



Office of Community Involvement



Department of Community Services CBAC Report

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

FROM: Department of Community Services Community Budget Advisory
Committee (DCS CBAC)

DATE: April 25, 2024

SUBJECT: Department of Community Services Community Budget Advisory
Committee Report & Recommendations

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The members of the DCS CBAC appreciate the opportunity to support the county budget process. Following a comprehensive review of Elections, Land Use Planning, Transportation, and Animal Services divisions' practices and needs, as well as those of the Director's Office, we identify six (6) priority, out-of-target program offers under two themes: Maintaining Trust in Elections and Restoring Trust in Animal Services. These address critical needs but are not exclusive. In our judgment, all work that DCS does is urgent and essential to our community. We expand on emerging concerns that factored into our prioritization decisions within this document.

PROCESS

This CBAC began meeting to prepare for this budget season in October, and thanks to the proactive help and preparation of DCS staff, we were able to get a full overview of the work, priorities, and budget requests of the Director's Office and each DCS division in time to inform this document. At presentations arranged by DCS staff, Directors explained the work of their divisions, rationales for their budget appeals, and future plans. In evaluating program offers we applied two criteria.

1. Prioritize funding for services that equitably benefit the broadest array of community members.
2. Prioritize funding for repair of structural issues in existing division operations so that expected services can be reliably provided without recurrent dependence on employees' crisis-level efforts.

CBAC members met for work sessions to rank and discuss the proposed budget items. There was also a follow-up meeting with Department staff to facilitate additional questions. We'd like to thank everyone involved for creating an atmosphere of transparency and collaboration.

Department of Community Services CBAC

BUDGET/PROGRAM OFFERS FEEDBACK

After reviewing all of the DCS program offers, we believe that the Chair and the Board should prioritize Elections and Animal Services operations support. Our core motivation is to maintain - or in the case of Animal Services, restore - a high level of service, which is essential to earning community trust (a critical priority for the County at this juncture).

In the case of Elections, Portland's transition to the new Ranked Choice Voting methodology poses an enormous challenge, and having the resources to prepare for and execute the election in a timely, transparent, and accurate manner will be key in setting the new system of government up for success. The Elections team is prepared, professional, and thoughtful, so we have high confidence that any resources dedicated will be deployed effectively.

For Animal Services, our goal is to help them obtain the resources they need to recover from previous mismanagement. When the County takes on the responsibility of caring for these animals, there should be no question about whether they are getting the care they need. We have been heartened to see the efforts that have gone into getting this critical County function back on track, and we want to make sure that progress continues.

DEPARTMENT BUDGET/PROGRAM OFFER RECOMMENDATIONS

Our specific recommendations for program offer prioritization are as follows:

1. Maintain Trust in Elections - Total: \$1,276,435
 - a. a. 90010B - Presidential Election
 - b. b. 90010D - Ranked Choice Voting (OTO)
 - c. c. 90009 - Charter Reform Rank Choice Voting
 - d. d. 90010C - Restore Elections Outreach and Operations

The Elections Division must both implement a new system of voting for both the County and the City of Portland and educate the public on how the new voting and vote-counting processes will work. Not only must the Division be able to effectively execute this work, but it needs to do so in a way that earns and maintains the trust of all residents. We believe that funding the four program offers listed above will give the Elections Division the resources it needs to accomplish this tall order in FY2025.

2. Restore Trust in Animal Services - Total: \$516,171
 - a. 90008B Animal Health Professional Services - emergency care and spay/neuter
 - b. 90007B Animal Care

The Committee specifically chose these two program offers from Animal Services because we believe that the highest priority for the Division right now is to demonstrate a commitment to delivering good care for the animals that go through the Animal Services system.

Members: Matt Tuckerbaum, James Ellis, Peter Finley Fry, Conrad Hulen, Taylor Scott, Chuck Woods
Staff: Denell Broncho, Britta Schinske, Rose Cervenak, Tina LeFebvre, Hoa Vu

Department of Community Services CBAC

EMERGING THEMES FOR BOARD ATTENTION

Through our conversations with DCS staff, the CBAC identified three emerging challenges to the ongoing or expanded operations within the department:

Land Use Division Organizational Stability

Over the last few years, we have observed two problems at the Land Use Division: difficulty managing the Land Use domain with an outdated code, and significant staff turnover and hiring challenges. We can see that these problems might exacerbate each other, but we do not have sufficient insight to determine what the root cause is. Despite our belief that the Land Use code update is important to simplifying the Division's work and improving equity and outcomes for residents, we are not convinced that additional funding for the code improvement project is what the Division needs right now. We hope that, with strong leadership at the Department level from Director Bradway, Land Use can find the organizational stability that will make additional funding a clear choice without a significant opportunity cost.

Transportation and Animal Services Revenue Models

The Transportation and Animal Services Divisions provide direct value to members of the community, and there are specific transactions (e.g. pet registration, vehicle registration, etc.) that provide some of the funding for their operations. However, the current revenue models used to fund these two Divisions are unsustainable or are insufficient to meet necessary service levels. Transportation is experiencing a decline in gas tax revenues and fees from vehicle registrations, and Animal Services has proposed reducing or eliminating adoption fees to address equity issues. Transportation is also limited in what it can fund with gas taxes, leading to the annual submission of a program offer to fund ADA ramp construction. This committee strongly believes that the Department should prioritize development of revenue models that will (1) keep these Divisions from competing for scarce general fund dollars and (2) enable the County to easily fund projects like ADA ramps, which advance our community's equity goals.

Fairness of Elections Funding

In our current governmental structure, our County Elections office is often squeezed between unfunded mandates passed by the State Legislature and the responsibility of administering elections for our state's largest city. In some cases, the Elections office is able to charge entities like the David Douglas School District for the cost of administering special elections. That is not the case with Portland's Charter Reform effort, which imposes significant preparation and administrative costs on the County team. We want to highlight these challenges and ask that the County Board set policies in collaboration with City and State officials to reduce the funding burdens and uncertainty imposed on our critical Elections service.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS –

The committee would like to give special thanks to Denell Broncho, Department Assistant Director, for her proactive leadership and commitment to assisting our CBAC throughout this process.

The committee would also like to thank the following folks for the information, insight, and perspectives they brought to this process:

Members: Matt Tuckerbaum, James Ellis, Peter Finley Fry, Conrad Hulen, Taylor Scott, Chuck Woods

Staff: Denell Broncho, Britta Schinske, Rose Cervenak, Tina LeFebvre, Hoa Vu

Department of Community Services CBAC

- Margi Bradway, Department Director
- Adam Barber, Interim Land Use Planning Director
- Tim Scott, Elections Director
- Erin Grahek, Animal Services Director
- Jon Henrichsen, Transportation Director
- Britta Schinske, Senior Finance Manager

We also appreciate Rose Cervenak, Tina LeFebvre, and Hoa Vu for their work in facilitating the committee, coordinating with staff, and for their excellent taste in takeout.

Members: *Matt Tuckerbaum, James Ellis, Peter Finley Fry, Conrad Hulen, Taylor Scott, Chuck Woods*
Staff: *Denell Broncho, Britta Schinske, Rose Cervenak, Tina LeFebvre, Hoa Vu*