

DENVER CITY COUNCIL

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Bonita Roznos
Executive Director

May 23, 2024

Mayor Mike Johnston
City and County Building
Denver, CO 80202

Dear Mayor Johnston,

We write to provide input on budget allocations and policies we believe should be reflected in your proposed 2025 budget. Our city faces numerous budgetary pressures on many fronts, and we understand the complexities and challenges in prioritizing needs. We believe it is crucial to allocate resources in a way that addresses both immediate needs and long-term systemic issues. You have demonstrated that you are willing to make bold decisions and work with this City Council body to collaboratively fund and implement key priorities. We hope to continue this spirit of collaboration in 2025 and beyond.

On Friday, May 3rd, the City Council met for a full-day retreat at Four Mile Historic Park in the Washington Virginia Vale neighborhood for the annual budget retreat. While we list several policy goals below, some overarching strategies intersect multiple areas.

Foremost is our shared concern in addressing homelessness in our city. Under your leadership, the city has made significant and laudable strides in providing shelter to thousands. Yet, if we are to move people from sheltering toward stability, and if we are to prevent displacement and enable residents to “age in place,” we must recognize that providing shelter is not enough. It must be accompanied by appropriate programs (i.e., TRUA) and services (i.e., mental health support, substance use treatment, and work training/placement) to ensure stability and greater success. You will find several policy proposals below aimed at these crucial elements.

This turns our attention to our workforce. Recognizing the pivotal role of workforce development in both preventing homelessness and fostering long-term prosperity, we advocate for a robust pipeline of skilled workers. This entails not only meeting the demands for essential services but also creating opportunities for residents to secure meaningful employment. This must also include newcomers to the city. While we expect continued funding for the migrant response, we also hope to see comprehensive support for facilitating their transition into work life. Finally, let’s not forget our youth in this effort to develop work skills and opportunities. This expansive approach will enhance and contribute positively to our community's economic and cultural vitality. Several proposals below reinforce the importance of our workforce.

Of course, speaking of our youth reminds us all to look to the future. The city has numerous well-thought-out plans that have not been implemented. These neighborhood plans are designed to improve quality of life, increase efficiency, manage growth, and improve safety. We want to see these plans considered as budget decisions are made. Ensuring their equitable implementation will contribute to the overall well-being of our city, as they were meant to do. Bringing an Office of Community Engagement to fruition will go far in furthering this brighter future while bringing efficiency and reliability to how residents engage with their government.

In crafting the 2025 budget, we urge you to consider everything in it through an equity lens, ensuring that underserved communities receive the support they need. We stress the importance of ensuring all budgetary decisions are evidence-based, taking a regional approach when necessary, and including built-in metrics in city contracts to accurately track progress and outcomes. By prioritizing evidence-based decision-making and streamlining operations, we believe there are opportunities to reallocate resources more effectively.

We appreciate your thoughtful attention to these proposals. We look forward to working together to build a more equitable and prosperous city for all residents.

Sincerely,



City Council President Jamie Torres



City Council President Pro Tempore Amanda P. Sandoval

Cc:

Manish Kumar, Dept. of Community Planning and Development
Jolon Clark, Dept. of Parks and Recreation
Amy Ford, Dept. of Transportation and Infrastructure
Nicole Doheny, Chief Financial Officer
Anne-Marie Braga, Denver Human Services
Al Gardner, General Services
Phil Washington, Denver International Airport
Alice Nightengale, Dept. of Public Health and Environment
Kerry Tipper, City Attorney
Armando Saldate, Dept. of Public Safety
Molly Duplechian, Dept. of Excise and Licenses
Chief Desmond Fulton, Denver Fire Department
Chief Ron Thomas, Denver Police Department
Elias Diggins, Denver Sheriff

Suma Nallapati, Office of Technology Services
Mike Bouchard, Office of the National Western Center
Jamie Rife, Dept. of Housing Stability
Dwight Jones, Office of Children's Affairs
Adeeb Khan, Denver Economic Development & Opportunity
Matthew Mueller Office of Emergency Management and
Homeland Security
Perla Gheiler, Agency for Human Rights and Community
Partnerships
Elizabeth Babcock, Office of Climate Action, Sustainability and
Resiliency
Dr. Ben Sanders, Mayor's Office of Social Equity and Innovation
Gretchen Hollrah, Denver Arts and Venues



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2025 Budget Goals

Budget Goal: Strengthen community safety by engaging directly with neighborhoods and ensure investment in community-supported, anti-racist, public health strategies.

