

## Commissioner Sharon Meieran's 2022 Budget Adoption Remarks

Today is an exciting day for us all - one that, for me, is filled with gratitude and also with some relief.

I always feel an especially intense degree of responsibility during our budget process, and this year has demanded a lot from us all as we implement major new programs and continue to support our communities in surviving and recovering through the COVID-19 pandemic - it is uniquely challenging to have an unprecedented level of resources to budget, but also a truly unparalleled level of need to address.

Our base budget is a very strong indication of our shared values across an incredible array of work that Multnomah County does in, for, and with our community.

It also reflects major new ways to grow - seeding new ideas and scaling things that we know work.

This budget makes major new investments in supportive housing and services; implements federal and state COVID-19 relief dollars; supports how we respond to and prevent violence in our community; and sustains and deepens our intentional work to address racial disparities in Multnomah County.

I can't - and won't - be able to note all of the things that I'm excited about in this budget, but I want to mention a few:

- This budget funds a Digital Access Coordinator position - as we advance our work on digital equity and next steps related to the Municipal Broadband Feasibility study we completed last year, this is a really important role that will spot opportunities, track funding opportunities, and connect things with a clear strategic, big picture/aspirational focus. Our work around municipal broadband has been informed, thus far, by an imperative to think big and think creatively, and I look forward to continuing this work.
- This budget fully funds an amendment I proposed to support and expand services for aging adults living with, or affected by HIV and AIDS. Dramatic improvements in the effectiveness of HIV treatment have resulted in people living with HIV longer than ever before, which is excellent. But as this population ages, they encounter unique challenges that accompany being a long-term HIV/AIDS survivor - many long-term survivors lost much of their support network to the HIV epidemic, so experiences of complex post-traumatic stress disorder and isolation are all too common.

- This budget dedicates additional funding to Portland Street Medicine to support and expand the important work they do in our community. As a volunteer with PSM, I see firsthand the impact that routine, compassionate, unconditional care has for people surviving outside. I am so pleased that our budget includes more funding to support this work.
- This budget makes an important commitment to support moving toward a living wage for organizations who contract with Multnomah County. This budget dedicates some additional funding in Joint Office contracts, and I have also really appreciated the commitment from the Chair's office to convene a structured process in the coming months to explore how we can expand this work to support the community based organizations - and their staff - who *do* so much of the work we are proud of at the County.
- And, there are all sorts of smaller, "quieter" things tucked away in this budget that I appreciate - such as stipends for members of our Community Involvement Committee, a new Conviction Integrity Unit in the DA's office, increased land use and planning code compliance staffing to better serve our communities (especially in D1!), funding to support the Audubon Society's Wildlife Care Center project, deepening equity work in the Sheriff's Office, and so, so much more.

One of my key priorities this year was to ensure that our budget provides services, supports, and programs that reduce harm for people living unsheltered in our community.

I am happy that this budget includes new investments through the Supportive Housing Services budget and American Rescue Plan Act funding for hygiene, shelter, alternative shelter, and services that will help people move into housing.

I am also very pleased that this budget includes dedicated staff capacity in the Joint Office to support alternative shelter work in coordination with the City of Portland.

While this budget does *so much* that I'm proud of in this area, I do want to note some things that concern me, that will continue to challenge us.

I believe we are going to not only experience the status quo, but a worsening of our homelessness situation and our humanitarian crisis, when we have an unprecedented opportunity to change the trajectory, save lives, and make a difference.

I have been clear, long before the realities of this budget crystalized, that we need to be addressing this crisis with compassion, with a focus on the people

living outside rather than visibility or politics, with a view toward public health, and, most importantly, with urgency. As the amount of revenue has become apparent, rather than get down to action and put our money where our mouth is - we have seemed to be striving to find reasons *not* to invest in the public health and humanitarian crisis that has unfolded on our streets.

I was heartened that the City of Portland committed to dedicating substantial resources to setting up the infrastructure for outdoor alternative shelter sites, and that the Chair joined Commissioner Ryan in supporting the City using its resources to establish the sites. However, there were few details, including how many people this might serve, and, rather than doing our part to invest any new money - any County money - in this partnership, in the behavioral health and case management services our providers who do this work have said are crucial to having the sites succeed and actually serve people effectively - we have dedicated no new funding to the functioning and support of the sites.

I want to be clear about this - I proposed a budget amendment that would support a range of alternative shelter sites for 500 people. When the City announced its plan to invest in the infrastructure for sites, and the Chair announced the County's support of the plan, and our own providers told us the types of services that would be necessary to make the plan successful - services that fall within our purview as the Local Mental Health Authority - I revised my budget proposal to add additional behavioral health and case management capacity for the sites. I am disappointed that we have not invested additional funds for even a single mental health team to serve these sites. The reasoning was that the funding should hopefully come from additional federal and/or state sources. I don't think we can wait.

I believe that to truly partner in our *joint* work with the City, we need to fund the BH, case management, and peer support services that will help people heal and achieve long-term stability. These services need to be increased.

While I am concerned that we are not allocating funds in this budget to support dedicated services for these sites, I have proposed budget notes to structure concrete next steps: asking the Joint Office to report back on work with the City, ensuring that we can come back in the coming months to understand new, more stable behavioral health resources that could apply to this purpose in an ongoing way, and better understanding the full spectrum of our outreach services.

Something from our very first budget work session stuck with me - Aron Klein, central CBAC chair reminded us that, "the people closest to the suffering are the closest to the solutions". This principle continues to guide my perspective on this work, and while this is a real milestone, our work continues tomorrow and in the coming weeks and months.

Finally, today I want to offer my sincere gratitude to so many people:

- To each of our County Departments, divisions, offices, and teams - directors, leadership, staff, putting the work of their teams into presentations that are both thorough and digestible; quickly turning around detailed answers to BCC questions
  - Budget office - Christian Elkin and your team for the tremendous amount of work required to keep us organized, precise and informed during this month (and really all year round)
  - Eric Arellano - sound wisdom, guidance and judgment to help our decision making
  - Budget + finance teams together have taken a truly unprecedented fiscal year and helped us feel confident that we are still acting prudently and responsibly as stewards of public dollars - including *lots* of brand new types of dollars for critically important needs on impossible timelines.
  - My BCC colleagues - for their critical questions, dedication to their constituents and districts, and collaboration
  - Chair Kafoury and her team - especially Kim Melton
  - To the 63 volunteer CBAC members who dedicated hundreds of hours over months and months to help shape our budget considerations, and to the Office of Community Involvement for supporting and facilitating this important work
  - And to the public! The hundreds of people who testified virtually, wrote to our offices, “showed up” at budget forums.

This year looked and felt so different from last year. Immensely proud of this board’s work and the work of the county, reflected in this budget