

Chair Jessica Vega Pederson

Prepared Budget Remarks

June 6, 2024

I want to close today's resolution with a question.

Every year we get to ask the question: What do we want our community to be?

I believe we want a County where people both feel safe and are safe.

Where our neighbors are housed.

Where people in crisis and out have access to the treatment and support that they need to be healthy and thrive.

Where our kids have joyful preschool experiences and our schools unite our neighborhoods.

Where we have a strong county government focused on impacting our community and continuously improving our work and connections

This budget supports that vision, and this Board's commitment, to getting there.

And it responds directly to our community's call.

Today we've finalized this blueprint and though it's been a long day – at the end of an even longer process – it has clearly demonstrated how passionately this board and I feel about this community.

I'm proud that it represents our priorities, compromises, and challenging decisions we've made. I believe it reflects our community's needs as they have commented and shared over the last several months, and this board has deliberated during 60+ hours of public work sessions.

Through these weeks, I have been grateful for the community's input and investment – of time and of energy. Our budget is stronger when we hear from you. And together, through this work, I know we have a way forward that capitalizes on our shared strengths.

Living conditions for people on the street are intolerable. There is no bigger or tougher problem than making sure thousands of our community members have a pathway off the streets. And this budget shows that we are up to the challenge.

We're not letting a single shelter bed close. We're creating a stronger shelter system that meets people where they are, all across our county. We are moving more people into housing and strengthening supports so they can stay housed, and we are investing in behavioral health.

This budget funds the work of the Homeless Response Action Plan, which provides an incredible opportunity for our community. It builds a system to address the needs of people pushed into homelessness, preventing homelessness, coordinating behavioral health and mental health interventions, and adding hundreds of shelter and recovery beds to provide safety off the street.

This plan is an ambitious, outcomes-focused, iterative approach to addressing, resolving and preventing homelessness. Its focused goals and outcomes create a coordinated approach across systems and jurisdictions. It includes accountability and measures key metrics to assess the effectiveness of the work through better data collection and tracking, allowing for continuous improvement of our systems.

This plan contains clear goals: hundreds more shelter beds and recovery beds, more people returning to permanent housing from shelter and tents, and our ongoing work of reducing persistent racial disparities. It centers aligning and resourcing our behavioral health system, including the creation of a 24-hour drop-off receiving, deflection, and sobering center. In addressing the inflows into homelessness, it requires that people do not exit corrections, foster care, or treatment into homelessness; creates affordable homes so we can keep people housed; and prioritizes preventing our neighbors from falling into homelessness in the first place.

We've made additional investments in East County, including the development of a strategic action plan to bring more services additional case management to housing placement in the city of Gresham and outreach and rent assistance in the cities of Fairview, Wood Village and Troutdale – all of which complements an expansion in East County homelessness services.

This budget must, and does, support next steps for residents looking for support around substance abuse or behavioral health challenges.

Investments will help us implement a deflection program by September 1 as we also appropriate \$26.9 million in funding for the development of a 24/7 drop off and receiving center that includes sobering services.

Our work from here will include a Sobering Services Leadership Team to provide oversight and direction to aid in the coordination of systems to address the region's severe drug crisis. These funds will also support tracking and assessment of the impacts of House Bill 4002 on the community.

We are also putting additional dollars in our amended budget to fund expansion of the Downtown Addiction Services Pilot and Behavioral Health System transformation in the form of a limited-duration behavioral health strategic data analyst in the health department to convene, coordinate and support the finalization of a Comprehensive Local Plan (CLP) for mental health.

Living in a community that feels safe and connected is our goal. Multnomah County is deeply committed to upstream prevention programs, interventions, family stabilization efforts and resource-building to break the cycles of violence.

My executive budget fully funded our jails, adult parole and probation and specialty courts. It put aside dollars for new staff positions in Corrections Health to increase oversight of care coordination for adults in custody.

The budget we pass today digs deeper to make 3 new FTE available to the Sheriff in human resources to build new departmental efficiencies and adds an additional deputy for the gun dispossession unit.

We've also added capacity to the District Attorney's office to increase resources for Access Attorney and Victim Assistance programs at the same time that we continue our investment in successful retail and car theft teams to take criminals perpetrating these crimes off the street for good.

I appreciate this board's commitment and believe in this continued prioritization of the Sheriff and DA's teams in pursuit of a stronger, safer community.

Our upstream investments must continue to help us keep tomorrow's safety net strong by preventing our community from facing challenges in the first place.

Preschool for All is the ultimate upstream investment. Kids who attend preschool are much more likely to graduate from college and go on to fulfilling careers.

Many of the biggest challenges we face as a community must be solved by paying it forward to the future we believe is possible.

Our investments in Preschool for All this year meet immediate needs as we grow to full universality in 2030, including \$17 million in our Facilities Fund to strengthen or expand existing facilities or open new facilities to serve more families.

We will continue to utilize a dedicated savings strategy to ensure that this program will have the resources it needs to succeed as I work to convene a Technical Advisory Group to provide recommendations on how best to ensure the program remains successful and on-track.

Multnomah County often works on behalf of the animals who have lost their home, are in unsafe conditions or have had the most difficult challenges in their lives.

Which is why we're continuing to address structural challenges and historic underinvestment with emergency medical and spay and neutering services and three additional field services officers.

Fair, safe and free elections in this year's presidential race, charter reform and ranked-choice voting have the additional funding in this budget for voter education, outreach and supervision of new systems.

We've also included new funding to explore a small donor elections program to reduce barriers for everyday people to run for elected office. This investment has been enhanced by Commissioner Beason to include a Public Financing Implementation Advisory Committee to examine potential governance structures, look at financing options, scope technology and staffing and begin implementation.

