

DENVER CITY COUNCIL

1437 Bannock Street, Room 451
Denver, Colorado 80202

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Executive Director

October 11, 2024

Mayor Mike Johnston
1437 Bannock Street, 3d floor
Denver, CO 80202

Dear Mayor Johnston,

First, we want to thank you and all the agencies for participating in the budget hearings and answering the many questions Council members had concerning the proposed 2025 budget. We sincerely appreciate the administration's collaborative and responsive spirit throughout the budget process.

All of this helps us assess the alignment of the administration's plans with our budget goals, developed from our unique relationship with the city's residents we have the honor of representing. These goals reflect our collective commitment to addressing the diverse and evolving needs of our communities. To review, they are:

- A. **Community Safety Initiatives.** Strengthen community safety by engaging directly with neighborhoods and ensuring investment in community-supported, anti-racist public health strategies.
- B. **Community Empowerment.** Empower the community and improve customer service by sharing information, engaging, and collaborating with residents.
- C. **Housing Solutions.** 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.
- D. **Business and Labor Growth.** 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.
- E. **Climate Emergency Response.** Treat climate change as an emergency. Protect our natural environment through action and investment. Mitigate harm in areas of environmental injustice.
- F. **Safe Transportation Networks.** Create complete and safe multimodal transportation connections. Improve Denver's infrastructure. Reduce traffic deaths by 25% by the end of 2025.
- G. **Support for Families and Youth.** Invest in Denver's children, youth, and families. Support, educate, and engage them to meet their multifaceted, multigenerational needs.

- H. **Heath Access Expansion.** 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.

In reviewing the proposed 2025 budget, we have identified several key modifications that align with these goals. After careful consideration and in-depth review, we recommend the following necessary adjustments to the 2025 budget.

PROPOSALS RECEIVING THE SUPPORT OF A SUPERMAJORITY OF COUNCIL MEMBERS (9)

Denver Department of Public Health and Environment

- **Add Inspector and Analyst Positions at DDPHE (\$590,000):** Allocate funding for 3-4 inspector positions at \$110,000/year and 1-2 analyst positions at \$99,000/year (5 total positions) to enhance the agency's capacity for residential inspections. This increase aims to improve the current ratio of one inspector for every 9,000 rental units in Denver, enabling more proactive inspections, alleviating the burden on inspectors focused on high-priority cases, and fostering better connections with renters. **Budget Goals: A, B, C, G.**
- **Increase Funding for the STAR Program (\$650,000):** Allocate additional funding to the STAR program beyond the proposed \$600,000 for a second supervisor to address urgent needs identified by providers and advisory committee members, including (1) funding for a unified database system, (2) purchasing a new van to support program growth, and (3) increasing provider contracts and wage schedules to improve staff retention. Recent findings from the Urban Institute highlight the program's efficacy and the importance of addressing its underutilization. **Budget Goals: A, H.**
- **Food Justice Fund (\$150,000):** Establish a Food Justice Fund for infrastructure, staffing, transportation, cold storage, and culturally relevant food purchasing and distribution. Use 2025 as a planning year to assess community providers' capacity, stability, and coordination needs to develop a strategic plan for future implementation. **Budget Goal: H.**

Denver Economic Development & Opportunity

- **Fund a Second WorkReady Cohort (\$600,000):** Allocate funds to support a second WorkReady cohort within DEDO by extending El Centro's contract to serve an additional 250 participants, half the size of the current cohort. The WorkReady program has proven highly successful in assisting individuals awaiting work authorization and has partnered effectively with community organizations. This model not only enhances local resettlement efforts but also complements other existing programs. **Budget Goals: D, G.**
- **Business Impact Opportunity Fund (\$1,100,000):** Allocate an additional \$1.1 million to address the shortfall in the Business Impact Opportunity Fund, which is critical for supporting businesses across the city affected by city construction projects. **Budget Goal: A, B, D.**

Denver International Airport

- **Support for Gig Drivers at DEN (\$176,000):** Redirect funds within DEN to improve infrastructure and services at the commercial parking lot, primarily used by gig drivers. Enhancements include improved restroom maintenance (\$105k for full and part-time custodians), a designated food truck area (\$1k), a recreation area (\$30k), more covered seating (\$30k), and expanded Wi-Fi coverage (\$10k), for a total of \$176,000. These improvements will create better working conditions for gig drivers who spend significant time at the lot. This would be funded from within the DEN budget. **Budget Goal: D.**

Department of Transportation & Infrastructure

- **DOTI Funding for Safe Routes to School (\$2,500,000):** Increase funding for the Safe Routes to School program to ensure that more schools benefit from safe and equitable access for children. Many schools are currently not covered by this initiative, and this funding will help close the gap. **Budget Goals: A, F.**
- **Funding for Neighborhood Traffic Management Program (\$1,500,000):** Increase funding for speed tables to enhance traffic safety and provide effective traffic calming measures. This request echoes concerns highlighted in the 2024 budget but proposes a smaller increase in response to the 2025 budget constraints. **Budget Goals: A, F.**
- **Fully Fund the Right of Way Enforcement (ROWE) Team:** Allocate full funding for the ROWE team, as fines should deter behavior rather than generate revenue. Despite the tightest budget in 14 years (excluding 2020), ROWE can sustain its anticipated headcount while generating revenue. This funding promotes equity (ensuring fair parking access), public health (maintaining functional infrastructure), business support (aiding small businesses reliant on-street parking), and climate goals (reducing time spent searching for spaces). **Budget Goals: A, B, E, F.**

