

Multnomah County

2024-25 Hearing Minutes

Wednesday, May 29, 2024

9:00 a.m.

Multnomah Building 501 SE Hawthorne Blvd.
Portland, Oregon

Present:

TSCC:

Chair Harmony Quiroz, Vice-Chair Commissioner Mark Wubbold, Commissioner Matt Donahue, Commissioner Allison Lugo Knapp, Commissioner Tod Burton, Executive Director Allegra Willhite, and Budget Analyst Tunie Betschart.

Absent: None

Multnomah County:

Multnomah County Board of Commissioners: Chair Jessica Vega Pederson, Commissioner Julia Brim-Edwards, Commissioner Sharon Meieran, Commissioner Lori Stegmann, and Commissioner Jesse Beason joined via Zoom meeting.

Chair Quiroz welcomed everyone to the hearing and briefly described the duties and responsibilities of the TSCC. She reviewed the hearing process and stated the hearing was to engage the district leadership and provide an opportunity for the public to comment before Multnomah County adopts its budget. She asked the TSCC Commissioners and staff to introduce themselves and state if they have business relationships with Multnomah County that could be perceived as a conflict of interest. Each commissioner and staff member introduced themselves and said they had no conflict of interest with the county. She asked Multnomah County Commissioners to introduce themselves.

Following introductions, Chair Quiroz asked if any members of the public wished to speak at this time. No one in the audience responded, and no one had signed up to give testimony.

Then, Chair Quiroz asked County Chair Vega Pederson to briefly explain the budget. Chair Vega Pederson thanked the Commissioners for holding the budget hearing and said the 2025 executive budget is the first one she has been able to work on from start to finish. It was a community-oriented process with a genuine desire to invest in policies and programs that meet people's most significant needs. This budget continues to provide the critical safety net that supports those who need it most. With this proposed \$3.96 billion fiscal budget, the county has made hard choices and tradeoffs, but these represent reasonable compromises. This budget puts focus and clarity on programs foundational to a healthy safety net and a one-county approach across all programs. Particular emphasis has been directed towards the homelessness response system, addressing the fentanyl crisis with increased interventions and treatment options to strengthen Multnomah County. The county knows that challenges remain with federal support dollars no longer available this year. Continued social and economic recovery from the pandemic, and wrestling with the complex impacts of homelessness and systemic lack of affordable housing, community violence, complex behavioral and mental health challenges, addiction, climate change, and economic vitality continue to plague the county. But this budget shows Multnomah County can address these challenges by advancing equity and justice, bringing all partners to the table with a shared commitment to collaboration, accountability, transparency, and trust.

With that, the commissioners started their questions.

Chair Harmony Quiroz asked the following question:

From our conversations with you last year, we understand that Preschool for All will take time to ramp up. Based on reported numbers, the program appears on track to meet current goals. What are the most significant barriers to meeting the 2030 full-implementation timeline?

Commissioner Beason said Preschool For All continues to exceed its current goals for growth. The goal for 2025 is 2,000 seats, and 2025 will begin with 2,071 seats starting in September. They anticipate adding more seats in January 2025. During the pandemic, Multnomah County saw a significant reduction in preschool and early childhood providers. In 2024, there are 20% fewer providers than before Covid-19. To reflect the changes the community's childcare landscape saw during the pandemic, the seat growth targets were updated in 2022.

Two of the most significant barriers to universal preschool in Multnomah County are the lack of early education facilities and the need for more early childhood educators. Childcare facilities have long been overlooked by funders and rejected by banks, resulting in a lack of early learning spaces and many facilities that need renovation. This historical underinvestment, plus the increased number of children that Preschool for All seeks to serve, creates a significant need for more preschool facilities.

The Preschool for All Facilities Fund was publicly launched at the end of March and received over 175 interest forms. BuildUp Oregon, a Community Development Financial Institutions coalition, leads this work. BuildUp Oregon will administer the Preschool for All Facilities Fund and offer technical assistance for providers seeking to improve, expand, or build new facilities. The first grants and loans are expected to go out in early June.

Increasing the number of early educators and support staff will be necessary to keep scaling up. Based on increased wages available through Preschool for All, the regional workforce investment board, Worksystems Inc., has added early education as a career pathway. The county has contracted with Worksystems to utilize its network of career coaches to recruit, train, and support new educators.

There is not a single way to become an early childhood educator, so it is essential that workforce development investments meet a wide range of needs. There are Preschool for All funded bilingual community college navigator positions to help recruit and retain students in the early education programs at both Mt. Hood Community College and Portland Community College. There are scholarships for educators to pursue professional development and a degree in early education. The Pathways Program works with preschool providers who want to participate in Preschool for All but may need additional preparation support. This year's budget also includes dedicated funding for paid media initiatives to recruit new providers and participants in workforce development initiatives.

