

CENTRAL COMMUNITY BUDGET ADVISORY COMMITTEE

To: Chair Jessica Vega Pederson and the Multnomah County Board of County Commissioners

From: Multnomah County Central Community Budget Advisory Committee (CBAC)

Subject: Central CBAC Report & Recommendations

Date submitted: April 25, 2024

Central CBAC Members

- Department of County Assets and Management: *No representation*
- Health Department: Rosalie Lee
- Multnomah County Library: Madison Riethman
- Joint Office of Homeless Services: Daniel DeMelo, *Chair*
- Non-Departmental: *No representation*
- Department of Community Services: Conrad Hulen
- Multnomah County Sheriff's Office: Corinne Frechette
- Department of County Human Services: *No representation*
- Multnomah County District Attorney: *No representation*
- Department of Community Justice: Tom Karawaki

Executive Summary

The Central Community Budget Advisory Committee (CCBAC) has encountered significant obstacles in effectively carrying out its mandate during the FY 2023-2024 and FY 2024-2025 budget cycles. These challenges include a lack of timely support from the Office of Community Involvement (OCI), inconsistent representation from departmental CBACs, and compressed timelines for reviewing budget proposals and submitting recommendations.

Key issues identified by the CCBAC include:

- Staff and community safety concerns across County departments
- The need for climate change preparedness, particularly in addressing health risks during extreme weather events
- Hiring and retention challenges, with a focus on ensuring qualified staff and addressing abusive behavior among leadership
- Lack of clarity regarding the impact of CBAC input on final budget decisions

The CCBAC recommends that the County:

1. Prioritize investments in sustainable, evidence-based programs that support staff and community health and safety
2. Implement recommendations from the Multnomah County Budget Process Audit, including engaging CBACs earlier in the process and providing transparency on actual expenditures
3. Extend CCBAC service terms and timelines to allow for adequate participation and review
4. Standardize departmental CBAC processes and improve communication pathways with OCI
5. Evaluate and address other limitations to CCBAC participation

By addressing these challenges and implementing the recommended changes, the County can enhance the effectiveness of the CCBAC and ensure that community input is meaningfully incorporated into the budget decision-making process.

Process

The Board of Commissioners is aware from [the April 23, 2023 report submitted by the Central CBAC](#) that, during the FY 2023-2024 budget cycle, the Central CBAC encountered significant obstacles that impeded its ability to effectively carry out its mandate. Unfortunately, these obstacles continued to occur during the 2023-2024 fiscal year and the FY 2024-2025 budget process. To provide context and detail on Central CBAC operations during this time, we have outlined processes and events from both the FY 2023-2024 and FY 2024-2025 budget cycles.

FY 2023-2024 budget cycle

In 2023, the Central CBAC (CCBAC) first convened on February 8th, 2023 without support from the Office of Community Involvement (OCI), despite repeated requests from the apparently sole member of the CCBAC for the "technical assistance and clerical support" mandated by Multnomah County Code (§ 3.306 (E)). Only after the conditionally-elected chair testified at a Board of Commissioners meeting on February 16, 2023 to implore Multnomah County to support its CCBAC as required by Multnomah County Code did OCI finally reach out to assist the committee's efforts.

On March 15, 2023, the CCBAC chair held a private meeting with the OCI director, during which they agreed to convene the CCBAC on March 29 at 6pm. However, OCI failed to provide timely communication or assistance in organizing the meeting, and the agreed-upon date passed without acknowledgement from OCI. Instead, on April 3rd, OCI announced an "informational" meeting to be held on April 5, giving representatives less than 48 hours' notice.

On April 12, 2023, CCBAC representatives met with County Chair Vega-Pederson. Each representative was instructed to ask the Chair a single question; however, this proved challenging since the group had not been given any prior opportunities for discussion or deliberation.

As the meeting unfolded, it became increasingly apparent that the representatives to the CCBAC had not been provided with accurate information from the County regarding their participation. The Department of County Assets and Management CBAC and Sheriff's Office CBAC sent multiple representatives, despite Multnomah County Code stipulating that each CBAC should select only one member (§ 3.306 (A)). Conversely, the Department of County Human Services CBAC, District

Attorney CBAC, and Department of Community Justice CBAC sent no representatives to the CCBAC. At least one representative disclosed that they were not selected in a public meeting by vote. This revelation posed a significant issue, as the committee could not determine with absolute certainty whether it had a quorum. Despite repeated requests, the County failed to provide the CCBAC with a comprehensive list of its membership. It is crucial to highlight that this appears to have been a substantial and long-standing error in practice: every CCBAC report submitted since 2019 has reflected the participation of multiple CCBAC representatives from at least one departmental CBAC.

