

Department of Community Services CBAC

TO: Chair Jessica Vega Pederson and Board of County Commissioners (6 pages)

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

DATE: March 14, 2025

SUBJECT: DCS Community Budget Advisory Committee Report & Recommendations

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this difficult budget year, the DCS CBAC did its best to evaluate the Department of Community Services budget program offers with a lens focused on the County's core values, but also with consideration of the need to sustain key programs, to meet basic legal obligations, and to minimize risks and harms from the unfortunate but necessary budget cuts across the county.

The CBAC recommends that the County's FY26 DCS budget prioritize maintaining positive momentum in the Animal Services Division, protecting trust in the Elections Division, and supporting the Land Use Division which continues to struggle. Specifically, the CBAC suggests priorities for restoration in these divisions, along with two ongoing additions. The CBAC did not prioritize any one-time-only additions.

The CBAC FY26 program offer priorities, **by division**, are:

Elections:

- **Total restoration of funding for Ballot Tracking**
(Reduction-14, Program Offer 90010)
- **Total restoration of Voter Pamphlet distribution**
(Reduction-07, Program Offer 90010)
- **Ongoing Addition - New position for GIS support**
(Addition-02-Ongoing, Program Offer 90010)

Animal Services:

- **Total or partial restoration of funding for Foster Program**
(Reduction-03, Program Offer 90007)

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- **Total or partial restoration of funding for Enrichment Program**
(Reduction-12, Program Offer 90007)

Land Use:

- **Total restoration of funding for Planner 1 position**
(Reduction-01, Program Offer 90021)
- **Total or partial restoration of funding for contractual services**
(Reduction-02, Program Offer 90021)
- **Total restoration of funding for front desk counter position**
(Reduction-06, Program Offer 90021)
- **Ongoing Addition - New Planner 1 position**
(Addition-10-Ongoing, Program Offers 90021, 90020)

Director's Office:

- **Total or partial restoration of HR and Research Analyst positions**
(Reduction-04, Program Offers 90000, 90001)

PROCESS

The DCS CBAC was convened in November 2024 and met regularly from December 2024 through February 2025. With seamless coordination by DCS staff and leadership, the CBAC was briefed by key staff in each of the DCS divisions and the DCS Director's office. The briefings provided CBAC members with frank, transparent, and informative overviews of the responsibilities and challenges in each division, and a framework for understanding the divisions' budgeting in this difficult budget year. In a work session to develop our recommendations, the CBAC considered the Department's program offers, including constraints, ongoing additions, and one-time-only additions to the base budget.

To evaluate each budget item, the CBAC looked to the County's core values as their north star, prioritizing outcomes that equitably benefit the broadest array of community members. Because of the seriousness of this year's budget challenges, the CBAC gave special consideration to the survival of key programs, the County's obligation to meet basic legal obligations, and the need to minimize risks and harm due to budget cuts.

EMERGING THEMES/TRENDS

Difficult Constraints and Impossible Prioritization

It is clear to the CBAC that this is an extraordinarily difficult budget year, and we have deep appreciation for the DCS leadership's task to submit a prioritized reduction package of 12% to help cover the County's budget deficit. Indeed, with the breadth of community services being

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delivered by the Department, we found it practically impossible to weigh priorities for funding across the disparate divisions. We found ourselves considering reduced funding for services that will cease to function without personnel; for services at risk of legal consequences or inability to meet legal obligations; impacting the overall viability of divisions; and implication of basic moral obligations to minimize harm, not only to staff but to County residents who rely on these services.

Revenue Models in DCS Divisions

As in previous years, the CBAC observed again that the funding models in several divisions result in an ongoing and widening imbalance of revenue and expenses. In last year's memo, this CBAC noted, "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." This year, for example, with general fund dollars extremely scarce, we couldn't support the ADA ramps as a one-time-only addition. Furthermore, CBAC members noted that some revenue streams generated by DCS Divisions (animal registrations, for example) are deposited into the general fund and do not necessarily return directly to the divisions themselves. This disconnect may be leading to deprioritization of developing those streams.

BUDGET/PROGRAM OFFERS FEEDBACK

Maintaining momentum in Animal Service Division

By all accounts, there has been remarkable progress made by the Animal Services Division to fix its management problems and to restore trust in its essential programs. The CBAC believes that maintaining this forward progress is absolutely necessary, especially as capital funding for a badly-needed and much delayed animal shelter becomes a more concrete possibility.

Trust in elections remains a priority

The Elections Division delivered a first-ever ranked choice voting election in Portland in 2024 without a hitch. As Multnomah County implements ranked choice voting in 2026, the Elections Division needs to deliver again. The CBAC understands that trust, transparency, equity, and integrity are central to ensuring trust in elections processes, but the values also need to be part of the voter's experience and understanding.