Universal preschool access means enough slots for all interested families in Multnomah County to participate in a publicly funded slot. Preschool for All is one piece of that puzzle. This program will continue providing strong coordination and partnership between Head Start, Preschool Promise, and Preschool for All locations. Head Start partners were engaged in early Preschool for All planning, and two Head Start agencies are already Preschool for All providers. The county has complex political and resource challenges regarding staff wages and coordinated enrollment across different programs. They are committed to that difficult work in partnership with the early learning hub, Early Learning Multnomah, and the creative solutions needed to build a solid universal preschool system.

It's important to remain committed to an intentional growth timeline to create a robust mixed delivery model and focus on racial equity. Building and keeping the trust of providers and families is essential to success, which means being thoughtful about investments and giving them time to work. It also

means ensuring that providers are ready to offer culturally responsive and inclusive care and receive the support they need to help children thrive.

Multnomah County will need to help the Preschool for All tax base and larger community understand the plan, strategies, and vision for universal preschool access. Having that broader public support is essential for a successful implementation.

Commissioner Mark Wubbold asked this follow-up question:

This is a brand-new program. Do you have a research component in this program where you're looking at how the children coming in are doing versus as they begin to matriculate through the system and enter grade school?

Ms. Brook Chilton-Timmons said they have an internally focused research team and an external partnership with the Boston University Center on the Ecology Early Development or CEED. There are several different research focuses now. It's important as a new program to seek ways to improve the services provided to children and families and build that complete universal preschool system. In addition, they support providers with individualized student assessments, so each of them must utilize evaluations that help them provide individualized instruction to the children. That piece is critical at a classroom level, as teachers adopt and adapt their curriculum and instruction to meet the needs of the children.

She said they are also working on those long-term goals to understand the impact that Preschool For All will have on children and families. That work includes strong partnerships with school districts. Boston University and the eight local school districts are having those meetings to understand how to think about the partnerships and the impacts of those kindergarten transitions that can strengthen that experience from preschool to elementary school.

Chair Quiroz asked these follow-up question:

We spoke with the Multnomah Education Service District last week about retention challenges in their staffing. I know that that is something that follows through to preschool staffing. As the program rolls up and capacity is built, are you seeing an improvement in retention among preschool providers, or is it still too early to tell?

Ms. Simmons said it is something Multnomah County is tracking. The county wants to be cautious, so they are closely monitoring it. She said she has not yet felt confident about sharing that data. Retaining experienced staff members, experienced teachers, and assistants in the classroom will also help those assistants become teachers.

There's a lot of work to be done there, and the staff is excited about the early steps that have been taken. Multnomah County did offer its first Spanish cohort in partnership with Clackamas Community College. It is an online program that is entirely in Spanish for early education. After reaching out to the pilot base, this cohort was filled in three days. Folks are hungry for development, and these opportunities will help them stay in their positions.

Commissioner Matt Donahue asked the following question:

You are building up a sizable fund balance for anticipated gaps between revenue and expenditures in future years in the Preschool for All fund. Can you share how much the program will cost annually once you reach total capacity in FY 30? And what is driving increased future expenditures - is it just the number of seats that will be needed, or are you anticipating additional expenses related to capacity building, training, or other services to make the program work?

Commissioner Beason said in the current financial modeling, the program is expected to cost approximately \$386 million in fiscal year 2031. When the program reaches universality, based on updated population estimates from PSU's population research center, the number of seats needed

to maintain universality will not grow after 2030. The modeling includes assumptions about the family participation rate in publicly funded preschools. This expected participation rate is currently set at 77.5%, including 70% of those three years old and 85% of those four years old.

After Fiscal Year 2031, the growth in costs is primarily driven by increases in staffing costs, particularly for preschool providers. The yearly projected cost growth increase for preschool seats, which includes preschool staffing, is five percent. The Preschool for All ballot measure includes regular wage increases for preschool teachers and assistants.

The yearly projected cost growth increase for all other costs is three percent. There will be continued investments in capacity building, professional development, and support for families and children, but most of the funding will be dedicated to early education programs. In Fiscal Year 2031, 93% of the expected expenditures will go to organizations providing preschool. The dynamic modeling will continue to be updated as new data becomes available.

Chair Vega Pederson plans to bring a proposal to the board this summer to delay the Preschool For All tax increase scheduled for 2026 to 2027. This is possible because current forecasts show that with a one-year delay, the program will have enough savings to provide free preschool to all Multnomah County 3- and 4-year-olds by 2030, on schedule with the goals.

A Technical Advisory Group will examine financial and program data and recommend helping the program maintain fiscal stability while remaining on track for universal preschool by 2030. The tax increase delay will provide an additional year of information and data to guide the group's work.