Reallocate Funds to the Vision Zero Program (\$1,734,000, includes 2% contingency): Transfer \$1.5M from the Transportation and Mobility Capital Projects and \$200k from the DOTI Capital Maintenance Plan allocated for a Transportation Management Center into the Vision Zero program. While the Transportation Management Center is important, its funding does not align with multimodal goals. This recommendation reallocates the funds to support the Vision Zero program, which better aligns with the city's multimodal objectives. **Budget Goals: E, F.**

Denver Police Department

- **Reprioritize DPD Funds for Photo Enforcement Van Staffing:** No new funding is requested. Instead, reprioritize existing DPD funds to enhance recruitment and retention of staff for photo enforcement vans. Given the unacceptable reduction in enforcement amidst rising speeding, crashes, and fatalities in neighborhoods, this adjustment aims to effectively bolster safety measures. **Budget Goals: A, F.**

Department of Excise and Licenses

- **Increase Funding for Excise and Licensing:** Allocate an additional \$208,000 to support the hiring of two to four full-time equivalent (FTE) customer service staff at \$25 per hour, totaling \$52,000 per year per position. This funding will enhance customer service efficiency and response times while also improving constituent education efforts. **Budget Goals: B, D.**

Department of Housing Stability

- **Eviction Prevention Funding (Temporary Rental and Utility Assistance) (\$5,000,000):** In response to the historic eviction crisis in Denver, this funding addresses the needs of over 36,000 individuals at risk of homelessness. While this amount falls short of the \$34.1 million needed to maintain the Tenant Resource and Utility Assistance (TRUA) program at inflation-adjusted levels, it is a critical step towards stabilizing residents in their homes as new housing units are developed. **Budget Goals: A, C, G.**
- **Basic Income Project Funding (\$2,500,000):** Allocate funding for another cohort to be served by the Denver Basic Income Project. This program has found significant improvement in housing outcomes, and the city should continue participation in the three-year study. **Budget Goals: C, H.**

Department of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs

- **Transition Responsibilities of the Newcomer Program (\$3,000,000):** As the Newcomer Program concludes its current operations within Denver Human Services, transition remaining individuals and programs to the Office of Immigrant & Refugee Affairs in the Human Rights and Community Partnerships (HRCPP) agency. This office will need to reconfigure long-term integration strategies for recent arrivals, whether they are part of the Denver Asylum Seeker Program or not, to ensure effective programming and resource partnerships for all Denver immigrants and refugees. Successful initiatives should include legal clinics, navigation support, health assessment coordination, and additional services. **Budget Goal: B.**
- **Unfreeze Language Access Coordinator Position (\$120,000):** Reinstate funding for the Language Access Coordinator position in 2025. This role is essential for ensuring that city departments effectively establish and implement Language Access Plans. **Budget Goal: B.**

Mayor's Office

- **Reallocate Salaries for Mayoral Appointees:** Shift the salaries and positions of mayoral appointees who support the mayor's office (rather than specific agencies) to be directly under the mayor's office in the budget book. This change promotes good governance and enhances transparency compared to current practices. **Budget Goal: B**

Office of Children’s Affairs

- **Out-of-School-Time Program Investment (\$5,500,000):** Allocate \$5.5 million to the Office of Children’s Affairs to support comprehensive out-of-school-time programs for 5,000 elementary and middle school students, including a mental health support position to assist with that critical need. This funding will enhance youth engagement through physical, mental, and academic activities, fostering community involvement across Denver. We suggest leaving the decision of specific allocations to Director Jones and the OCA team. We also urge the administration to find alternative options for ongoing increased funding for children’s programs that do not drain the Broncos Fund from its intended use for future years. **Budget Goals: A, G, H.**

Office of Social Equity & Innovation

- **Funding for Digital Equity Initiatives (\$750,000):** Provide \$750,000 to support digital equity efforts for underserved communities in Denver. This includes funding for a dedicated position and resources to maintain the state’s only digital equity coalition, ensuring access to affordable internet services, devices, and technical support. These efforts are crucial for student education, healthcare access through telemedicine, and improving employment opportunities, reducing barriers to essential digital resources. **Budget Goals: A, B, D, G, H.**

Sheriff’s Department

- **Restore Funding for Sheriff Mental Health Programs (\$496,889):** Restore funding to fill seven civilian FTE positions in the Sheriff Mental Health Programs Division. This funding is essential to ensure that mental health professionals are available to support individuals facing long-term incarceration, promoting rehabilitation and overall wellness. **Budget Goals: A, H.**

PROPOSALS RECEIVING THE SUPPORT OF A SIMPLE MAJORITY OF COUNCIL MEMBERS (7)

Denver Department of Public Health and Environment

- **Transfer Funds for AID Center Operations:** No new funding is requested. Transfer budgeted funds for the operation of the AID Center and associated staff from the Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS) to the Department of Public Health and Environment (DDPHE). This will allow the AID Center space to support the DDPHE Roads to Recovery program, serving as a diversionary drop-off point for police and a drop-in resource for individuals exiting jail, along with other compatible programs. **Budget Goals: A, H.**

Department of Housing Development

- **Land Acquisition for Safe RV Parking (\$2,750,000):** Allocate funds for acquiring land suitable for safe RV parking, with any remaining funds directed toward necessary infrastructure upgrades to

support RV compatibility. Reallocate some of the Sheriff's Department budget currently used to dispose of seized RVs to this initiative. **Budget Goal: A, C, G.**

We understand that managing Denver's budget amid tight revenue requires significant effort and coordination across agencies. We also recognize the dedication and expertise that has gone into this process. We trust these recommendations will be considered and incorporated into the final budget to help build a stronger, more resilient future for our city.

Sincerely,



Amanda P. Sandoval
President



Diana Romero Campbell
President Pro Tempore

Cc:

Nicole Doheny
Stephine Adams
Jenn Ridder
Jeff Dolan
Angela Casias
Dominic Moreno
Janel Forde