

**District 1 Commissioner Sharon Meieran**  
**Prepared remarks FY 2025 Budget**  
**June 6, 2024**

After all I've been saying and doing the past few years, it should be no surprise that I begin today by observing that Multnomah County is badly flailing without a plan. The budget approved by this board is proof that once again we have failed to make the fundamental choices necessary to drive change or to measure the results of our ever-increasing investments.

Given the absence of an actual plan, the budget should be the closest thing we have to a clear mapping of priorities. But far from establishing focus, this budget obscures it.

It hides investments of hundreds of millions of dollars beneath a bunch of mediocre rhetoric and buzzwords. It contains hundreds of pages, each describing another program that doesn't tie into a larger purpose, plan or vision.

So-called "performance indicators" do not correlate in any way with actual performance, so we can't learn over time whether we're investing in a way that tells us if what we're doing works, or how we might achieve better results. There is no data to tell us where we've been or to shine a light on where we are going, so next year we won't know if we got anywhere.

Of course that assumes anyone in county leadership is responsible for following up to see if we did or didn't do what we said. Each year it's like a brand new game of charades, and the public - especially those who are most vulnerable, marginalized and disenfranchised- lose.

The real tragedy is that our actions – or rather, inactions – impact real human beings every day. PLANS are supposed to come before budgets. And no credible plan has ever been presented to this board by county leadership. For any of the core work of the county in mental health, addictions, corrections, public health, or housing.

Politically, this is a game. Morally, it's shameful.

I've been forced to concede that business at the county is not about smart plans or policies. Unfortunately, at the county, the concept of leadership itself is threatening to those more dedicated to avoiding blame instead of making a difference.

This is the final budget in my 8 years of service. I'm leaving with a degree of sadness and outrage I never would have thought possible when I first ran for office. Because when I started I naively thought failure would be a matter of not having enough funding to reach our goals and help those most vulnerable.

But the truth is much more pernicious.

I've realized that we're swimming - or more accurately, drowning - in money. We have more money in Multnomah County than we can effectively waste, and given our history of wasting resources, that's a helluva indictment.

What's worse are the excuses I hear. The wallowing in a mixture of arrogance and self-pity as we tell ourselves that we of course can't do better until we solve the social issues of our times. That it's other jurisdictions' fault. That we somehow STILL don't have enough money.

That's all bullshit. If we actually planned in advance what we should do with hundreds of millions of dollars per year dedicated to street homelessness - we could have transformed this community, and saved countless lives already. The people who sent us here, and the people struggling on the street right now ALL deserve so much better!

What I see in this sad excuse for a budget are the missed opportunities that should plague ALL of us as we go to bed tonight with a roof over our heads.

If this budget is not a prism from which we can see progress, it should at least be a mirror through which we see failure.

I want to say directly to all the service providers and volunteers out there doing the front line work every day - this budget represents the failure of the county as a government, not the failure of the people the county employs. There are an incredible number of people out there even as I speak dedicated to helping others and they are amazing human beings. They are being failed by their leadership who does not seem to understand that we have an obligation to outline and implement a coherent plan, not to try to obscure accountability and hide failure.

After eight years, in the end I can only say this: I regret only that I have but one NO vote to give to my county.

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