

# Multnomah County 2023-24 Hearing Minutes

Wednesday, May 31, 2023

9:00 p.m.

Multnomah Building  
501 SE Hawthorne Blvd.  
Portland, Oregon

**Present:**

**TSCC:**

Chair Harmony Quiroz, Vice-Chair James Ofsink, Commissioner Margo Norton, Commissioner Mark Wubbold, Commissioner Matt Donahue, Executive Director Allegra Willhite, and Budget Analyst Tunie Betschart.

**Absent:** None

**Multnomah County:**

Multnomah County Board of Commissioners: Chair Jessica Vega Pederson, Commissioner Susheela Jayapal, Commissioner Sharon Meieran, Commissioner Lori Stegmann and Commissioner Diane Rosenbaum

Staff: Multnomah County Budget Director Christian Elkin and Economist Jeff Renfro

Chair Quiroz welcomed everyone to the hearing and briefly described the duties and responsibilities of the TSCC. She reviewed the hearing process and stated the hearing was to engage the district leadership and provide an opportunity for the public to comment before Multnomah County adopts its budget. She asked the TSCC Commissioners and staff to introduce themselves and state if they have business relationships with Multnomah County that could be perceived as a conflict of interest. Each commissioner and staff member introduced themselves and said they had no conflict of interest with the county. She asked Multnomah County Commissioners and staff present to introduce themselves.

Following Chair Quiroz asked if there were any members of the public who wished to speak at this time. No one in the audience responded, and no members of the public signed up to give testimony.

Then Chair Quiroz asked Chair Vega Peterson to briefly explain the budget.

Chair Vega Peterson thanked TSCC for conducting the hearing. She reviewed the challenges the COVID pandemic created for the County's budget process and following Local Budget Law. She thanked TSCC for assisting the County's budget staff in navigating the revisions to enable public meetings, hearings, and navigating other budget compliance issues created by the pandemic. She commended the County Staff on their research and flexibility in ways to solve issues. She said that the County Budget Office praised TSCC staff for answering questions, providing feedback, and being a partner in figuring out how to do new, challenging tasks while meeting our statutory requirements. She thanked the TSCC Staff for being partners as everyone worked through these unprecedented situations.

With that, the commissioners started their questions.

**Commissioner Ofsink asked the following questions:**

Chair Vega Pederson, congratulations on your first budget as Chair. Tell us, what was the biggest challenge you faced in putting together this budget? And what are you the most proud of in this budget?

Chair Vega Pederson said the 2024 Multnomah County Executive Budget is the first created by this administration in a year of transition for the County. Everyone is emerging from years of hardship, organizational restructuring, investment, and constraint brought on by the pandemic to turn an important corner and take forward the lessons learned and things accomplished despite historic challenges. The community is dealing with racial and social injustice and wrestling with the impacts of homelessness, lack of affordable housing, community violence, climate change, and economic inequality.

Creating this year's budget did include significant challenges. The first of which was coming into the budget process midstream. The first months have been used to deepen the team's understanding of the County departments, engage with community and Community Budget Advisory Committees, and thoughtfully consider the investments needed to sustain communities with dwindling federal ARP dollars.

The era of additional funding through ARP, which in most cases funded programs that were important to the community, is sunsetting. The commissioners have looked closely at the program offers funded by ARP dollars, bringing some into the General Fund, supporting some with more limited ARP dollars, and decreasing funding for some.

This budget is not built in a silo but in concert with the many other jurisdictional and community partners who share in these investments. State funding, declining rental assistance funds, and uncertainty around assistance with community corrections required strategic choices.

The funding is consistently in question concerning local jurisdictional partnerships, continuing uncertainty in the relationship with the City of Portland around the Joint Office of Homeless Services. She said she hopes the renewed partnership with the city will continue to work. Investments today and in the future must consider how to support the County's work in housing and homelessness in a sustainable way.