Primary Considerations:

- Increased funding and expansion of the Place Network Investigation program, including community advisory work groups and street lighting.
- Additional funding for STAR program expansion.
- Ensure the newly created Office of Neighborhood Safety housed under the Office of Social Equity and Inclusion is funded in order to broaden its impact and strategically plan.
- Increase funding and use of the AID Center.
- Ensure free phone calls for those in City and County jails.
- Increase the number of off-leash dog areas in existing city parks.

Secondary Considerations:

- Maximize safety budget efficiency by funding an analysis of the cost and benefit of prosecuting minor “crimes of poverty,” reevaluating onerous court mandates, and exploring the transfer of traffic enforcement to DOTI rather than utilizing speed cameras.

Budget Goal: Empower the community and improve customer service by sharing information, engaging, and collaborating with residents.

Primary Considerations:

- Create the long overdue and critically needed Office of Community Empowerment/Engagement. Building off the recent study, this would include in-depth conversations with Council members about the vision and strategic plan of such an office.
- Expand the participatory budgeting program in 2025 by allocating funds for the inclusion of additional communities, permanent staffing, consultants, public engagement processes, and community grants.
- Improve neighborhood involvement by broadening notifications for liquor, cabaret, and marijuana license applications, as well as rezoning applications.
- Merge 311 and the police non-emergency line into a seamless system to improve the experience of residents with both services.

Secondary Considerations:

- Allocate funds to bolster community-driven boards and commissions, providing per-meeting stipends for members and necessary staffing support from city agencies. This includes access to subject matter expertise, childcare, food, and language services as required.

Budget Goal: Ensure the people of Denver are housed by improving the housing pipeline and ensuring the diversity and stability of housing. Meet the needs of those experiencing homelessness or who are vulnerable to homelessness and implement proven and innovative methods to mitigate and reduce involuntary displacement.

Primary Considerations:

- Create a concierge portal aimed at facilitating permitting processes and reviews for those builders voluntarily including affordability in their private developments.
- Expand funding for ADU construction assistance, based on the West Denver Renaissance Collaborative's model.
- Invest in comprehensive support services to ensure long-term housing stability, including establishing a workforce pipeline for caseworkers, medical professionals, and social services workers, to eliminate employment barriers in these fields.
- Expand Safe Parking Sites for those living in RVs.

Secondary Considerations:

- Develop innovative financing tools for housing to best leverage public resources, including exploring a social housing model. Maintain, at a minimum, current funding levels for permanent housing from both Denver's investment in homelessness solutions and the Homeless Resolution Fund. Aim to increase the proportion of investments into land purchases and housing outcomes to replace the diminishing revenue source for the "Denver Housing Authority Delivers for Denver" program.
- Allocate funds for the Residential Property Tax Rebate Program and establish an administrator position within DEDO. Enhance access to affordable housing options for older adults, facilitating aging-in-place initiatives. Introduce mortgage assistance programs to support existing homeowners at risk of displacement.

Budget Goal: Incubate city-wide business and labor infrastructure and our network of supportive community organizations. Empower workers, sustain a thriving workforce, and support our small and local business sectors.

Primary Considerations:

- Adequately fund DEDO's Business Impact Opportunity fund.

- Continue to fund DEDO's legacy businesses program to prevent business displacement and encourage job retention and growth in our small local business sector.
- Develop a sustainable funding source for the Neighborhood Activation Grants.
- Augment funding for nonprofit support, encompassing shared space initiatives and financial aid for acquisition or rental assistance across city neighborhoods. Allocate resources for nonprofit capacity building, mentorship programs, and overall enhancement of the nonprofit sector's capabilities.
- Support work centers and worker-owned cooperatives by providing technical assistance funds, conducting studies on businesses suitable for employee ownership, establishing spaces for worker gatherings and empowerment, supporting real estate acquisitions, encouraging sales to workers for business ownership succession, granting priority or temporary exemptions during licensing and permitting processes for worker cooperatives, and ensuring that city programs aiding migrant workers prioritize existing worker centers and uphold best labor practices.
- Develop a sustainable funding source for the Impact Investment Fund to support businesses impacted by bond projects.

Secondary Considerations:

- Partnering with DEDO and DDPHE, establish a workforce development program and pipeline specifically tailored for individuals in the behavioral health sector.
- Introduce mini-grants to support workforce development programs aimed at enhancing year-round youth employment opportunities in both private and public sectors.
- Conduct a comprehensive study on equity in contract allocation and develop strategies to enhance equity in this process.

