

This year's budget was my seventh as County Chair and my 12th as a member of the Board of Commissioners.

And while one might *think* that means that I've seen almost everything that a county budgeting process could throw at you, this year's process has been the most demanding that I've experienced, but it's also been, I think, the most satisfying.

The process of building Multnomah County's FY 2022 budget felt similar to previous years in a lot of ways: countless meetings with departments, multiple budget worksessions (18 to be exact, not including today's board meeting), perpetual awe at the quick-working brains in our budgeting office, and what feels like an endless stream of spreadsheets.

But this year has also felt unique, and I believe that's a product of the exceedingly unique year that we have endured together as a community.

In the face of multiple, and sometimes intersecting, crises, Multnomah County has consistently stepped *up* and *into* spaces of need, doing everything we could to respond effectively and equitably.

We led the public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic and have taken steps to dismantle systemic racism and confront racial injustices in our community and our own organization.

We've continued to provide safety net services, helped Oregonians navigate a toxic air event, and held multiple elections.

Looking back, the breadth, depth and significance of the roles that the County plays in the lives of our community members have never been more visible, or felt more tangible, to the public.

So it makes sense that this year, our community is holding our budget decisions to a higher standard than ever before.

They want to know that our budget process is transparent, and meaningfully informed by their voices.

And they're demanding that we make choices that don't simply perpetuate business-as-usual, but rather allow the County to lean even further into life-changing work that this last year has brought into the spotlight.

This is exactly what our community should expect of us, and it's what we should expect of ourselves.

It has taken an incredible amount of work to get to this point. It hasn't been easy, but easy is never the point, or the goal, of our budgeting process.

Rather, we engage in this process knowing that it requires asking hard questions, engaging in serious debate, navigating genuine disagreements and deliberating in good faith.

Of course this year, all of this took place against the backdrop of perhaps the most tumultuous chapter in our community's history. It was a year that displayed the full extent of the County's responsibilities, while also offering glimpses of the transformative potential we carry.

Despite the challenges we saw, we were also handed unprecedented opportunities, ranging from a set of once-in-a-generation ballot measures, federal stimulus resources to help us meet the increased needs in our community, and clear feedback from community members about the kind of government they want Multnomah County to be.

And it's **because** of these extraordinary circumstances, and the willingness to engage in the hard work to meet them, that our FY 2022 budget turned out as it did.

At just over \$2.8 billion, this budget is the largest that has ever been adopted by the Board of County Commissioners. It's ambitious. It's forward thinking.

And it's built to address Multnomah County's most immediate priorities in the wake of a pandemic, while also laying the groundwork for community-altering initiatives that can close disparities and improve the lives of thousands of people.

Creating the County budget is an exercise in converting priorities and values into a roadmap for action. But the process is effective and inclusive only when it's responsive to the needs of the community, as told to us *by* the community.

In light of the unparalleled amount of need this past year created, we were especially diligent about ensuring that all communities — and especially those who have been sidelined from these processes in the past — had seats at the table.

At every vaccine town hall I attended, I heard people sharing why their communities held reservations about the vaccine. But they also shared how the County could better reach their communities.

Over the last year, ***thousands*** of community members shared what they hoped a reimagined public safety system could look like, and the policy changes they wanted to see to help us achieve it.

Business owners across the community shared about the kinds of support they needed to make it through this pandemic.

And when the County's own clients told us what they needed to begin their recovery from COVID-19, we listened and adjusted our priorities.

I am so thankful for the relationships we continue to foster through community engagement and the trust they show in Multnomah County.

And I'm proud that our work led us to a budget that takes care to respond to the needs in front of us, build capacity to help community members recover from the pandemic and prepare the County for the work to come in the years ahead.

Although we are turning the corner, this pandemic is not over yet. So we invested more than \$60 million to maintain our **COVID-19 public health response**, an investment that is headlined by more than \$20 million dedicated to our ongoing vaccination and testing efforts through the Public Health Division and the County's Community Health Centers.

We're also dedicating \$20 million to support isolation, quarantine wraparound services, and the call center, and nearly \$5 million for ongoing surveillance and case investigation.

To address the spike in community violence, this budget makes timely investments to bolster the County's ongoing work of **violence prevention, intervention and healing** by investing in programs and services designed to reduce risk factors, and help individuals, families and neighborhoods who have been impacted by violence build strength and resilience.

These investments also include efforts that take a public health approach to violence, focusing on root causes, community strengths and partnerships, as well as recognizing the role of systemic racism in who violence impacts most.