Chair Vega Peterson said she is confident this budget positions Multnomah County well to respond effectively and equitably – and that's what she is most proud of. It represents a desire to take challenges head-on across many critical areas, primarily through careful stewardship of SHS dollars, increased investments in and accountability for Multnomah County Animal Services, support for operating the BHRC, developing the Behavioral Health Emergency Coordination Network and the stabilization and modernization of County workforce and services.

She concluded by stating that this budget was built to reflect the foundational values at Multnomah County with a focus on bringing those values into relationship with the community. The County provides the safety net that helps people meet their basic needs and live, rise, and thrive.

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**Chair Quiroz asked the following questions:**

We were pleased to see that Preschool for All slots exceeded this year's initial goal. Nevertheless, the Preschool for All fund is carrying a considerable amount of money to Fiscal

Year 24 - are there obstacles to getting the dollars out the door? What's your estimate on how long it will take to spend down these tax funds significantly?

Chair Vega Pederson said to center racial equity and build a robust mixed-delivery system, Preschool for All's implementation timeline invests in system support as the program grows. The intentional ramp-up of Preschool for All has been part of the plan. Implementing publicly funded preschool too quickly can have unintended consequences, including reducing the availability of infant and toddler slots and funneling investments only into large organizations. A quick expansion can leave behind small, diverse providers who've never had the opportunity for public investment or even put these small preschool programs out of business. The approach the county is taking builds capacity and allows time for culturally and linguistically diverse providers to strengthen and expand their businesses as the system matures.

Money saved in the early years of implementation has a specific and designated purpose called "revenue smoothing." As implementation progresses, it is anticipated that expenditures will outpace revenue.

Based on current estimates, there will be a ten-year period during FY 2029-2038 when costs are higher than revenues as the program nears universal access. Over time, the gap between revenues and expenses narrows as the pace of slot growth slows. By FY 2039, it is expected that projected revenue will catch up.

In recent briefings to the Board, PFA staff shared a graph illustrating how the revenue smoothing fund will work. In the early years, when there is a surplus, the revenue smoothing fund balance is growing. As the number of preschool seats grows and gets closer to full universal access, the fund balance starts to decrease. The program switches into deficit, and the surplus saved in the first few years will be spent down. Over time, as slot growth slows and the program is well-established, revenue and expenses will even out. This means that the program is fully funded, and aside from contingency and reserve funds, the fund balance lands near zero at the end of every year.

**Commissioner Ofsink asked this follow-up question:**

What else is the County doing to support these small providers?

Chair Vega Pederson said since its implementation, Preschool For All has started programs such as the Pathways program. The Pathways Program helps providers prepare for Preschool for All slots through individualized coaching and support. Over 60 providers are currently participating in Pathways. At these 64 sites, over 130 administrators and educators are receiving coaching. The Pathways providers are very diverse. 73% (47 out of 64) of the providers identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color or speak a language other than English. Preschool for All has 17 new providers for FY 2024, and nine out of the 17 have participated in the Pathways Program.

The County is also setting aside money for facilities, the brick-and-mortar buildings where the children will attend. The program has been running for an entire year and has been successful.

**Chair Quiroz asked this follow-up question:**

Can you talk more about the challenges associated with filling the seats? What are the barriers to getting students into the programs?

Chair Vega Pederson said they successfully got students into the programs. The enrollment numbers exceeded the goals for the first year. Some of the challenges they have faced are matching providers with the desired locations of the family's siblings in other programs, and some families chose Head Start over Preschool For All because they are familiar with the program.

**Commissioner Norton asked this follow-up question:**

Do you have competition for kids and staff from other programs such as Head Start, private programs, and public programs?

Chair Vega Pederson said there is a childcare desert for infant and toddler childcare in Multnomah County. It has been said that the county lost 20% of its childcare providers after the pandemic. The county is working on growing the number of childcare providers, teachers, and assistants by working through pathways and private providers to coach people. Additional resources are needed for families with young children.

**Commissioner Norton asked the following questions:**

The most recent quarterly report on the supportive housing program tells us that the Joint Office is struggling to spend supportive housing dollars. What are the obstacles, and what is the county doing to address them?