The original measure includes planned tax increases. What is your plan for implementing those?

Chair Vega-Peterson said the tax rate, as it is currently set, will provide Preschool For All access to all of the priority populations within Multnomah County. So when the Preschool For All plan was put together, the focus was on children with the least access to quality preschool experience. There are a variety of situations, such as children from poorer households, children who are speaking languages other than English in their homes, children whose families are experiencing homelessness, and black and brown children. The county wanted to provide preschool access for all of those. The current tax increase made driving full universal access by 2030 impossible. The county will need more resources because the expenses exceed the costs. However, as it currently stands with the additional revenue, there is no need to initiate a tax increase in 2026 to ensure enough revenue is available. It is a volatile tax and more data and information about how this tax mechanism works will help the commissioners make better decisions.

The county will review the need and determine the rate necessary to fund the program annually. Do you anticipate ever decreasing the tax rate?

Chair Vega Peterson said the modeling was done pre-Covid. There is a different set of data to ensure the funds meet the needs. The board of Multnomah County Commissioners has the authority to set the tax rate at what is needed without going out to the voters. They will ensure they have the best possible data to understand the need and make those decisions. It is essential to have predictability so people know what to expect and not change the rate each year. The rate must be relatively consistent and reliable for the program and the taxpayers.

Commissioner Allison Lugo Knapp asked the following questions:

This budget adds a new Deflection and Addiction Recovery program in response to Measure 110's changes, which decriminalized possession of certain drugs. We know it is in the early stages, but what's your plan for ramping up quickly? Who will be involved, and do you have a target date to begin services?

Commissioner Brim-Edwards explained that the county commissioners did not receive the questions and the proposed answers until the day before this hearing, so at she will be reading the staff-prepared responses. She went on to explain that the commissioners haven't had a chance to review the budget, hear community feedback, or have an opportunity to provide amendments. So, for that reason, she did vote against approving the budget. With that context, she gave the following response to the question.

The county is developing a system and policy direction in a bi-weekly meeting with the HB 4002 Leadership Team consisting of leadership from law enforcement, the Sheriff's Office, the District Attorney, Chair Vega Pederson, Multnomah County Circuit Court, public defense, the Multnomah County Health Department, Multnomah County Department of Community Justice, the District Attorney, providers from the Behavioral Health Resource Networks, and a representative from the Mayor's Office.

The primary objective of this group is to guide who will be eligible for deflection and what will count as successful deflection. Participating partners must be bought in to have some shared agreements to have a deflection system that works. The first meeting took place on Friday, May 19th. Staff have also met one-on-one with members, and public safety leaders came prepared with a consensus recommendation for discussion. This group meets again this week.

In addition, an operations team will be created to put high-level guidance into place. The goal of this group is to map out the policies' operations as defined by the leadership team and design the paths to deflection. This includes services provided, data collection, procedural requirements from police to provider to court, language access, and other operational details. This group will continue after Sept 1 with continued implementation work, tracking, and reporting.

While broad deflection is planned, two parallel paths are moving forward swiftly to open a 24/7 drop-off center. On September 1, Multnomah County will have a place for deflection drop-off, in addition to connecting the community with other programs currently providing similar services. The county hopes to give law enforcement options for deflecting individuals arrested under HB 4002 to ensure a simple path to providing an individual with the services they need, not jail.

County staff is working closely with regional partners to forecast the need starting September 1. Various unpredictable factors are being considered, such as people who could be arrested for drug possession but not other charges and law enforcement capacity.

The County's Department of Assets is well into the process of leasing a temporary space to have a drop-off center available on Sept 1 for law enforcement and first responders. While there are challenges to finding a short-term lease for this use, they are touring other sites.

In addition, programming conversations are underway to move forward with the permanent 24/7 drop-off receiving center with sobering services. DCA is searching for permanent facilities to purchase and define space needs.

She said staff reported that Multnomah County leaders met with providers to hear their updated feedback on the proposed drop-off center, developed by her and her team, and participation from the other commissioners, law enforcement, and health care providers. This conversation focused on how to best phase this program in a way that is responsive to the urgency and provides the correct level of care to community members who need it. These conversations are essential to ensuring the entire continuum of care will be connected to best support the community.

Do you have a sense of what the need is in this area? How many people do you hope to serve in the first year?

Commissioner Brim-Edwards said they do not know how many people will be deflected - this will depend on many unknown factors. This will be critical to monitor as they work with law enforcement,

behavioral health providers, and others. She said her perspective is that it will be important that the conversations about deflections are open and transparent. They are moving it out from the smaller group to the public forum. There are expectations that, as of September 1, things will be very different on the streets and in neighborhoods. If that doesn't occur, there will be a lot of questions about how deflection was defined and what services are offered. If there's a service gap, why is the transformation not happening? Between now and then, many of those conversations need to be daylighted so people understand what deflection is, what services will be provided, and what outcomes will be expected.

