

February 21, 2025

Multnomah County Board Chair Jessica Vega Pederson and Elected Commission Members
501 SE Hawthorne Blvd Suite 600
Portland, OR. 97214

Subject: Community Services and the Land Use Planning 2026 Budget.

Dear Chair Vega-Pederson and Commissioners,

The Multnomah County Planning Commission is a nine-member volunteer body serving four-year terms. Presently, its makeup includes six from within its rural planning jurisdiction and three members residing outside of the district or within the UGB and Portland. Its broadly inclusive membership represents a wide range of interests and backgrounds. Some members bring forth the perspective of serving multiple terms. Its primary charge is to inform, support and help guide the work of the county's land use planning (LUP) division in fulfilling the important state mandated program of protecting natural resources of the rural area including near 130,000 acres of farm and forestlands. Our focus is long range planning, but with an eye on the workings of the present code and to support development of documents that provide responsive permit services.

We understand the County faces a budget shortfall heading into the 2026 budget year and all departments have been asked to offer budget scenarios with cuts of 8, 10 and 12 %. Among the LUP division's responsibilities are current planning and timely permit response, implementing the Columbia Gorge NSA, long range planning and acting on a steady stream of changes mandated by the Oregon Legislature. Many of these tasks are of ever-increasing complexity.

It is our view that the present staffing allowance of just six planners is insufficient to reasonably keep up with this important work. Though relatively small, the program is heavily dependent on the General Fund. The LUP budget has grown modestly with no increase in planners over the past several years. It would take more than a threefold budget increase to reach just one percent of the General Fund of 2025. The prospect of trying to do more with less should there be budget cuts is alarming. Pressed to make state mandated deadlines, we see current planning caseloads as higher than they have been in some time, open compliance cases as severely backlogged, and we have yet to make much progress on simplifying the code or implementing an extensive Comprehensive Plan update of 2016. We are further challenged in making timely amendments in response to regular state mandated legislative changes.

It has never been routine for this Planning Commission as a body to weigh in on the budget process. Our hope is that you will carefully consider the choices and act with these thoughts in crafting the FY 2026 budget.

Sincerely,

Bill Kiebeisman, Multnomah County Planning Commission Chair
with unanimity of its members: Barbara Alexander, John Chen, Kari Egger, Chris Foster
John Houle, Stephanie Nystrom, Victoria Purvine and Tim Wood.

cc: Dept. of Community Services Director Bradway