

Citizens Budget Advisory Committee

Departments of Community Services

Report/Recommendations

April 2014 (for FY '15)

Members: Brian Harvey (chair), Joe Daunt, Debra Giannini, Karla Forsythe, Kay Metsger, Carolyn Manke

Staff: Jerry Elliott, Sammuel Konadu

Process:

Our committee met with the following directors during this budget season: Kim Peoples, Director, Department of Community Services; Karen Schilling, Division Director, Land Use and Planning; Brian Vincent, Division Director, Road Services; Tim Scott, Division Director, Elections; Mike Oswald, Division Director, Animal Services. Mr. Peoples started off our CBAC season by providing an overview of DCS structure and responsibilities. We then heard from division directors, who explained their division's programs and projects. The CBAC was afforded the opportunity to ask questions and seek clarification before meeting to discuss the merits of current program offers for DCS in Fiscal Year 2015. Our recommendations are detailed below and have been prioritized and ranked by number to reflect what we found to be the most efficient use of funds and the most pressing needs of the County.

(Note: A special thanks to Mr. Vincent for meeting with us a second time to follow up on questions the committee raised concerning the Morrison Bridge project.)

Budget Recommendations:

1. Because pedestrians tend to cross major roadways at points other than intersections due to long distances between those intersections, installation of mid-block crossings can increase pedestrian safety. However, this is only true with high vehicle compliance and driver awareness. It is the position of the Committee that Rapid Rectangular Flashing Beacon (RRFB) systems are an effective way to increase pedestrian safety by alerting drivers to pedestrian crossing and encouraging vehicle compliance. We recommend that the County fund **Program Offer (PO) #91031-15**. We further recommend that the County continue to explore and pursue opportunities to install RRFB systems in additional locations; particularly multi-lane, higher-speed throughways and commuter routes.

2. The Committee supports the request made by Animal Services in **PO#91010-15** to provide funding intended to make improvements to the Animal Shelter facility and expand Animal Services' presence in Portland. It is important that the County continue to support the efforts of Animal Services to humanely house and care for the animals they hope to place in new homes. To this end, increasing Animal Services' presence in Portland will improve timely placement of these animals in loving homes. Furthermore, because the County shelter is an open-admission animal shelter, the shelter cannot turn away any animals and must work diligently to avoid the euthanization of animals in its care. As a result, Animal Services is currently limited in its options to avoid being filled to capacity and must warehouse animals in a constrained facility.
3. After review, the Committee supports upgrading the County's ballot tally machines to a newer generation of ballot-counting technology. Multnomah County's optical scan tally machines (ES&S M650) and software have been in use since 2003. The 650s continue to count ballots accurately but due to their age have a high rate of mechanical failure and require almost hourly cleaning and maintenance during peak use. The 650s also have a very low rate of throughput at about 1,000 ballots per hour for 17inch ballots and about 2,000 ballots per hour for 14inch ballots. Elections currently owns six 650s but during large election cycles, rents three additional 650's to ensure that ballots can be counted in a timely fashion despite significant downtime due to mechanical failure. ES&S is no longer updating hardware, software or firmware for the system so there is no possibility of upgrades to our current system. Since 2003, the industry has been moving away from optical scan in favor of digital imaging. Digital imaging technology has several advantages over optical scan including greater throughput and a digitally captured image of every paper ballot. New systems can process ballots eight times faster than the County's current system. All these factors make **PO#91026-15** a worthwhile and necessary investment in the County elections process.
4. The Committee supports the funding of **PO#91029-15**. We feel strongly that the County should invest in a limited duration position, to be filled by a Senior Transportation Engineer with seismic experience, whose purpose is to increase coordination between government agencies by encouraging and enabling the use of similar assumptions for seismic damage, identifying remaining serviceable routes for emergency response and life line routing, and prioritizing restoration of service. While a major earthquake may seem remote and far removed from our daily experience, this does not diminish the importance of preparing for its eventuality.
5. The Committee supports the funding of **PO#91028-15**. After the County's initial investment, the replacement of existing high pressure sodium bulbs on County-operated bridges with new energy-efficient LED fixtures will save the County and taxpayers money. It will also increase safety and reduce the County's carbon

footprint. Increased safety will result from a brighter and whiter lighting source, and a decreased need to shut down lanes for bulb repairs/replacement.

In addition, the committee supports the funding of the following new program requests:

- **PO#91030-15** — Enhanced Veterinary Services:
 - PO#91030 would fund essential seven-day-a-week veterinary services for shelter animals and establish a sustainable veterinary services “safety net” for homeless and low-income eligible pet owners. The current staffing level only enables Animal Services to provide full veterinary services four days a week. On the other three days of the week, employee relief veterinarians are employed to provide essential health care and spay/neuter surgeries. PO#91030 would fund a veterinary team consisting of one veterinarian and one certified veterinary technician. This improvement is necessary to provide consistent service to our most vulnerable citizens and their pets.
- **PO#91027-15** — Land Use and Comprehensive Plan Update:
 - PO#91027 provides for a much needed update to the County’s Comprehensive Plan which identifies land use and transportation planning goals, policies and strategies to protect natural resources and guide development within the unincorporated portions of the County.
- **PO#91003-15** — Ombudsman / Equity Facilitator:
 - PO#91003 expands the scope of the Ombudsman to avail Ombudsman and Equity Lens Facilitation services to all County Departments. The Ombudsman is an advocate for equitable and transparent government through investigation of citizen complaints. Upon substantive findings from the investigative process, the Ombudsman would make corrective policy or procedural recommendations to Department leadership. In advance of a specific case investigation, the Ombudsman, using complaint tracking methods, can identify potential trends in customer service complaints and can recommend policy revisions or process improvements that may preempt customer service issues later.