Budget Goal: Treat climate change as an emergency. Protect our natural environment through action and investment. Mitigate harm in areas of environmental injustice.

Primary Considerations:

- Coordinate resources to establish green corridors spanning Council districts, reducing the heat island effect while enhancing walkability/rollability, connectivity, and accessibility between neighborhoods. Allocate funding for the expansion and upkeep of tree canopies.
- Allocate funds for boosting native grass seed counts and water-saving strategies, such as transitioning to shortgrass prairie ecosystems for drought resistance and turf replacement.
- Invest in bolstering environmental enforcement and litigation capabilities within CASR and the City Attorney's Office.

Secondary Considerations:

- Allocate funds for a neighborhood-level or local nonprofit-based, small-scale grant program supporting circular economy projects.
- Invest in forward-looking emergency preparedness initiatives and establish community resilience hubs to address challenges posed by unpredictable climate-related disasters.

- Boost subsidies for small business and residential electrification. Collaborate with businesses and cargo delivery services to develop innovative and safe transportation methods for goods across the city.
- Activate shelter populations, migrants, youth, and other vulnerable populations to help achieve climate goals & learn valuable skills for the workforce and the green economy. Invest in building a skilled workforce through vocational training and apprenticeship programs.

Budget Goal: Increase access to physical and mental health, and addiction and substance use resources. Expand investments and collaboration between providers and partners to achieve a seamless continuum of services.

Primary Considerations:

- Create a Food Justice Fund to provide flexible support for infrastructure, staffing, transportation, cold food storage, culturally relevant food purchasing and distribution. Designate small acreages for local agricultural production and implement strategies to minimize residential food waste. Collaborate with and fund programs like Denver Community Fridges to enhance food accessibility in communities. Additionally, ensure the permanency of programs like the Botanic Gardens Fresh Food CSA.
- Increase funding for Denver Health and increase support for Medically Indigent care.

Secondary Considerations:

- Fund service providers at an appropriate rate. Additionally, establish a program that offers technical assistance to providers seeking to become Medicaid providers to help pull federal funds.
- Position the city as a leader in securing diverse funding streams, simplifying referral processes, and strengthening the continuum of care to address critical gaps to support our most vulnerable populations. This includes enhancing Medicaid expertise and advocacy. Additionally, consider implementing reasonable taxes on products harmful to health, such as alcohol, tobacco, and gasoline.
- Increase investment in harm reduction programming.
- Expand medical-assisted treatment (MAT) for Denver Health, in collaboration with the Denver Sheriff's Department.

Budget Goal: Invest in Denver's children, youth, and families. Support, educate, and engage them to meet their multi-faceted, multigenerational needs.

Primary Considerations:

- Expand services tailored for the senior population to facilitate their access to community and city opportunities. This includes offering free rides to senior activities and extending this benefit to people with disabilities as well.

- Invest in addressing the childcare crisis for working families, including reducing childcare space costs for providers and supporting childcare workers, including Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) providers.
- Allocate funding to increase staff capacity at the Office of Children's Affairs to support grantees, the youth violence prevention task force, and programs aimed at reducing youth violence.
- Invest in spaces such as recreation centers, libraries, parks, and other city or nonprofit spaces where children, youth, and families can gather and interact, both formally and informally.

Secondary Considerations:

- Create a growth plan to secure scalable funding and invest in strategies that actively engage children, youth, and families through diverse and robust afterschool and summer programs. Additionally, allocate funds to establish a full-time equivalent (FTE) position to spearhead the Office of Children's Affairs' Child-Friendly Cities Initiative.
- Explore revenue-generating avenues, including initiatives like a sugary drink tax, to generate funding for youth programs and initiatives.
- Invest in shelters and transitional housing tailored for older youth and emerging adults aged 18-24.

Budget Goal: Create complete and safe multimodal transportation connections. Improve Denver's infrastructure. Reduce traffic deaths by 25% by the end of 2025.

Primary Considerations:

- Invest in achieving Vision Zero goals and prioritize pedestrian and cyclist safety, exploring various measures like enhanced crossings, traffic calming, scooter corrals, and other infrastructure improvements.
- Expand the Denver Connector Microtransit Program and support neighborhood-focused first/last mile or food access transit initiatives.
- Fund additional technology upgrades to fill the gap that results from reduced police contacts. Shift transportation enforcement away from DPD and move to DOTI where possible.
- Complete a road safety audit on all high-injury networks by the end of 2026.
- Ensure safe routes to school are available to protect public health and prevent children from exposure to illicit substances.