Chair Vega Pederson responded that she is committed to setting priorities and focus for the Joint Office under new leadership. That is work that will include every person's input on this board. It includes increasing the urgency and impact of efforts to address the humanitarian crisis on the streets, utilizing tools and methods that improve the data on the work happening throughout the system, improving the efficacy of the county's continuum of care, and putting more specific accountability measures in place that ensure money, time, and effort invested in reducing homelessness and increasing housing stability is effective and strategic.

The County has recently reported that its Supportive Housing Services (SHS) reflected significant underspent dollars. This is unacceptable. Commissioners are working with the Mayor's Office and Metro to identify short-term opportunities to spend SHS dollars consistent with program objectives. The plan will convene key JOHS contracted service providers in June to help identify obstacles and impediments to service delivery, address underspending, and outline new accountability measures. Lastly, the county is hiring a consultant with national expertise in system performance to increase best practices and efficiency in distributing funds and propose process improvement for organizational and structural changes. Funds have been allocated across fiscal years due to intergovernmental agreements and medium-term housing commitments. These obligations will be reported in Multnomah County's Quarter-4 report, with any remaining unspent dollars carrying over into FY 2024.

Are you expecting any new issues that you are not already aware of?

Chair Vega Pedersen said she is new in her role and will be listening and learning from the providers, thus identifying challenges and helping to find solutions.

Metro has issued a corrective action plan. Are the activities you have described part of the corrective action plan or are there other activities that are required?

Chair Vega Pedersen said she is in constant conversation with Metro. Metro has requested to know how the dollars are spent as soon as possible. The County is working with Metro toward

creating procedures to get the dollars out into the community that provide sustainable services for people as soon as reasonably practicable.

**Commissioner Ofsink asked these follow-up questions:**

With all the major players in this houselessness spectrum, there is an emphasis on placements. This is often a key metric. The one thing everyone wants is less people in very tough situations. This is not necessarily the same as placements. Can you tell us what are the key metrics that you will be prioritizing when you meet with the other players in June?

Chair Vega Pederson said she has set up a data system task force to track the work being done. This has been a priority for the entire Board of County Commissioners. When they convened, they had two parts of that work. One was to develop ten key performance indicators to share on the Joint Office website. Placement was a piece of that. There are many other aspects, such as the number of people contacted to receive services, the number who have found a shelter bed, the length of stay, whether they are still housed a year later, do they have the permanent support they need. This will be an ongoing conversation to ensure the correct measurements are being tracked. The County IT department is working on a system that will be user-friendly for outreach workers in the field to update and track information.

**Commissioner Donahue asked the following question:**

What is the plan in the coming years for the County's shelter system? What is your measurement for success? How many new shelters are needed, and how many are in the works?

Chair Vega Peterson said as we move into later years with the SHS Measure funds, JOHS will shift its response from an emergency to a stabilization strategy. This transition will allow JOHS to consider long-term planning and alignment with SHS goals around permanent supportive housing rather than primarily focusing on immediate interventions.

Plans include the following:

- Increase the current service level capacity of 2,400 funded shelter beds to 2,580 funded shelter beds, returning to pre-pandemic capacity levels across JOHS-funded shelter sites.
- Capital investment in the acquisition and development of emergency shelter sites.
- Incorporating housing navigation services such as housing access, placement, and retention strategies within the emergency shelter system.
- Implementing geographic and racial equity in the distribution of shelters and housing services.

This strategy will further propel the Housing First approach – whereby JOHS is moving individuals experiencing homelessness into housing as quickly as possible and increasing access to the emergency shelter system by reducing the length of stay and expanding shelter options.