Chair Quiroz asked these follow-up questions:

Is there enough money? Is it the right amount? Has that budget been right-sized to that, and is it specific enough to ensure that you can hold your staff members and the county accountable for how those dollars are spent on deflection, given how early we are in the process?

Commissioner Brim-Edwards said the legislature passed House Bill 4002, which did provide the county with \$25 million for this drop-off receiving center with sobering services. But the county knows a much more robust continuum must be built out. Deflection is only one piece of what people need. There's a 42% gap between the need and withdrawal management; there's a gap between the number of beds the county can provide the actual need. The county is still reviewing the health department's and other budgets that will be part of the final adoption. There is not that full continuum built out and resourced. The county should deflect them to options for other services, including withdrawal management and treatment because that's ultimately recovery services. She concluded by stating she does not see that in the budget build-out to help circumvent the crisis happening on the streets.

Chair Vega Peterson added that there are many unknowns about how House Bill 4002 will look when it is fully implemented on September 1st. This has many potential impacts on different parts of the system, depending on how the enforcement goes. That key piece of the deflection where law enforcement engages with somebody in that interaction will be critical to the impact on the system. Suppose that person is successfully deflected from the criminal justice system and is on a more health-focused path. In that case, they will see a greater need for deflection drop-off or partnerships with providers with the entire continuum.

The county will be more focused on the justice system, the jails, district attorneys, and public defenders, ensuring they have an easy and successful path for deflection. There are also parts of the bill that give additional offramps. Deflection is a voluntary thing. If somebody decides they don't want to be deflected at that moment, they go down the other path of the justice system. There are other offramps, some impacting the Department of Community Justice and Parole and Probation. The county wants to have enough flexibility in the dollars to adjust and invest in the areas that need it the most. What all of this is going to cost ultimately is going to depend on what it's going to look like.

Is that \$25 million for building capital expenditures, leasing space, or operations?

Chair Vega Peterson said it is for both capital and operations.

Commissioner Meieran said that having received the TSCC questions yesterday and looking through them, she also had some concerns. So much more is needed for a full continuum. Not just for substance use disorder writ large but for deflection itself within that. That \$25 million is another concern. She understood that it was for a facility with services attached. The only other funding reflected in the budget is in the Chair's office. There's \$2 million. That includes a staff person, but it's unclear what the \$2 million is for other than a staff person. She said she feels there should be contingency established with probably substantially more. None of the department directors who have presented have given an analysis, even an estimate of what might be needed.

She went on to say no one had mentioned the recent presiding judge's order, which comes from the Oregon Supreme Court requiring that those caught dealing drugs must be held pretrial in jail, and that will have a substantial impact on who's in the criminal justice system and who's in jail, and who's prosecuted. The county must budget for all of these, and she feels this has not been adequately addressed in the budget.

Commissioner Tod Burton asked these follow-up questions:

Would you comment on the capacity to provide the mental health services that are going to be required from a staffing level? We understand it isn't easy to find the professionals needed to deliver these kinds of services, and the expectation is that those services will grow with this deflection program. Has the county thought about how they will staff this up for that?

Chair Vega Peterson said they are already working on a Request For Information that would be sent out for providers who would be staffing a deflection center. The county is also envisioning that there are multiple pathways for deflection. One might be a drop-off center, but another might be the model currently used where law enforcement, as they're engaging with someone who needs assistance, reaches out to a provider and has a peer come and meet that person where they are on the street. They may take them to the behavioral resource center downtown and engage with that person that way. What deflection will look like is that there will be different options for it. The county is making sure the partnerships are available, and they will be able to have a provider that can do the staffing. That's just for deflection.

She concluded by stating that deflection itself would be essential, and Multnomah County would be working to set up components, have the right resources, and have the right staff. These are more significant issues that the county, the state, and healthcare partners have been grappling with for a long time.

Commissioner Wubbold asked the following questions:

When we spoke last year, the County was beginning work with Metro to build a plan for spending down the homeless services tax dollars. Are you on track with your spending plan? And what lessons have you learned from last year about the process of spending these dollars?

Commissioner Stegmann said she read and agreed with the answers prepared by staff. Multnomah County is on track for spending as required by the Metro & Multnomah County Intergovernmental Agreement. The total Supportive Housing Services (SHS) FY 2024 budget is \$205 million. The IGA with Metro requires establishing a spending target, and Multnomah County's spending target is \$127 million. Year-to-date spending through March was \$91 million, which is 71% of the spending target and shows Multnomah County is on track to meet the target.