2023-2024 fiscal year

Regrettably, these inconsistencies and compressed timelines persisted into the current fiscal year, further exacerbating the challenges faced by the CCBAC in fulfilling its mandate and responsibilities.

On June 15, 2023, the Multnomah County Chair released a June 13 letter addressed to CBAC members stating that “Over the summer I will be working with the Office of Community Involvement (OCI) and Department staff leads to make updates to our CBAC process for a better future experience. During this time, we will be asking all current and previous CBAC Members to offer insight to their experience and give feedback on needed changes. I believe together we can create a process we can all be proud of.” As far as this committee is aware, this did not occur.

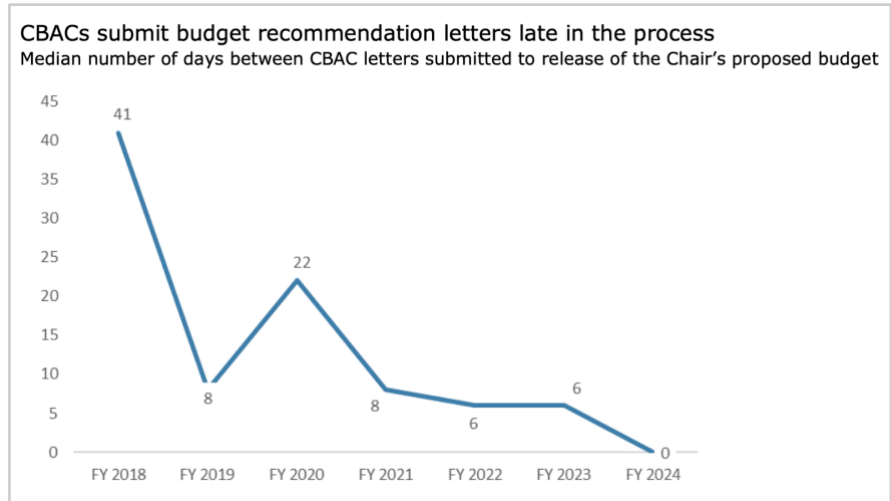
On August 9, 2023, the CCBAC convened at the Hollywood Library, once again without support from OCI. The committee invited each Commissioner to this meeting; Commissioners Meieran and Brim Edwards met with the Central CBAC to discuss the difficulties the committee was encountering in pursuing its mandate. CCBAC Chair Daniel DeMelo and Sheriff's Office CBAC representative Patrick Pangburn were in attendance.

On October 17, 2023, [Willamette Week reported](#) that the Sheriff's Office CBAC had dwindled to a single member, Patrick Pangburn, despite Multnomah County Code's requirement that each departmental CBAC "will be composed of seven members appointed by the Chair upon the approval of the board" (§ 3.302 (A)). However, in a subsequent discussion between Pangburn and the CCBAC chair, it was revealed that Pangburn's term, limited by Multnomah County Code to 3 calendar years (§ 3.302 (C)), had expired on December 5th, 2022. No County representative had informed Pangburn that his term had lapsed, and County staff continued to encourage and facilitate Pangburn's participation in both the Sheriff's CBAC and the CCBAC, despite the fact that Pangburn was no longer a member of any CBAC (*the CCBAC would like to note that Pangburn's participation was nevertheless extremely helpful and that responsibility for this lapse in lawful compliance with Multnomah County Code lies only with county administration*).

Shortly thereafter, County Auditor Jennifer McGuirk [released an audit](#) on Multnomah County's Budget Process. The audit notes that “In three of the last four years, CBACs submitted budget letters fewer than 10 days before release of the Chair's proposed budget. With this in mind, it is not

surprising that CBAC members surveyed by the Office of Community Involvement said they did not believe their input had an impact on the budget.”

