely challenging for our all-volunteer limited-duration committees operating in a very limited window. On the one hand, we deeply appreciate the opportunity to provide input early in the Chair’s decision-making process, but on the other hand, the closely-held confidentiality of draft program offers and budget departmental requests, then followed by their instantaneous mass release, hinders the ability of CBACs to dive very deeply or effectively into the budget issues presented.

While the CBACs certainly understand the sensitivity of preliminary budgetary information, especially in difficult budget years, we also believe that CBAC effectiveness could be very much improved with a modicum of earlier transparency. CBACs don’t need final detailed budget numbers before being able to preliminarily discuss impacts of policy options or tradeoffs being considered.

The annual reorganizing of each CBAC and the steep annual learning curve for CBAC members makes the problem more difficult for CBACs that do not meet year round. With fall recruitment and onboarding for the CBACs, the “basic training” orientation to the departments and their divisions necessarily runs through the winter, but this is also when budgets are taking shape (behind the curtains) in the Departments. First year appointees to CBACs in particular find it difficult to contribute effectively.

**CCBAC recommends that the Departmental CBACs consider standardizing to a year round model.** This could allow a lower cadence of meetings, more potential for site visits, and a better learning curve and annual organizing portion of the process, providing both relief and an improved experience for volunteer members and staff alike. And it could allow CBACs the space to consider annual progress toward relevant departmental metrics and strategic outcomes, more runway in advance of the time-pressured budget deliberations in the spring, and generally, a fuller understanding of how the County’s budget actually works..

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## *B. Recruitment and onboarding for CBACs is better, with room for more improvement*

From the perspective of the CCBAC, it is clear that recruitment and population of the departmental CBACs is greatly improved this year. But it's also clear that several of the CBACs still struggle to fill their committees, maintain a quorum through the process, and contribute to our Central CBAC. We appreciate the ongoing efforts and commitment by the Office of Community Involvement to improvements, and we realize the task is not easy and the pipeline of potential CBAC members remains inconsistent and uncertain. It may take several recruitment cycles to achieve a reliable annual pool of applicants.

We also note that in-person onboarding of new CBAC members was also much improved this year and was deemed successful by participants. Nevertheless, challenges remain for new recruits in coming up to speed. The earlier in the cycle that the onboarding can occur, the more time can be available in the fall for departmental and divisional background presentations.

Relatedly, **retention of continuing CBAC members must also be a priority.** Continuity from one budget year to the next is important for CBAC members to fully understand County budget issues and decision-making. Also, because first-year CBAC members struggle to participate fully, it's important that they have the opportunity to use their hard-won institutional knowledge in subsequent years.

## *C. Some organizational standardization and structuring of CBACs could be helpful*

CCBAC notes with appreciation that the overall approach by County staff to the CBACs has been to allow the CBACs to be largely self-governing, and to let each CBAC choose its own leadership, set its own schedule and cadence, and decide how it will operate and make decisions. We agree with this general approach, as it protects the independence and democratic nature of the CBACs and empowers the community members. However, some of this open-ended empowerment leads to time spent in an annual reinvention of the wheel during initial (re)organizing meetings each fall.

In fact, CCBAC believes that some **simple standardization of some of the elements of operations and governance of the CBACs** would not be unwelcome. For example, a simple

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consistent set of common structures and rules of procedure for the CBACs could establish minimum standards and basic expectations without requiring re-deliberation in each committee at the beginning of each year. Standardization may also help the Office of Community Involvement with recruitment efforts and compatibility with other County committees. It should also be helpful to departmental staff for coordination and expectations. The [CBAC Policy Guide](#), as updated last fall, is a good framework for implementing standard practices more deeply.

## 4. The Role of the Central CBAC

### *A. The Chair and Board should feel free to ask CBACs for specific advice.*

Beyond the formal charge to provide feedback set forth in the Multnomah County Code, the CCBAC and departmental CBACs certainly hope the feedback they provide is both welcomed and useful to the identified recipients, namely “the Chair, the Board, and the public.” For feedback to be useful, it needs to be timely, well-informed, relevant and clear - and the current CBAC system does its very best under the circumstances to deliver.

Although the CBACs need to retain their prerogative and duty to provide fully independent feedback on topics of their own choosing, we would also suggest to the Chair and members of the Board, that **when there are particular topics, or budget issues of interest, they should, in fact, feel free to specifically solicit feedback from the appropriate CBACs at the start of the budget cycle.**

### *B. Continuous improvement of all CBACs should be an ongoing role for CCBAC*

With its representational membership and cross-departmental view, the CCBAC is a natural entity to provide advice and advocacy for improving the entire CBAC system – over the course of a budget cycle, but also from one cycle to the next. The CBACs and their department sponsors would benefit from CCBAC information-sharing and problem-solving to make the process more efficient and the experience better for all involved. However, continuous improvement requires a certain amount of continuity, and currently there is very little year-to-year CCBAC institutional knowledge being preserved. **The Board should consider making continuous improvement an express role for the CCBAC, either in code or by resolution. And the Board should consider**

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**allowing longer and overlapping terms for CCBAC membership that the code appears to limit to one year.**

## *C. Awareness and analysis of cross-departmental budgeting is a key role for CCBAC*

In this year's work, CCBAC made a concerted effort to look at cross-departmental issues, consistent with the charge given in the county code. By being somewhat methodical in our review of Departmental CBAC letters, it became clear that the CCBAC's role in looking across departments is indeed critically important. It turns out the work is a matter of issue-spotting, but also tracking chronic interdepartmental or overarching problems. Future CCBACs need to consider this a core responsibility each year.

## **5. Staff and technical support is key to CBAC success**

CCBAC and each of the departmental CBACs rely very much on the helpful guidance and assistance of County staff. The behind-the-scenes administrative work – arranging meetings, technology, meals, stipends, agendas, communications, and overall coordination – is recognized and acknowledged by each and every CBAC participant. Without it, the volunteer-based CBAC system simply would not function. In addition, Department leadership across the board has been generous with time and availability and patience as CBAC members do their work. We're thankful for the County's commitment to the CBAC system.

Very specifically to the CCBAC experience in this budget cycle, we would like to thank Amara Pérez for her superb facilitation and kind and professional guidance of our efforts. We deeply appreciate her commitment to the CBAC system and the community spirit at its core.

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