



Office of Community Involvement



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## Department of Community Services CBAC

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

FROM: Department of Community Services Community Budget Advisory Committee

DATE: April 28, 2023

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

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### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY - Report overview and highlights**

- What did your CBAC choose to prioritize in deciding your recommendations?
- What core values guided your recommendations?

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 we identify three (3) priority, out-of-target program offers. These address critical needs but are not exclusive. In our judgment, all DCS out-of-target program requests are urgent and essential to ensuring DCS divisions' capacity to continue delivering essential services.

### **PROCESS -**

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 reoccurring dependence on employee's 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 Directors and staff to facilitate additional questions. We'd like to thank everyone involved for creating an atmosphere of transparency and collaboration.

### **EMERGING ISSUES & CHANGES**

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

# (Department) CBAC

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## **Multnomah County Animal Services**

While the programmatic issues with Animal Services have been well publicized, the need to address these issues quickly can not be overstated. Animal Services are largely focused on domestic human family pets - not merely animals but integral, cherished members of human families. The Division provides emergency shelter, temporary foster-housing, retrieval of lost pets and vigorous efforts to locate and reunite them with owner-families - services which are disproportionately used by under-represented, less affluent, or unhoused communities. In addressing these issues, the County has an opportunity to equitably provide deeply needed assistance to some of our most vulnerable neighbors.

## **Multnomah County Elections**

As Multnomah County moves towards implementing ranked choice voting, the need to expand community education and engagement efforts will be essential to maintaining community trust during a moment of critical transition (Portland charter reform). Increased support staff, training for volunteers, and outreach via media channels and the voter pamphlet will be necessary to ease the transition into a new system of voting for many of the county's residents. Finding sustainable funding for these expanded responsibilities will be necessary for both the success of the coming elections and into the future.

## **An Uncertain Economic Outlook**

DCS CBAC has also identified concerns that the Department's requests for ongoing funding may not be sustainable in the current economic climate. While the Department has been able to mitigate the negative externalities of this year's budget reduction, the requests for additional on-going funding may create a situation in which those new positions and programs may need to be rolled back without additional investment from the General Fund.

**BUDGET FEEDBACK** - The Department of Community Services Community Budget Advisory Committee recommends the following priorities for both the Department and County Budgets:

**Support the Chair's Recommendations for Animal Services** - The ongoing investigation into the issues at Multnomah County Animal Services is vital to maintaining a high level of service for humans and animals, as well as ensuring equitable access to Animal Services for Portland's most vulnerable residents. While the CBAC does not feel that it can make specific recommendations regarding the current budget proposals, we fully support the investigation and implementation of new processes, procedures, and staffing changes that may come as a result of this process.

**Reiterate the County's commitment to equitable elections** - The democratic process is the bedrock of our society. As the County begins the transition to a new form of election, County leadership must support equitable access to election information by restoring funding for the Voter Pamphlet. This information - in all its translations - is vital to allowing equitable access to local government for all of the county's residents.

The County budget should also prioritize the structural and staffing needs of the Department of Elections. The shift to ranked choice voting will require more of the Department, particularly during the

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# (Department) CBAC

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transition period, in order to maintain the existing high standards of transparency, education, and accountability necessary to ensure community confidence in our election process.

**Remove barriers to access and development** - DCS CBAC also recommends that County leadership continue funding the ongoing ADA access ramp work within the Department of Transportation. While this work is necessary to enable equitable access to residents with limited mobility, failure to continue to make progress is also a legal liability under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

While we consider the inclusion of equity in the Planning Department's code important, we are not convinced that this needs to be funded as a standalone effort independent of the Code improvement and simplification project. We encourage the Planning Department to bring an equity lens to this ongoing work, with an emphasis on clarifying and simplifying the County's Development Code. We believe this will allow residents to better understand land use restrictions without the additional expense of hiring specialists, expanding their ability to fully utilize their property, whether for residence or business. Ensuring the Planning Division is staffed for the Code improvement project should be the highest priority.

**PROGRAM OFFER RECOMMENDATIONS** - Brief summary of any overarching rationale for recommendations followed by each recommendation **in priority order** including the detail shown below:

In the Department's internal budget process, staff members within each division identified programs that were underperforming or off-target with the department mission, as well as those where increased investment would be most effective. Budget cuts and new requests were then prioritized by consensus within, and then across, divisions. The Department has also identified strategies for offsetting - to the extent possible - the effects of budget cuts. While these measures are not sustainable in the long term, they are necessary to continue providing proactive and equitable services to the community. We appreciated the Department's commitment to actively sharing the outcome of their budget work and exposing it to this CBAC for feedback and input.

The Out-of-Constraint budget requests are designed to further the Department priorities – concentrating resources on high-risk clients, reducing racial and ethnic disparities in access to County services, and improving measurement and reporting of results.

Our specific recommendations are as follows, in priority order:

1. Fund critical Elections requests - Total: \$973,000
  - a. 90009A - Charter Reform Rank Choice Voting Implementation -
  - b. 90010B - Elections Infrastructure
  - c. 90009B - Charter Refm Rank Choice Voting: Voter Education and Outreach Staffing
  - d. 90010C - Elections (Voter's Pamphlet for Nov 2023)

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

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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 FY2024.

2. Help Animal Services consistently meet a minimum standard of care for all animals - Total: \$1,116,335

The DCS CBAC came away from this season's budget presentations convinced that significant changes are necessary at the Animal Services Division, but it was unclear to us exactly what those changes should be. In light of the ongoing investigation into current and historical operations at Animal Services, we are inclined to support the Chair's conclusions about the resourcing needed to get the Division back on track and deliver the services and care that the community expects.

3. Fund construction of Tier 2 ADA ramps - Total: \$1,735,000
  - a. 90018B - Tier 2 ADA Ramps

It is essential that the Transportation Division continue making progress towards accessibility at important intersections throughout the County. This Program Offer represents both an opportunity to incorporate equity considerations directly into our community's physical infrastructure and to reduce risk by improving compliance with ADA regulations. While we believe this should be funded as an Out-of-Constraint Program Offer in FY 2024, we have asked DCS staff to consider more consistent alternative funding measures that would better reflect the importance of accessibility to the County's equity and inclusion goals.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS –**

The committee would like to give special thanks to:

- Lee Girard, Interim Department Director
- Adam Barber, Interim Land Use Planning Director
- Tim Scott, Elections Director
- Erin Grahek, Animal Services Director
- Jon Henrichsen, Transportation Director
- Dr Stephen Graves, Equity Manager

For the information, insight, and perspectives they brought to this process. In particular the committee would like to thank Britta Schinske and Hoa Vu for their work in facilitating the committee, coordinating with staff, and for their excellent taste in takeout.

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