The survey data mentioned in the Budget Process Audit was obtained by the CCBAC chair via public records request. The survey – conducted after the conclusion of the FY 2022-2023 budget cycle – revealed the following averaged responses to several recommendations (where a score of 1 represents strong disagreement and 5 represents strong agreement):



- “I would support changes to my CBAC's meeting schedule that would allow our committee to provide input earlier in the budget process.” – 4.41
- “I support changing the program timeline so CBACs submit a recommendation letter, centered on a set of priorities, to department and county leadership in January or early February.” – 4.14
- “It would be useful for the Chair to meet with each CBAC in January or early February, prior to her receiving program offers from departments and finalizing her executive budget.” – 4.30

Notably, the results of this survey were available to County administration well before the "pause" that forced the CCBAC to meet on a compressed schedule in 2023, and certainly prior to the current CCBAC process and budget cycle for FY 2024-2025. Despite this feedback, the County failed to take meaningful action to address the concerns raised by previous CCBAC members and failed to implement any recommendations from the Auditor's Budget Process Audit during this year's budget cycle.

2024-2025 budget cycle

On December 5, 2023, OCI announced [new guidelines for CBACs](#). These guidelines made explicit the County's preference for County staff to set meetings and agendas for CBACs, rather than their volunteer participants.

The release of these guidelines included a note about key dates in the FY 2024-2025 budget engagement process. Notably, despite the overwhelming desire from CBAC participants for earlier engagement in the budget process and the County Auditor's recommendation to the same effect,

departmental CBAC letters were once again due to OCI on the same date that the Chair would release her budget, leaving no time for the CCBAC to use these departmental CBAC letters in developing their recommendations.

Additionally, these guidelines noted that on February 12, 2024, OCI would convene the CCBAC. February 12, 2024 passed without a meeting of the CCBAC.

On April 2, 2024, the chair of the CCBAC inquired with OCI about the status of the CCBAC. In an exact replay of the prior year, on April 3, OCI responded, stating that "we just confirmed the dates with the Chair" and once again announced an April 5 "Info Session" meeting with less than 48 hours notice.

The CCBAC was first convened on April 11, 2024 to begin activities for the FY 2024-2025 budget cycle. We re-elected our chair, discussed and agreed upon the role of the CCBAC, and established our shared values of equity, compassion, and human dignity, which drive our input on the budget and County activities. The three (3) CCBAC members present for the full meeting then drafted an outline of this report.

In our discussion, we lamented the fact that the CCBAC was unable to support the work of individual departmental CBACs throughout the budget engagement process, and noted the severe limitations placed on our ability to complete our mandated objectives due to rushed and unclear communications from County conveners, a constricted timeline, and the absence of representation from 6 of the 10 departmental CBACs. Given these limitations, the CCBAC was unable to adequately fulfill the mandate to provide input on the budget in areas that cross one or more departments.

On April 18, 2024, the CCBAC finalized this report, with participation from 6 departmental CBAC representatives.

EMERGING ISSUES

Contributing CBAC members discussed two categories of emerging issues as part of the review process: 1) Issues addressed in multiple departmental CBAC budget proposals and reports, and 2) Issues with the CCBAC in trying to meet its objectives.

1. Issues addressed in multiple departmental CBAC budget proposals and reports

Staff and community safety remains a chief concern across County departments, especially within the context of policy changes at the state level. Departmental budgets and memos reflect this concern, as resources are allocated towards addressing health and safety issues through dedicated staffing, speciality contracts, and facilities maintenance and upgrades. In many cases, this comes in addition to new and existing programs that support staff and community members in receiving the upstream care and services they need. The CCBAC applauds departments in their focus on community and staff health and safety, and encourages the County to support this focus in its budget, while also recognizing that these increased costs come with the risk of losing other programs, staff, and activities valued by the community.

In addition to the focus on immediate health and safety concerns, the County must also prepare for the long-term impacts of climate change on our community. As extreme weather events become more frequent and intense, it is crucial that we invest in strategies to protect the health and well-being of our residents during both warm and cold weather. The Health Department should continue to develop and implement plans to mitigate the health risks associated with heat waves, such as expanding access to cooling centers and providing education on heat-related illnesses. Similarly, the Joint Office of Homeless Services (JOHS) should work to ensure that individuals experiencing homelessness have access to safe, warm shelter during cold weather events. All County departments must prioritize facilities maintenance to ensure all County facilities are prepared for any foreseeable climate-related issue. Unfortunately, some climate responses have been hindered by a lack of clear organizing for volunteer support during severe weather events. By proactively addressing the challenges posed by climate change, we can build a more resilient community that is better equipped to weather future crises. The CCBAC urges the County to prioritize funding for these climate change preparedness efforts, recognizing that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