Shelters needed

JOHS works to consider the necessary balance between different shelter models - emergency, motel, and alternative - and the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness to provide shelter programs that are appropriately suited to the needs of the community. In FY 2024, JOHS will continue to work with elected leadership, service providers, and community

stakeholders to provide shelter options that meet these needs. The 2023 Point-in-Time and Built for Zero will also identify the appropriate shelter needed here in Multnomah County. The shelter inflow and outflow data will be used to understand the need for shelter in balance with permanent supportive housing placements, rapid rehousing placements, and prevention investments.

### Shelters in process

Two congregate shelters, Arbor Lodge and Willamette Center, are undergoing major renovation projects and will reopen in FY 2024. Arbor Lodge will be a joint congregate and alternative shelter, while Willamette will be a congregate site.

Three properties, Cook Plaza, Montavilla, and Harrison, have been purchased and are going through the County process to determine construction plans and usage.

She concluded by stating they are also looking at the City of Portland and the investments they are making to expand in terms of increasing shelter capacity.

The County plans to open alternative shelters in east Portland in the coming year. What is the timeline for these projects? What lessons learned from existing alternative shelters run by the County are you planning to apply to these new sites?

Chair Vega Pederson stated that there are a variety of shelters. Congregate shelters are what most people think of when they consider shelters. The thought is an open space with maybe a few partitions where people sleep in a mass assembly setting. Multnomah County has several of those. Changes came partially due to the pandemic to hotel-type shelters. These have been used for those who need to isolate due to health risks or other reasons and for families. The villages provided are also referred to as alternative shelters. Often, these are on private or public property where the land is donated. The City of Portland's safe rest village is an alternative village.

### **Chair Quiroz asked this follow-up question:**

How do you explain to the public and build the bridge between the services you are providing and the ramp-up of those services and the perception that the pace is going too slow on this work and that the work is just not enough? This has to be a challenge for all entities working toward the goal of ending homelessness.

Chair Vega Peterson said she understands the frustration about what people see on the streets and the desire to change what is happening. This is the work she is focusing on. The County, the Joint Office of Homeless Services, Metro, and the City of Portland all focus on the solution with urgency and passion. All organizations are working in partnership and taking a hard look to ensure that changes will be made where they need to happen. The current partnership with the City of Portland, Metro, and the County is stronger than it has been in some time, and there is a unified effort to address this issue together.

### **Commissioner Norton asked this follow-up question:**

Could you explain to us where emergency shelters or alternative shelters meet with supportive housing services? And how does a person get from emergency services to forward progress?

Chair Vega Peterson gave an example of domestic violence as an emergency shelter needed

in extreme weather conditions. The County is investing in a shelter that can be used for 30, 60 or 90 days, and sometimes longer. The goal is the least time possible as they move into permanent housing. At this point, the permanent housing services and assistance they need to be successful will come into play. A wide variety of services could be available to ensure success.

Commissioner Jayapal added she appreciated this conversation. Different kinds of shelters work for different types of people. The idea is shelter is on the path to housing. There is not enough money to provide shelter for everyone. A spot at a safe rest village for a year costs \$60,000. The cost to provide a bed is \$20,000 - \$40,000 a year. There is no magic answer to know precisely how much of which kind of shelter is needed.

Commissioner Meieran said they need an array of options to meet various needs. Many folks are still on the streets and living with the threat of life and death health issues. The available resources must be used wisely to meet needs and save lives.

**Commissioner Wubbold asked the following questions:**

Substance abuse issues are complex, and the County is uniquely poised to make change in this area because it's a law enforcement issue, it's a public health issue, it's a prosecution issue, and it's a housing issue. The County has a responsibility for each one of these areas. How are efforts being coordinated across these areas? Why are we not seeing more progress?

Commissioner Jayapal said like jurisdictions across the nation, Multnomah County has faced a rapid increase in substance use and overdose that corresponds to myriad factors, including isolation from services and support during the COVID-19 pandemic, changing substance use behaviors, and decades of chronic underfunding of public health, particularly to address the social determinants of health.

The Health Department takes an integrated and comprehensive public health approach to addressing and solving our community's substance use crisis. This work is divided across four core areas: prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and recovery support.