It is important to note that SHS Measure revenue has been volatile in its first years. In FY 2024, the Joint Office of Homeless Services (JOHS) received significant unanticipated revenue. The large increases in available funding have required rapid growth in programs and infrastructure. The County has integrated lessons learned from the last several years that have resulted in the following improvements, including:

- Coordinating cross-department programming and budgeting with a one-county perspective
- Increasing visibility of financial data and improved monitoring of expenditures to make mid-year spending adjustments.
- Investing in infrastructure and staffing to right-size the capacity needed
- Providing quality initiatives to improve contracting procedures and invoice payment timelines
- Prioritizing homeless services and ensuring JOHS contractors are prioritized for execution

These improvements have helped better manage the SHS Measure funding and ensure that it is used effectively to address homelessness in the community.

The Supportive Housing Services tax dollars have provided the Joint Office of Homeless Services an opportunity to significantly increase services across all of its divisions of work, including:

- Safety Off and On the Streets
- Housing Placement & Retention
- Supportive Housing System Support, Access, & Coordination
- Strategic Capital Investments

The funding priorities align with the annual work plan, the local implementation plan, and the Homelessness Response Action Plan. As part of the Safety Off and On the Streets division of work, this year the county will begin the implementation of the Community Sheltering Strategy, which will add 1,060 shelter beds in the next two fiscal years, as well as maintain existing shelter units and adult and youth day centers. With the Housing Placement & Retention, Multnomah County is expanding services to improve placement out of shelters—tied to the Homelessness Response Action Plan—and fully funding Continuum of Care matches for all projects to assist provider organizations in overcoming barriers to federal resources. The county is increasing the number of permanent supportive housing units and service funding to match the need to support clients with housing and health care navigation, income acquisition, eviction prevention, and other individualized tenant-driven services.

The county is using Regional Strategy Investment Fund dollars and in-system support to bolster the data modernization efforts, develop and launch a shelter availability application helping providers and clients identify available shelter beds in real-time, and maintain capacity-building efforts for providers as part of a multi-year effort to stabilize the workforce across provider network.

The Joint Office has also supported a county-wide approach in spending down Supportive Housing Services tax dollars. For Fiscal Year 2025, the Joint Office solicited proposals from departments across the County that meet SHS goals. Proposals were selected based on Multnomah County's Local Implementation Plan (LIP) goals, strengthening year-over-year investments to prevent homelessness, the feasibility of implementation, equitable outcomes, and this year's funding priorities: eviction prevention; behavioral health services; and services to support folks impacted by the City of Portland's time, place, and manner initiative.

Chair Quiroz asked these follow-up questions:

When will the public see change? Lots of processes have shifted and changed over the last several years, mainly from the previous year to this year, just in terms of being able to spend the money quickly and agilely. It was mentioned that the county is taking authority back from the joint office. Are there conversations about a different, county-wide, joint office-wide structure? Is that the best mechanism for supportive housing and serving the homelessness problem, or should we stay the course and continue to make these minor adjustments?

Commissioner Stegman said she appreciates the Chair and the leadership's commitment to see a "One-County" vision. There are multiple departments and divisions, and, in the past, there has not been an overarching implementation of supportive housing services dollars embedded across those departments and divisions. There is a change in how the county does business and how those services are delivered. However, while the county is charged with addressing homelessness, it does not have the resources or funding to solve it. Homelessness is about poverty; it's about racism -- it's about all the socio-economic problems that one county cannot solve individually. It is incumbent upon individual county members to move that dial. While it is the county's responsibility, it is also everyone's responsibility.

Chair Vega Pederson said the one-county approach has been vital in making sure that Multnomah

County is working in coordination internally within the organization. The other essential things are cooperation and partnership with different jurisdictions and entities besides Multnomah County. The county is working with other partners and investing in the staff and elected levels. This is paying dividends.

Commissioner Brim Edwards said there's been a considerable change in the relationship between the city and the county since last year versus having two separate sets of activities occurring. There's much more coordination, which is critical given the shared responsibilities. There have been several joint meetings.

Most people are seeing a directional improvement. On the dollars spent, the county is hitting the targets. But the real question will be: Are the dollars being spent effectively and creating a reduction in the number of people who are homeless?

The number of resources the county has received is unprecedented. There are also an unprecedented number of people living on the streets. The county does not have a plan that shows an overall reduction in the number of people living unsheltered on the streets without essential services or a path to housing. That's critical. The county needs to ensure more people exit the streets than enter homelessness. That's the essential next step.