We are dismayed by the apparent toleration of abusive behavior among leadership in multiple departments. It is deeply troubling to see a common thread emerge, where staff under investigation for misconduct appear to continue to have been employed or otherwise work with the County, as has been the case in multiple departments, including at [JOHS](#) and the [Health Department](#). This pattern suggests a systemic issue that must be addressed. The county has a responsibility to ensure a safe and healthy work environment for all employees, and that starts with holding leadership accountable for their actions. We strongly urge the County to take swift and decisive action to investigate and address any allegations of abusive behavior, and to implement policies and procedures that prioritize the well-being of staff. Failure to do so not only puts employees at risk, but also undermines the ability of departments to effectively serve the community. The CCBAC believes that investing in a positive and supportive workplace culture is essential for attracting and retaining talented staff, and ultimately for delivering high-quality services to our residents.

The CCBAC acknowledges the difficulties faced by various County departments in hiring and retaining staff. However, we strongly emphasize the importance of ensuring that all staff members are qualified for their positions and have earned the trust of the community, their colleagues, and volunteers. Competitive pay and positive work conditions play a crucial role in attracting and retaining talented employees. By prioritizing fair compensation and fostering a supportive work environment, the County can reduce turnover and maintain a skilled, experienced workforce. This is particularly important when it comes to trauma-informed training, as retention helps ensure that staff members are well-equipped to handle the complex challenges they face in their work. Moreover, focusing on retention is an effective strategy for combating burnout, which can have a detrimental impact on both staff well-being and the quality of services provided to the community. The CCBAC urges the County to invest in its workforce by offering competitive wages, promoting a healthy work-life balance, and providing ongoing professional development opportunities. By doing so, we can build a stable, committed team of public servants who are dedicated to meeting the needs of our residents.

2. Issues with the Central CBAC in trying to meet its objectives

The aim of the CCBAC is to review and discuss departmental budget proposals and CBAC memos, in order to provide feedback on the direction of the County budget and operations at large. While participating members agreed upon this central aim, the CCBACs ability to achieve it was severely hindered by lack of representation and significant time constraints.

With only 6 of the County's 10 departmental CBACs participating in this year's CCBAC report, discussion was limited to the perspectives and departmental expertise brought by these individuals. There are likely additional commonalities that would have been valuable to discuss, but were ultimately unable to be included in this report due in part to a lack of representation. Of those CCBAC representatives who were present, some were appointed late and with limited knowledge of the CCBACs role and objectives. Departmental CBAC processes and timelines varied greatly; for example, some departmental CBACs had already convened and submitted their memos, while others had not. This resulted in valuable time lost to first understanding these process differences in order to then talk through contents and commonalities.

Adding to the challenges faced by the CCBAC, multiple departmental CBACs reported a lack of clarity regarding the value and impact of their input. Volunteers across all County CBACs have invested countless hours in reviewing and providing feedback on budgetary matters, yet there is little clarity on how their efforts have influenced the final budget decisions. While it is understood that certain aspects of the budget are mandated and non-negotiable, CBACs have expressed a need for clearer guidance on which areas of spending are more discretionary and open to their input. This opacity in the process has left many CBAC members questioning the true purpose and efficacy of their involvement. It is disheartening to consider that the collective efforts of over 70 dedicated volunteers may have had minimal tangible impact on the budget beyond the mere fact that it has undergone the CBAC review process. The County must take steps to provide greater transparency and clear communication regarding the role and influence of CBACs in the budgetary decision-making process. Failing to do so risks undermining the very purpose of these advisory bodies and diminishing the trust and engagement of the volunteers and the community writ large who generously contribute their time and expertise.

This CCBAC was ultimately given seven days to complete its objectives: convene, review and discuss the ten departmental budgets and memos, and submit a final CCBAC report. This amount of time is greatly insufficient, particularly when combined with the participation and process challenges discussed above.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Prioritize aspects of each program offer that address staff and community health and safety, and identify ways to support this without sacrificing core department services

The CCBAC applauds individual departments in their efforts to dedicate resources to ensuring staff and community health and safety, while also maintaining adequate funding for their core programs and activities. We request the County support departments in achieving this difficult balance, and

that the budget prioritizes investments in sustainable, evidence-based, upstream programs that support staff and community member health and safety and therefore reduce the need for individual departments to apply reactive and expensive temporary measures.