This work is conducted across all clinical divisions: Behavioral Health, Corrections Health, Public Health, and Integrated Clinical Services. There are 17 different teams and programs that integrate substance use prevention or services as a primary element of their mission and activities.

The County is a leader in delivering substance use harm reduction and clinical treatment services. The Health Department operates multiple harm reduction sites where people who use drugs and their drug-using networks can receive syringes and safe smoking supplies, drug test strips, naloxone, overdose prevention education, HIV/STI testing and treatment, wound care, and connection with treatment, as ready. In this fiscal year, from July 2022 to April 2023, the Harm Reduction clinic has served more than 4,000 unique clients.

Within the Behavioral Health Division, the Addictions and Prevention Unit has more than 100 contracts with partners across the community to provide residential treatment, intensive outpatient treatment, recovery mentoring, and support. Clinical services for youth incorporate drug and alcohol assessment during the mental health assessment and connect children with harm reduction supports and referrals for substance use disorder services, as needed.

Every person brought into custody in a correctional facility is screened for a current or a history of substance use. Individuals who indicate everyday substance use immediately receive Medication Supported Recovery (MSR). To ensure continuity of care and support, before release, Corrections Health works with the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office and community partners to connect clients with the MSR services in the community and other recovery and supportive services.

This work is not limited to the Health Department. Addressing and preventing substance use requires an interdisciplinary approach that reflects individual and systemic circumstances.

The Health Department works closely with other departments and jurisdictions to identify, implement, and sustain cross-departmental services and programs. All of the programming and services prioritize using trauma-informed and culturally specific approaches, including building teams with culturally specific staff, developing peer-led models, offering services in a wide range of languages, providing programming and services at readily accessible sites, and contracting with Community Based Organizations.

Many of the immediate limitations to the County's response to the substance use crisis pertain to infrastructure, policy, and funding outside the County's jurisdiction. While the County seeks to work collaboratively with these jurisdictions, this limits the ability to prevent and reduce substance use and overdose. Similarly, state policy and funding significantly impact behavioral health trends and outcomes, including Measure 110 and the Mosman Order, which have changed how individuals access services and the institutions tasked to provide services.

She explained that healthcare workforce shortages have also profoundly impacted delivery. All teams present significant and disruptive workforce shortage issues as barriers, exacerbating challenges to entering and navigating substance use programming and services.

Are some substances so powerful that they are beyond the County's ability to combat the effects?

Chair Vega Peterson answered that there are different drugs that impact people differently. Each case must be viewed individually. The Portland police are now using Measure 110 citations, giving people citations when they find they are using. The impact this will have is unknown, but conversations need to happen about this. It is different than the drug usage in the past. The ability to detox is different than previously. So, all those involved are looking at various ways to address this.

**Commissioner Ofsink asked this follow-up question:**

Is there anything the public should know about the supply side? What is your response to those providing the drugs.?

Commissioner Jayapal said the county's role is with the Sheriff's office. They work closely with the Portland Police Bureau, the FBI, and other law enforcement jurisdictions. They are focusing on interdiction of supply. They are focusing on large suppliers rather than on small suppliers. She added that they are developing Measure 110 to be more robust. The desired outcome is having more than a phone number when an arrest is made. Instead, a social services provider comes on-site, and case management tracks that person. There is no one solution to these issues, but this will provide a pathway to helping a portion of the population.



**Commissioner Ofsink asked the following questions:**

Will County Elections have capacity to implement, manage and report results for ranked-choice voting for the city election in the 2024 presidential election year? What impacts will there be on the Elections division?

Commissioner Meieran said the Elections Division is intently focused on successfully implementing ranked choice voting in the 2024 general election. This work is well underway and includes reviewing and updating policies, procedures, and technology and educating voters.

