

## **NON-DEPARTMENTAL CITIZEN BUDGET ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

**TO:** Chair Cogen and Commissioners

**FROM:** Multnomah County Non-Departmental Citizens Budget Advisory Committee

**DATE:** April 22, 2013

**SUBJECT:** Non-Departmental CBAC 13/14 Report

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**PROCESS:**

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The Non-Departmental Citizen Budget Advisory Committee (CBAC) is responsible for reviewing the budgets of various offices and programs, including centralized administrative functions (e.g., the Chair and Commissioners' Offices, Auditor, County Attorney); Communications Office; Office of Diversity and Equity; Office of Emergency Management; Office of Government Relations; Office of Sustainability; independent agencies within the county (e.g., Citizen Involvement Committee, Tax Supervising and Conservation Council, Public Safety Coordinating Council); and additional areas in which the funding is essentially non-discretionary (e.g., the Business Income Tax pass through to the East County cities, facility costs for the State Courts, and accounting costs for various sinking funds outside the county's General Fund). The remainder of the non-departmental budget is composed of allocations to non-county agencies such as Multnomah County schools and the Regional Arts and Culture Council.

The Non-Departmental CBAC reviewed and vigorously discussed goals, priorities, and plans for maintaining services in light of the county's continuing difficult budget situation. We studied the county's non-departmental services for both the current fiscal year and the budget offers for the next budget cycle. We also received feedback during our committee sessions about our thoughts on cost saving, including comments from the Chair's and Commissioners' Offices. Further, the CBAC training orientation provided information on how funding for the next fiscal year was shaping up. We met with the Chair's Office; Commissioners' Offices from Districts 1, 2, 3 and 4; Auditor's Office; Office of Emergency Management; Office of Diversity & Equity; Communications Office; Office of Sustainability; Office of Government Relations; the Regional Arts & Culture Commission; and the Budget Office with regard to the Non-Departmental Special Funds. Additionally, we met with the Director of Economic Development to learn more about the program.

The Non-Departmental CBAC is diverse, consisting of new and returning citizen volunteers. Returning members include Sherry Willmschen, Pauline Duffy, and Brenda Ray Scott, with Laura Chenet Leonard, Cain Bloomer, and Mary Stewart joining our CBAC last Fall. What we have in common is a concern for the fiscal health of Multnomah County, a belief in the maintenance of fiscal responsibility among the county offices and agencies, and a desire to seek collaborative and proactive actions to improve non-departmental functions benefiting the community. As a committee, we appreciate the efforts of all who provided us with the information and materials needed to make well-informed recommendations regarding the use of county resources.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

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To summarize, the Non-Departmental CBAC concludes:

1. **Coordination and collaboration intra-county and with external partners:** Our Committee continues to strongly encourage county offices and departments to coordinate their efforts and actively seek out collaborations and partnerships, both with other county offices and departments, as well as with other government and community organizations. Community organizations include non-profit, faith-based, and other non-governmental organizations. The benefits of successful coordination and collaborations are undeniable, especially in a time of diminishing resources. They include conserving resources, strengthening relationships, and broadening public knowledge and acceptance of county programs. Examples of successful collaborations within the last year include:
  - a) VASH 305 program—Multnomah County recently invested \$10,000 while partnering with Home Forward, the Portland Housing Bureau and the United Way. The organizations pooled a total of \$40,000 in resources. At an average cost of \$300 per veteran, the money was used to pay housing application fees, deposits and other related expenses, which, in turn, qualified them each for an \$8600 housing voucher. This small investment ultimately resulted in 136 vets obtaining housing and avoiding becoming homelessness.
  - b) Healthy Multnomah County Forum—the Chair’s Office, the Budget Office, and the Citizen Involvement Committee teamed up to host the successful forum in March.

During our research, we identified a number of potential new initiatives to expand coordination and collaboration which will result in improved service while conserving resources. We recommend that:

- a) the Commissioners’ Offices collectively identify and pursue initiatives connected to critical mental health and housing issues.
- b) the County establish a central location where licenses for external software applications reside and could be used by multiple county offices and

departments (e.g., one survey application could be used by multiple offices). We had recommended this previously.

2. **Communications Office:** Our Committee is pleased the Communications Office adopted our recommendation from last year's report to hire a graphic designer. We encourage the Communications Office to continue adopting our recommendation that electronic and graphic mediums be utilized at levels similar to television and video formats in order to maximize the delivery of information to the broadest audience possible.

It is critical that the Communications Office support and be seen as an asset internally. We are concerned that county departments and offices are not able to take full advantage of the capabilities of the Communications Office due to lack of awareness about its policies and procedures. Examples include lack of knowledge about:

- a) support offered for graphic design projects;
- b) how to request videos be prepared;
- c) types of announcements that can be posted on the social media accounts maintained by the Communications Office as well as how to submit requests;
- d) how to submit general requests for consultation.