The CCBAC is encouraged by Chair Jessica Vega Pederson's support for a "One County" vision, and we support the de-siloing of departments and services within Multnomah County in order to support more efficient and cost-effective operations. In particular, we request an increase in collaboration and referral pathways between County departments, to best utilize each department's resources and expertise while limiting duplicative departmental spending.

2. Implement recommendations from the [Multnomah County Budget Process Audit](#), published October 2023

The Central CBAC requests timely implementation of the recommendations outlined in this audit to facilitate more effective CBAC operations. In particular:

- *"The central budget office and Chief Financial Officer should develop an ongoing process for all county departments to report to the Board of County Commissioners at least once each fiscal year to compare the adopted budget to actual expenditures at the program offer level":* Information on actual expenditures, particularly in relation to the budgets on which the CBACs are tasked with advising, is essential information to CBACs for providing informed budget feedback year over year.
- *"The Board of County Commissioners should develop a policy requiring departments to report to them when they intend to make expenditures in a way that that the Board defines as materially different than how they proposed to spend funds in program offers":* As highlighted above, CBACs cannot provide adequate input on program offers if they do not have data on how previous program offers aligned with actual spending.
- *"The Chair should direct the central budget office and departments to engage community budget advisory committees earlier in the budget process so their comments have more time to be addressed before the release of the Chair's proposed budget":* As has been demonstrated over multiple fiscal years, departmental and central CBACs cannot adequately carry out their objectives within the current time constraints (see item 3 below).

3. Extend CCBAC service terms and timelines

We reiterate previous support and recommendations for a year-round CCBAC, with members appointed with ample time to understand and participate in CCBAC operations and in a manner consistent with requirements per Multnomah County Code. We recommend Central CBAC members be appointed no less than six (6) months prior to the submission due date of the Central CBAC report, which should be set for no less than one (1) month prior to the release of the Chair's proposed budget. We also recommend that the CCBAC, in collaboration with OCI, establish procedures in which new departmental CBAC representatives are appointed, in the event of continued non-participation by the initially appointed representative.

The CCBAC appreciates the effort to implement leadership involvement early in the CBAC process, and found the presence of County commissioners at CBAC events prior to budget review

and report development was helpful. We request that involvement by the County Commission and OCI be incorporated year round, not just in the weeks approaching the release of the proposed budget.

4. Standardize Departmental CBAC processes

While the Central CBAC recognizes the importance for each departmental CBAC to maintain its own review processes and operations, the lack of alignment on core activities and timelines between departmental CBACs placed severe constraints on the CCBAC's ability to achieve its aims.

We advise that departmental CBACs meet year-round, and elect their CCBAC representative no less than six (6) month's prior to the submission due date of the CCBAC report. Departmental CBACs should be required to submit their departmental memos no less than six (6) weeks prior to the release of the Chair's proposed budget, in order to be effectively used by the CCBAC in preparing its report.

Each departmental CBAC that participated in a site visit as part of their review process found this very valuable; we recommend all departmental CBACs incorporate this as standard practice.

All participating departmental CBAC representatives reported rushed and unclear communication on the CCBAC appointment process, as well as a lack of information about the roles and responsibilities of CCBAC representatives. We recommend OCI establish stronger communication pathways with departmental CBACs in order to ensure stronger engagement in CCBAC operations.

The CCBAC also recommends that the County's de-siloing effort extend beyond County departments, with collaboration between Portland and Gresham Budget Advisory Committees (BACs) and County departmental CBACs with similar functions (for example, the Sheriff's Office CBAC should meet at least once with the Portland Police Bureau BAC). This would allow for greater alignment on County-wide aims, as well as operational best practice sharing.

5. Evaluate and address other limitations to Central CBAC participation

We have identified a lack of early engagement, inconsistent and unclear communications, and an extremely condensed timeline for participation as major contributors to the lack of CCBAC participation by departmental CBAC representatives; however, we request OCI assess and respond to other factors that may be contributing to poor participation.