Commissioner Brim Edwards said that the county made significant investments and critical pieces of the continuum of moving people and stopping them from becoming homeless using rent assistance, eviction protection, or a whole host of services. However, the county does not have the final accounting of how that \$100 million was spent. The community must see how that money was spent and effectively produced outcomes, not just activities.

Commissioner Meiran added that spending and investing money does not translate into action or impact with the \$205 million in the fiscal year 2024 budget. She said when you look at the \$500 million spent and the results, it doesn't add up and this concerns her, she feels there's not been the attention placed on what that should be. There's no holistic plan, rather there are isolated puzzle pieces. Maybe someone gets into treatment, but then they end up going off the cliff because there's nothing after the treatment, so the numbers -- getting people into treatment look great. And then they crash, and they're back on the streets, and nothing accounts for that. That is the problem. The local improvement plan through Metro is not a plan to address this.

In her opinion, the Homelessness Response Action Plan that is mentioned in all these responses and throughout the budget: in essence, it has not been approved by this board, is distributed in a way that it's hard to figure out what it's doing, and there's no acknowledgment.

This process has been happening, but it's been flying under the radar, so there's not a lot of public understanding of what's happening with it. It's a new bureaucracy, and if the board approves, the Joint Office IGA with the City of Portland will be dissolved. There will be a new system.

She said she is concerned about that vagueness and not having a plan for primary prevention, shelter safety on and off the streets, transition from shelter to housing, and permanent housing. They need a continuum to show the impact of investments just for the SHS investments of \$500+ million in two years. There has been a carry-over of millions of dollars. That means the county is underspending or not spending that money, but that's not called out in the budget. Again, it's dispersed.

She said there are issues with contracting that play into this. Significant systemic issues concern her regarding this budget. She emphasized that this being her last year on the board, she wanted to be honest because often, these processes are such that the Commissioners get the talking points. The commissioners read them, and it's just not the process of engagement and authenticity.

Commissioner Burton asked the following questions:

We know you have a multi-prong approach to address houselessness in our community, ranging from preventive services like rent assistance to building and expanding shelter capacity. How do you select between these different interventions? How do you choose which is the best approach?

Commissioner Stegmann said Multnomah County and the Joint Office of Homeless Services have always been committed to providing a full continuum of services to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. This complete suite of services is central to a Housing First approach, built on "meeting people where they are" and connecting each person to the exemplary service for them. The balance of services funded is affected by multiple community plans.

The Supportive Housing Services Measure Local Implementation Plan (LIP) sets priorities and numeric goals around prevention, housing placements, and permanent supportive housing. The LIP's regional goals at the end of the 10-year measure include:

- Creating and maintaining 2,235 supportive housing units,
- Exiting an additional 2,500 households experiencing homelessness for permanent housing per year, and
- Preventing 1,000 households from becoming homeless per year.

At the same time, the Homelessness Response Action Plan (HRAP) sets complementary numeric goals around shelter and housing placements. The HRAP set a target of sheltering or placing into housing an additional 2,699 people by December 31, 2025—the number equivalent to 50% of the unsheltered people on the by-name list as of January 2024—as well as ending discharges from corrections and the health system to the streets by 2026 and ensuring 75% of people housing in permanent supportive housing retain their housing 24 months after placement.

Both of these goals also include a focus on reducing disparities for people who are over-represented in homelessness, including people of color and LGBTQIA2S+ folks. Both plans are built around community and service expert analyses of the services needed to reduce homelessness, including prevention, case management, rental assistance, and shelter options. JOHS also performs and commissions studies to help the county understand the value of new approaches as they evolve, including the recent PSU study of alternative shelters.

JOHS staff and leadership create long-term and annual plans based upon these community goals, making decisions on the balance of funding per service area to ensure the county meets those long-term goals. They then craft budgets that support these annual work plans.

She concluded that the metrics had never been more robust in her time as County Commissioner. They have a ways to go. She looks forward to the dashboard, where they can tell how many shelter beds are available in real time. She added that they have data points they are tracking, and the fact that they are trying to get 50% of the homeless populations housed by the end of 2025 is significant.

Commissioner Wubbold asked the following questions:

Last year, the County Auditor's Office released a report on the County's budget process. The audit included recommendations related to community budget committee involvement, and the budget document discusses planned changes in this area. Tell us more—what was different this year? And what changes are you planning for next year?

Chair Vega Peterson said during the FY 2025 Budget Engagement Process this year, her office and the Office of Community Involvement (OCI) increased opportunities for Community Budget Advisory Committees to engage the budget outside of the CBAC process and provided some guidelines to bring better clarity to the CBAC process for staff and volunteers. These changes were made available for the FY 2025 Budget Engagement Process while her office and OCI

continued researching other ways to improve the process for future engagements.