The Land Use Division is struggling

The CBAC is concerned that the Land Use Division is not properly resourced, and as a result is unable to feasibly manage the breadth and the amount of work its small office is responsible for. The Division cites staffing problems, state-mandates, and its tiny budget complicating the ability to process land use applications, to do long-range planning, investigate and enforce code complaints, revise and update the land use code, and manage the county's solid waste and

recycling program. The CBAC understands that there is a fee study that might suggest ways to increase revenue somewhat. We would support new fee structures, but new fee revenue should be associated with new and better service. More than just a small boost in fees will be needed to provide the Division with increasingly necessary organizational stability.

Difficult Justifications for One-Time-Only Additions

Understanding the extraordinary budget pressures, the CBAC had difficulty recommending One-Time-Only additions that, in any normal budget year, would command universal support: Spay and neuter expenses for a growing population of animals that need it; Ranked choice voting implementation for Multnomah County's first RCV election; and the multi-year effort to fund design and construction of ADA ramps. With the possible exception of the RCV request, these were additions that are simply not "one time only," and they were requests that were for contractual services, and not in-house.

DEPARTMENT BUDGET/PROGRAM OFFER RECOMMENDATIONS

Our top priorities for ***Restoration***, by Division:

- 1. Elections: Total restoration of funding for Ballot Tracking**
(Reduction-14, Program Offer 90010)
- 2. Elections: Total restoration of Voter Pamphlet distribution**
(Reduction-07, Program Offer 90010)

BallotTrax is not only a best practice for vote-by-mail elections, it is an increasingly popular service with voters. It serves as a relatively inexpensive way to not merely boost confidence in elections processes, but also to reduce call volume to the elections office from voters wondering about their ballot status during the busy election season. Similarly, the Voter Pamphlet is something that County voters have relied upon for many years for reliable information on candidates and ballot measures. Voters will miss it, and many will call the elections office wondering where it is. Regardless, it should not be eliminated without at least some serious consideration of better cost recovery as an option.

- 1. Animal Services: Total or partial restoration of funding for Foster Program**
(Reduction-03, Program Offer 90007)
- 2. Animal Services: Total or partial restoration of funding for Enrichment Program**
(Reduction-12, Program Offer 90007)

The CBAC is committed to maintaining the momentum in management improvements made in Animal Services and without restoration, these two reductions would constitute a major setback for the County's animal care program, in both capacity (Foster Program) and quality (Enrichment Program).

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1. **Land Use: Total restoration of funding for Planner 1 position**
(Reduction-01, Program Offer 90021)
2. **Land Use: Total or partial restoration of funding for Contractual Services**
(Reduction-02, Program Offer 90021)
3. **Land Use: Total restoration of funding for front desk counter position**
(Reduction-06, Program Offer 90021)

Without restoration, the collective reductions in the Land Use program would be particularly difficult for the already-understaffed Division to sustain while still meeting legal obligations and providing basic services in a timely way.

1. **Director's Office: Total or partial restoration of HR and Research Analyst positions**
(Reduction-04, Program Offers 90000, 90001)

The Director's office has taken the brunt of the budget constraints placed on the Department, and without restoration, the reductions would be felt in the already difficult top-level management across such a uniquely diverse portfolio of essential county services.

Our priorities for **Ongoing Addition Program Offers** by Division:

1. **Elections: New Position for GIS support**
(Addition-02-Ongoing, Program Offer 90010)

Mapping errors in the May 2024 election demonstrated a strong need for a position focused on strategic and technical support necessary for critical geographic mapping technology for elections. Mistakes in elections, geographic and otherwise, are not only expensive and difficult to correct, especially under very strict election timelines, but they can fundamentally damage trust in elections processes, which the county cannot afford.

2. **Land Use: New Planner 1 Position**
(Addition-10-Ongoing, Program Offers 90021, 90020)

The new position is essential to handle the workload in the Division and would help to shorten timelines for land use applications. The CBAC expects that funding for at least a portion of this position could be accommodated by anticipated fee increases for land use services.

Finally, the CBAC did not prioritize any **One-Time-Only Program Offers**.

As noted previously, all of the Director's proposed constraints and program offers represent crucially important services for Multnomah County residents; however, given the severity of this year's constraint, this CBAC chose to prioritize restoration of extant services and desperately needed capacity improvements over OTO program offers in their recommendations.

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The committee would also like to particularly thank the Department and Division leadership for meeting with us and providing us with excellent information and important perspective into the Department and its work:

- Margi Bradway, Department Director
- Megan Gibb, Land Use Planning Director
- Tim Scott, Elections Director
- Erin Grahek, Animal Services Director
- Jon Henrichsen, Transportation Director
- Britta Schinske, Senior Finance Manager
- D'Metri Mattocks, Equity & Inclusion Manager
- Amara Perez, Director of the Office of Community Involvement