We know valuing the health and stability of young people and families has profound intergenerational impacts.

This budget maintains funding for Nurse Family Partnerships as the program explores restructuring of home visiting programs, increased community engagement and the development of a financially sustainable model for expansion.

Given the disproportionate impacts of housing instability, addiction, and health disparities on Native populations, the restoration of funding for the Future Generations Collaborative – the first and only Native American and Alaska Native program funded by our Public Health division – is of great consequence. Stability for this partner includes a community health worker to provide programming on-site at Barbie’s Village, a Native-specific transitional housing tiny village that centers Indigenous values.

We heard from several advocates asking us to increase investment in the Community Healing Initiative (CHI) Early Intervention and Prevention Program and responded with an increase and request that the Department of Community Justice develop a bridge for this program to increase effectiveness and utilization.

We believe in short-term humanitarian transition services for asylum-seekers – and you do too. Of the feedback we heard from the community, nearly 40 of you spoke to needed investment in this area.

As we end the process for this year, we look ahead to improvements for next year – especially around creating a budget process that truly encourages and engages community input, from the work of the Community Budget Advisory Committees to the tools we use across departments to create our budget.

During budget worksessions, we’ve reflected on the limitations of the program offer system and a need for meaningful metrics for the important work of our departments.

I’ve directed the Central Budget Office to begin proactive research and planning to consider Strategic Budgeting starting in FY26. I look forward to taking this up in greater depth and in consultation with this Board.

This will be important work with many possible upsides, helping the development of more meaningful Key Performance Indicators linked to strategic initiatives rather than the outputs and outcomes currently included in year-over-year program offers.

I’m also grateful for Commissioner Beason’s budget note about our Office of Community Involvement’s work to support a Community Budget Advisory Committee process that better aligns with our needs. Currently, all of the CBACs, programmatic committees and focus groups that aid departments in collecting

critical feedback operate in a constrained information environment due to Oregon budget laws – and we must work to make revisions that reverse this trend.

Our Community Involvement Committee will also recommend updates to the process, including the CBAC program. Beyond this, we look forward to a briefing this summer that provides a clear and concise CBAC calendar tracking major budget milestones and recommends changes to communicate better with these critical volunteers who bring so much access to the community through their involvement.

One thing that has been a consistent theme throughout this process is the hard work of many people who deserve genuine thanks and appreciation as we close the books on the FY25 budgeting process.

I want to thank my colleagues on the Board for your engagement, partnership and collaboration in developing a final budget. We've all worked to make tough trade-offs, Commissioner Beason while attending to a family health crisis and Commissioners Meieran and Stegmann for the last time as Multnomah County Commissioners. Each of us has shown leadership and stamina.

Thanks to your Chiefs of Staff – Adam, Sara, Eric and Becca – and staff members, for the care you've taken with this process and getting us to the finish line. You have been present for 21 budget work sessions, three community budget hearings and what adds up to 60+ hours of public forums to finalize this budget – and I know for every hour you spent in public sessions, there were many hours outside of them. Every second of that work has been critical to where we are today.

I am so appreciative of the staff in every department who worked so diligently to speak to the investments we're making today in your areas of expertise. I believe in you and your work to make the programs we invest in today successful and impactful for the people we serve. This was a huge lift and you undertook it with great intention. I know the impacts will be equally great.

Many thanks to Board Clerk Marina Hovious and Deputy Board Clerk Taja Nelson for dozens of hours making sure our meetings and public hearings have gone smoothly and that we've had the materials we've needed to conduct budgetary business.

Thank you to the District Attorney Schmidt, Sheriff Morissey-O'Donnell and Auditor McGuirk for the careful stewardship of your budgets and your partnership in finalizing our overall budget in recent weeks.

I am very grateful for the good work of departmental Community Budget Advisory Committees. Many volunteer hours go into engaging with departmental budgets and our budget would not be possible without your recommendations. You have my commitment that we'll be coming to you earlier in FY26 with a process that will better support your work and collaboration.

Thank you to Coalition of Communities of Color and Executive Director Marcus Mundy for helping us again this year to co-host our public budget hearings. Thanks also to dozens and dozens of community-based organizations who provided thoughts and priorities and who work alongside us every day of the year.

Thank you to every single individual who attended our budget town hall, took our budget survey, showed up to testify, reached out to make sure your voice was heard and invested time and energy in this process. You make our county a better place.

None of this work would be possible – conceivable, even – without our extremely talented budget office: Director Christian Elkin, Economist Jeff Renfro and staff who worked long hours to prep materials, adjust spreadsheets, develop forecasts, run tallies, connect the dots and make this process as smooth as possible. Thank you for your humor and good grace every step of the way.

Thank you to my staff for jumping into this process with your hearts and minds. Thank you policy staff Hayden Miller, Renee Huizinga, Garet Prior, Alicia Temple, Heather Lyons, Stephan Herrera and former policy staffers Leah Drubin, April Rohmann and Raff Timarchi. Thank you to communications advisor Sara Guest, constituent relations liaison Ruby Gonzales and my executive assistant and scheduler Diana Gabaldon.

Special thanks to my Chief of Staff Jenny Smith, Deputy Chief of Staff Stacy Borke and Budget Director Tabitha Jensen for your long, productive hours and the many ways you've kept communication flowing between our office and our partners. I am grateful for you every day.

I am proud of the work we have done this year to truly consider how to make the most impact for the most people and I look forward to collaborating with each of you as we embark on this next year of progress for Multnomah County. Thank you.

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