Having endured a year during which the community experienced collective trauma, loss and destabilization to an unprecedented degree, we also strengthened and expanded our **core safety net services** that intervene, prevent and respond to crises.

For example, we're increasing the number of culturally specific domestic violence case workers to meet the needs of people seeking help, and creating a Mobile Behavioral Health team that will be dedicated to serving a Black and African American justice-involved individuals leaving incarceration.

We're also investing in helping communities of color who have been disproportionately harmed by this pandemic build assets to aid their recovery. The brand new Multnomah Mother's Trust Project will partner with approximately 100 Black, women-led families to provide immediate access to a monthly income to meet basic needs and aid them in developing connections to other community assets.

Our Public Health Community Partnerships and Capacity Building team will receive increased funding to expand their ability to help develop community coalitions specifically in Asian, Pacific Islander, Latinx, and Black and African immigrant communities to help those communities leverage their

existing wisdom and relationships into culturally responsive and appropriate solutions.

We've also laid the foundation for the success of all three **voter-approved ballot measures** that, together, have the potential to transform our community.

The first year of funds from the Supportive Housing Services measure will be used to quickly connect 1,300 households to permanent housing through rent vouchers and supportive services to help them stay housed, while also making new investments in emergency shelter and culturally specific service providers.

Revenue from the Preschool for All measure will be used to help rebuild a preschool workforce that has been devastated by the pandemic, while also establishing the administrative backbone of the program so that families can begin applying for slots in early 2022.

And we're gearing up to put money from the Library Building Bond to work, notably with the construction of a new flagship library in East County, putting money **back** into the community by building a diverse, fairly paid construction trades workforce.

We invested in programs that continue to move the County's vision of **public safety** away from incarceration and toward strategies that break cycles of harm and incarceration, and address racial disparities that plague the criminal legal system.

We're doing this by connecting justice-involved individuals struggling with their behavioral health to housing and treatment, and offering culturally specific behavioral health services for people re-entering the community after incarceration.

We're funding efforts in the District Attorney's office to both review the integrity of past convictions and help people overcome barriers to essential resources by obtaining expungements. We're also allocating resources to increase support for survivors of domestic violence.

And while the County supports the organizations that we partner with by funding their services, we recognize that physical space and infrastructure are often part and parcel of their work to successfully serve and strengthen communities. One of the final amendments to our budget created a new \$1.5 million **community capital fund** to help offset capital expenditures for projects designed to build the capacity of community-based organizations that serve culturally specific communities most affected by the pandemic.

Adopting this budget is a significant step toward ensuring Multnomah County continues to be a place where everyone who needs help can find it, where everyone shares equally in opportunity and where the most vulnerable are protected. But urgent needs, like the crisis that thousands of our neighbors surviving outside face, remain, and became even more pressing amid the pandemic.

For years, the County has helped people surviving outside find safe, stable homes and the supportive services they need to stay housed, but our limited resources kept us from sufficiently meeting the scale of the need, which only continues to grow.

But now, thanks to the Supportive Housing Services measure that passed just over a year ago, we finally have the capacity to make unprecedented investments in the solutions we know end people's homelessness.

I'm proud of the kinds of solutions we are pursuing -- strategies that range from helping people into a permanent home through rent assistance and supportive services, to increased outreach and other investments that address more immediate needs like emergency shelter.

But I'm also proud of **how** we're pursuing this work: through months and months of engagement to ensure that our plan is truly representative of the community's priorities... through collaboration, partnership and a community-wide commitment to helping our neighbors surviving outside escape the trauma of homelessness for good.

The investments found in this budget put the County in a strong position to respond to the needs of our community through our services and programs, but also through systemic changes and transformation.

But this is only the start of our work. We will not stop listening and improving, or learning from and empowering cultural communities. We won't stop striving to become a local government and organization that our residents deserve.

The partnership of this board has been critical to this budget process.

Commissioners Sharon Meieran, Susheela Jayapal, Jessica Vega Pederson and Lori Stegmann: thank you for your work to make sure that our budget is a true reflection of the County's values.

Thank you, also, to Budget Director Christian Elkin, Chief Financial Officer Eric Arellano, and their respective teams. Not a day has gone by during budget season when I haven't been grateful for your insight.

And finally, I want to share my gratitude to the employees of Multnomah County. I'm humbled by all the ways you've continued to support each other and show up for the community through such a trying and unpredictable chapter in our organization's history.

Thank you for your resilience, your commitment and your service.