

## Proposed county budget makes smart connections

For many years, the budget process for Multnomah County was a painful study in having to do more with less.

That is not the case for now. This year, Chair Deborah Kafoury's 2016 proposed budget is \$1.7 billion, with more than \$90 million in expected new revenue over the current budget.

### EDITORIAL

There are lots of places that money can go wrong. We're happy to see it go right.

Kafoury has a well-established reputation as a put-your-money-where-your-mouth-is advocate for

the poor. With the combined initiatives from her fellow commissioners, this budget is no exception.

The budget dedicates \$2 million in ongoing funds to place more vulnerable people into housing by leveraging a combination of approaches. It is expected this funding will place 125 households into permanent housing, with a focus on families with children, veterans, the elderly and disabled. In addition to housing placement efforts, the budget has allotted \$5 million to one-time only funds to build new affordable housing units for an additional 125 families.

Housing options for the poor in this city, particularly people of color, are scarce growing ever scarcer in this city, with little interest from the private marketplace to correct the imbalance. It has to be the responsibility of our government, as the collective arm of the community, to foster the opportunity of housing for all, and Multnomah County is doing this in tandem with the cities of Portland and Gresham, nonprofits and other philanthropic partners.

The more immediate need exists as well, and the county budget has earmarked \$90,000 toward year-round shelter for families. The city has also expanded its year-round services for homeless individuals. Of the nearly 4,000 people counted as homeless in Multnomah County

in January, nearly half were unsheltered on the streets. Securing shelter will save lives and provide the essential first step to stability, services, housing and independence.

This budget connects the dots. In addition to direct services for people experiencing poverty and homelessness, it weaves a stronger network around education, health care and public safety.

The county proposes expanding the SUN school program to Parkrose, Gresham and Reynolds school districts, with additional funds dedicated to culturally specific case management services for African American children in East County.

The budget includes \$450,000 of new funding for culturally specific mental health services in schools to help kids access care. Currently, of the more than 140 schools in Multnomah County, only 1 in 4 have a dedicated mental health consultant.

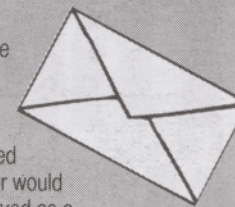
Beyond schools, the budget has dedicated more than \$1.5 million toward outpatient mental health services for underserved communities of color. It's part of the county's ongoing work to partner with communities of color whose members experience a lower life expectancy and higher rates of disease and poverty. The county is also a funding partner in the new Behavioral Health Center to provide immediate services for people in a mental health crisis.

The budget includes new investments to improve school attendance rates, increase the financial literacy and opportunities for low-income families, and prevent youth violence. The latter includes a coordinated effort with the court system, juvenile services, schools and law enforcement to divert first-time offenders away from the justice system and back to stability.

Chair Kafoury says the goal of the budget is to equip county employees with the means to best serve our community. As people on the front lines know — and this budget reflects — it's all connected.

### Write in

If you would like to have something that you've written published in our pages, or would like to get involved as a member of our reporting staff, contact Managing Editor Joanne Zuhl at 503-228-5657, joanne@streetroots.org. We ask that all submissions include the author's name and contact information, if available.



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## Weekly publication strong, getting stronger

For two days this spring, Street Roots vendors, volunteers, staff and board met to hash out what the next three years of the organization might look like.

Understanding that Street Roots went to a weekly publication schedule in January, something the organization had been working toward, it was clear that the next three years needed to be about improving and building on what we have accomplished. It was also clear that we needed a strategic plan for

success, but not to grow too fast.

Themes that boiled to the top of the two-day planning session included better ways to support the vendor program and offering more opportunities to people experiencing homelessness and poverty. Finding ways to give vendors a raise, offering better services and quality transportation options are all key to supporting the people we serve. Elevating vendor and community voices was equally as important. Of course, improving the newspaper and remaining relevant in an ever-changing media environment is also critical to the success of the organization.

Street Roots is about to reach the six-month mark of weekly publication. It is a heavy lift in itself. At the heart of weekly publication is giving people experiencing homelessness and poverty a more stable income to improve their quality of life. That has everything to do with the relationships built in the community between readers and vendors.

"Weekly has been working out for the vendors in greater ways than we could have anticipated," says Cole

Merkel, Street Roots vendor coordinator. "Readers are supporting around 120 vendors every week to earn an income. Sales have gone up 50 percent over the first 5 months of last year, and, overall, the energy has been really positive in the vendor office. Our vendor team right now is clearly motivated and driven. We have some of the hardest workers in Portland, doing everything they can to improve their quality of life."

It's been a truly amazing transition. It's something that we are constantly working on and trying to improve. From working with local businesses and vendors to providing quality content and journalism, to being a platform of social justice in our community. Everything we do at Street Roots is about relationships and lifting people up, including our collective community.

"Street Roots helps me meet people," says Jermaine Johnson, a Street Roots vendor. "It brings the community together — all the vendors, all the customers — to be able to go out and do this: to sell the paper and have love for the people. It's a constructive job."

So this summer you can help by spreading the word about Street Roots. Some of the ways you can do that is by turning your network onto the newspaper. Pick up an extra copy of the paper and leave it out your local haunt or at work. Have friends or family visiting? Let them know about the paper when they are out and about.

"Street Roots is a conduit for improving my life," says David Walker. "Homelessness doesn't equate to hopelessness. Everyone deserves a chance at happiness. My customers provide me with that opportunity! Thank you."

True that. Thank you readers. We couldn't do it without you. We appreciate all of your love. More than you can imagine. Read on.



### DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer

Israel Bayer is the executive director of Street Roots. You can reach him at israel@streetroots.org or follow him on Twitter @israelbayer.