Additionally, early in the FY 2025 budget preparation process, she created the new Chair's Office Budget & Strategic Projects Director position – a role intended to lead and streamline budget initiatives and timelines – and made intentional efforts to increase opportunities for feedback and to diversify communication channels for collecting input from the public. This role worked in close partnership with the OCI Director to collaboratively plan new activities, including a Budget Town Hall event in early February, recorded for those unable to attend the live event. A new Chair's Annual Budget website was launched as a hub for these new resources. A dedicated email address for the community to send budget questions and comments was created, as well as a budget survey that collected responses from late January through the end of March. Over 1,000 community responses helped to inform priority-setting and decision-making for the Chair's Proposed Budget.

The Office of Community Involvement also worked for much of the past fiscal year to daylight the resources and structure needed to improve the CBAC experience. During this review, county staff and CBAC volunteers expressed a need for clarification about roles and responsibilities and clear guidelines for managing the process. Before starting the CBAC FY 2025 Budget Engagement Process, she released Program Guidelines that provided clarity and direction for CBAC Volunteer Members and Department Staff who manage the programs.

Her office and OCI created a plan to update County Code Language to clarify better program details, research best budget engagement practices that comply with State of Oregon regulations, and make an updated process and tools for budget engagement for CBAC members. These steps are currently in process, and several elements are planned to be in place for the FY 2026 budget engagement process. The planned steps for continued improvements to the CBAC program in FY 2025 include engaging in an after-action review of this year's CBAC Process for successes and growth opportunities and continued partnership and planning to create opportunities for synergy. She concluded that that's something she also wants to implement every year for the budget.

Can you recall an instance in the budget where a comment, suggestion, or recommendation by CBAC impacted your decision about something in the budget?

Chair Vega Peterson said one of the cruxes of the issues is that the timing of the process doesn't match up well as the Chair is putting together the budget. All those comments at the town hall happened before her budget was released in April. She said they often don't get the letters or responses until after my budget has been finalized, and that's one of the things she is working on.

She added that in past years, recommendations have come out of the CBAC reports on the work process and looking for recommendations around certain things. One of those is what can be seen with the JOHS and wanting to understand how the different dollars are being spent throughout the organization. So, the county has tried to be more transparent about that.

Commissioner Brim Edwards added as someone who has been through many budget processes. Still, for the first time as a Multnomah County Commissioner, she said she was appreciative when she raised issues earlier this year and when CBAC raised problems that the Chair was willing to examine the overall process. The constituents view us as their elected community members to surface issues that the community has raised with us, so she is interested in the after-action, looking at ways in which there are opportunities for commissioners to have a deeper opportunity before they are asked to approve the budget. She said so that they can help bridge the community who may or may not have access to the link to respond to the Chair's budget. The rest of the commission can be an essential way in which community concerns and ideas are surfaced. There needs to be a process in which the commission can do that. She emphasized that she appreciates

that they will relook at how the commission engages in the calendar and the timing of their votes.

Commissioner Meiran added that she too would like to add additional perspective. After years of being on this board, she appreciates the work done with the community, and building on that will be great. But year after year, there's a promise to address the process and make it better. Nothing is put together for the commissioners, and they aren't effectively engaged in the process even though they could be involved in it more meaningfully. She said she is hopeful this will happen.

There was sobering feedback last year from CRBC representatives reflecting a dysfunctional process where the community advisory bodies for the budget were not getting information. They were getting it late, only getting references to program offers and that type of thing. It was a very dysfunctional process; the commissioners heard even more sobering feedback about the continued dysfunction, and none of these issues have been addressed. She said she appreciated TSCC commissioners saying they would check back next year and see if the county is doing as they said they would. She said the county had not followed through in the past as they said they would.

Commissioner Burton asked the following questions:

It's a big year for Multnomah County elections, with the change to new ranked-choice voting for the Portland City Council, and continued work to ensure public confidence in the elections process. What steps are you taking (e.g. testing) to ensure ranked-choice voting will be tabulated properly? How will ranked-choice voting be clearly explained to voters? What communications will be provided?

Commissioner Meieran read the following: On November 8th, 2022, voters in both the City of Portland and Multnomah County approved measures requiring ranked-choice voting (also called RCV). Last year, the Clear Ballot Group, the Election Divisions' voting system software vendor, began developing an updated version of its software capable of counting single and multi-winner ranked choice contests. The CBG software was designed to be paired with the open-source RCTab to tabulate round-by-round results for RCV contests. While RCTab is new to Multnomah County Elections and Clear Ballot software, it is not new to RCV elections. It has been used and proved successful in several RCV Elections, including the successful ranked choice voting Elections in New York City.

The next step in the process is Election Assistance Commission testing. After developing their new software, Clear Ballot submitted the updates to a federally accredited Voting System Test Laboratory, which will review the updated software to ensure it aligns with Election Assistance Commission standards. The testing process has been completed.