In line with the larger recommendations made by the County Auditor in his 2011 Social Media Review Report, we recommend the Communications Office issue communications guidelines, including those for social media. We also encourage the Communications Office to increase awareness about these policies and procedures using methods such as holding meetings and posting them in the Wednesday Wire.

3. **Youth internships:** District 2's Office and the Office of Diversity & Equity (ODE), independent of one another, created innovative internships for youth. These internships are important for: (1) giving youth professional experience which will inspire and help shape their lives, and (2) creating projects that improve county services. Our Committee supports the mission and outcomes of the county's youth internships. However, we believe that the various programs could be consolidated and jointly coordinated. The action could be spearheaded collectively by the Board of Commissioners, ODE, and county departments. A competitive, open bidding process should be established if the county chooses to contract out the internship selection/management functions. This would identify the contractor most likely to succeed at the lowest cost. Additionally, there should be open recruitment for interns throughout the county, with significant efforts made to do outreach in East County. Such program modifications will increase efficiency, transparency and make these important opportunities equally

accessible to every young person in the county. Cost savings could be used to support additional internships.

4. **The Office of Emergency Management (OEM):** Our Committee is concerned about the lack of coordination of emergency management services located within specific county departments. In several departments, small offices delegated with emergency management responsibilities sometimes lack sufficient staff to respond to inquiries and situations when they arise. We recommend that staff responsible for emergency management throughout the county be centralized in OEM in order to increase efficiency and improve performance. OEM staff can then be assigned to work with specific departments as appropriate.

Additionally, we continue to recognize the funding challenges OEM faces due to the potential reduction of federal Emergency Management Performance Grants and the overall lack of state support for the county's emergency management services. We encourage the county to pursue these issues as part of its legislative agenda. Although we are aware that the state funding formula for emergency services was recently adjusted to better reflect county population size, we also encourage county leadership to continue monitoring this matter.

5. **Performance measures:** Our Committee continues to be pleased with the increasing clarity and usefulness of performance measures of non-departmental offices. Tangible performance measures reflect the values of the county's different constituencies and are critical since they can provide an accurate picture to the public about their investment in government services. We recognize the inherent challenge of long timeframes that are needed to achieve worthwhile goals. We continue to encourage the county to develop performance measures in a tiered manner, which would promote accomplishing larger projects in smaller chunks. Commissioners continue to develop performance measure models which describe tangible written project goals and milestones that lay out concrete steps by which each project can be measured. We would like to see other non-departmental offices consider similar models for developing their performance measures. We acknowledge the positive impact of the Auditor's work with non-departmental offices to create meaningful performance measures.

6. **New Initiatives Proposed by Chair Jeff Cogen's Office:** Our Committee supports the following initiatives proposed by the Chair's Office:

- a) suing the Mortgage Electronic Registration System;
- b) mental health first aid training;
- c) planning for the new health department headquarters.

These initiatives may recoup significant financial losses to the county and assist homeowners, as well as improve county services and responses over both the short- and long-term.

Additionally, we commend the Chair’s Office for creating a public advocate position and partnering with the Office of Citizen Involvement on several project designed to increase and support public participation opportunities (i.e., trainings for committee staff, creating an easily accessible list of current opportunities to serve on public advisory committees).

7. **Regional Arts & Culture Council (RACC):** Our Committee is pleased to hear that RACC’s funding is stable and even growing, potentially freeing up resources to expand arts and culture programs. We encourage RACC to take steps to increase funding for arts and culture programs in underserved communities, with particular attention to East County. These steps could include conducting significant outreach, holding an East County Arts Summit, and designating funds for distribution in these communities.
  
8. **SUN School Program:** While the SUN School program resides in the Department of Human Services, our Committee learned that county commissioners are also involved by assessing and setting guidelines for the program. We learned that SUN School providers have five year contracts, plus an additional two year renewal option. Our Committee believes implementing a three year contract cycle is a more useful approach. This approach reflects best practices, provides stronger oversight to identify problems earlier, and would encourage a wider pool of opportunities for more contractors to participate.
  
9. **Office of Government Relations:** Our Committee supports the recent hire of a permanent grant writer to help identify grant opportunities and advise county departments about how to submit successful applications. We believe this is an investment in which the higher likelihood of receiving grants in the future far outweighs the costs of this position.
  
10. **Economic Development:** Our Committee believes it is important for the county to take steps to stimulate the business climate, such as supporting the microloan program. We also encourage the Economic Development Director to study what other cities, counties, regional governments, and comparable entities are doing to promote economic development and consider implementing successful practices and programs here.

In conclusion, the Non-Departmental CBAC appreciates the opportunity to be of service to Multnomah County, and we are grateful to all county employees who gave their time to meet with us about the budget process during this difficult economic time.

**MEMBERS:**

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Sherry Willmschen, Chair  
Laura Chenet Leonard  
Brenda Ray Scott

Cain Bloomer  
Pauline Duffy  
Mary Stewart