After passing EAC testing, the State of Oregon has its certification process that voting system software must go through, which includes a functional test of the software. This functional test will be carried out at Multnomah County Elections over July, consisting of:

- A load test to ensure that the software works at scale,
- A test election to produce results, and
- A mock hand recount of the test election will be conducted using a recount procedure drafted by the Elections Division and tested by national experts.

After the functional test is complete, the State of Oregon will certify the software in August.

Internally, an in-house DCS data scientist continues to do logic and accuracy testing procedures unique to Multnomah County Elections. This procedure will allow the county to independently verify the accuracy of the tabulation performed by Clear Ballot's software in a precise way.

Members of Multnomah County Elections, the City of Portland Transition Team, and the Portland Auditor's Elections Office have collaborated since March 2023 to plan and build RCV voter education strategies and tools. They aim to ensure that all Portland voters have the tools and knowledge to vote successfully with a ranked-choice ballot.

Based on best practices and the advice of nationwide voter education experts, the City and County have decided to wait to kick off RCV education campaigns in early June – a time that is: (a) after voters have finished filling out their Primary Election ballots, and (b) at a time closer to when voters will see RCV contests on their ballots. By the time November comes, the education that they've received about RCV will still be fresh in their minds.

To ensure that voters are aware that ranked-choice voting is coming to their ballots and that they understand how to vote with this new system, Multnomah County Elections, in collaboration with the city, is developing materials and campaigns to educate voters with a focus on reaching voters in underserved communities and locations:

- Educational Videos – The county is producing two videos explaining ranked choice voting and how to mark an RCV ballot.
- Comics and Coloring Books – The county works with three Multnomah County-based artists to produce an educational comic and a coloring book that will provide detailed instructions and visuals for marking a ranked-choice ballot. These materials, and many others, will be disseminated to voters through the Library system and at summer outreach events.
- Paid Media Campaigns – In coordination with the Portland City Auditor's Office, MultCo Elections will be purchasing advertising between September and November 2024 to spread the word that ranked-choice voting will be used in City of Portland contests to direct people to resources that explain how ranked-choice voting works and how to mark a ballot. You can expect to see and hear advertising about ranked-choice voting on the radio, at the bus stop, in the newspaper, on social feeds, and more.
- Website Content – The county is developing comprehensive content for the Multnomah County Elections website to give voters the information they need to vote in an RCV election successfully.

In addition to the materials that Multnomah County is producing, the City of Portland is developing several tools and materials, which the County is supporting and sharing through its channels, including:

- Mock Elections – The City has purchased a registration for RankedVote, an online mock voting platform that teaches voters how to fill out a ranked-choice ballot. The County and City will host several mock elections using the platform.
- Citywide Mailer and Ballot Insert – The City is designing and sending a two-page, full-color mailer to all Portland households. The mailer will explain the changes to elections for the City of Portland contests, including the introduction of district-based voting and ranked-choice ballots. A variation of the mailer will also be inserted into the ballots of City of Portland voters for the November election.

In addition to the materials produced and shared by the County and the City, many voters will look to news organizations for their results. For this reason, the county is working to educate local media members about voting, tabulation, and results reporting in ranked choice voting contests.

County Elections officials will present at various media education events over the summer. They

will host results-reporting-specific media education forums from late summer to early Fall. The north star is that regardless of where voters look for RCV results, whether from the website or their favorite trusted news source, they will receive accurate, timely, and understandable information.

Multnomah County takes voter education and outreach efforts related to ranked choice voting seriously and has some great plans.

Chair Quiroz thanked the Multnomah County Commissioners and staff for the responses to the questions and contributions to the hearing. She closed the hearing and opened a regular meeting of the TSCC. She asked if the commissioners had any comments. Commissioner Wubbold said he wanted to comment that the situation with houselessness in his neighborhood had gotten better.

Chair Quiroz thanked him for the comment and asked Executive Director Willhite to share the staff recommendations for the certification letter.

Executive Director Willhite said it's been a pleasure, as always, to work with the Multnomah County budget and financing staff. Staff are diligent and always ready to answer any questions. TSCC staff appreciates their partnership. Director Willhite said staff, found the budget estimates reasonable for the purpose stated and in compliance with budget law. TSCC staff suggests no recommendations or objections to the fiscal year 2024-25 Approved Budget.

Chair Quiroz called for a motion.

Commissioner Burton moved to certify Multnomah County's Approved Budget with no recommendations or objections as recommended by staff. Commissioner Wubbold seconded the motion, which passed with a unanimous vote of the commissioners.

There being no other business, Chair Quiroz closed the meeting.