- Elections Division and City of Portland staff collaborated to inform City elections code amendments for ranked choice voting that the City Council adopted in April.
- County and City staff are also collaborating in developing voter education and outreach plans for ranked-choice voting.
- In parallel with the development of amendments to the city's elections code, County Elections staff began consultative discussions with its IT vendor as they worked to add ranked choice voting capabilities to the County's voting system software. This software update will go into federal certification testing between July and September to be ready for state and local certification and testing in time for the November 2024 election.
- County Elections staff also consult with colleagues from Clackamas County, Washington County, and the Secretary of State's Office to ensure coordinated, timely, transparent, accessible, and accurate election administration for Ranked Choice Voting contests.

The Elections Division initiated its work in FY 2023 to implement ranked choice voting with existing and temporary staff. The FY 2024 budget includes strategic investments to ensure the Elections Division can continue to deliver on this work and its other functions heading into the presidential election year. The budget consists of a bilingual voter education and outreach staff person, a supervisor for the team who is the first point-of-contact for voters that need help, and a limited-duration project manager for ranked choice voting. The budget also includes funding for upgrading the County's ballot design and vote tally system software, a consultant to help plan a ranked choice voting voter education media campaign, and developing education and outreach media and materials. She said they see synergies between the implementation of ranked-choice voting and ongoing work to provide reliable and trusted information to voters, promote and support voting, and administer a secure and accurate election.

Has the county considered preparing reactive measures if folks see the changes in an adverse light and react with criticism toward the county?

Chair Vega Pederson said the election division has always been committed to upholding the sanctity and excellence of the election process. It will continue with the same excellent process as in the past. They will educate the population about the changes as much as possible. She said they recognize the need to work with their partners at the City of Portland and the Secretary of State's office in terms of having a response to any allegations of a coordinated response to any allegations of election fraud.

**Chair Quiroz asked the following questions:**

The County started several new programs thanks to the influx of federal dollars from the American Rescue Plan Act. Last year, you spoke with us about the county's thoughtful approach to adding the federal dollars where most needed. Can you give us an example of a

program where you measured the impact of the dollars? What were the results?

Commissioner Rosenbaum said when the pandemic first began, the community's need was immense. The Federal government acted quickly to prevent a prolonged, severe recession with direct assistance to businesses and households. But the initial pandemic impacts hit the most vulnerable communities the hardest, and the recovery has been uneven and inequitable. The County chose to allocate ARP by fulfilling the local public health authority role while applying an Equity Lens and County values to the decision-making process.

The County issued ARP resources to five priority areas:

- Public Health Emergency Response
- Core Services Supporting People in the County's Care
- Restore Services Impacted by Budget Reductions
- Crisis Response & Community Recovery
- Critical County Infrastructure

The County's ARP funding went to various programs within these priority areas. She highlighted a couple of notable programs and their impacts as follows:

### **Rent Assistance**

- The County has dedicated a significant amount of ARP resources to rent assistance during the pandemic in response to the economic upheaval.
- In FY 2023, \$69.2 million was allocated to rent assistance and program administration from various state and federal sources, with \$25.5 million coming from the County's direct ARP allocation.
- Funding is distributed through a network of non-profit organizations.
- As of April, 7,751 households had received emergency rent assistance in FY 2023.
- Since the beginning of FY 2022, 5,354 households have received rent assistance to prevent imminent eviction through the Bienestar Rapid Response Eviction prevention program.

### **Vaccinations:**

- The County led the local COVID-19 response as the Local Public Health Authority. An equity lens was applied to all ARP funding decisions, and the County could leverage its relationships with local, culturally-specific organizations to deliver vaccines to marginalized communities.
- Through Public Health, Corrections Health, and the Community Health Centers, the County provided over 5,100 vaccinations to almost 4,000 individuals and hosted over 150 vaccine events with their partners.

### **Multnomah Mother's Trust:**

- Multnomah Mother's Trust provides an unconditional basic income to 100 Black female-headed households with children whom the pandemic has negatively impacted. Participants receive an unconditional basic income of \$500 per month.
- Program participants also participate in research and program development by either inputting information about their economic and social condition into an existing database or participating in a design process for programs intended to build assets over time or decrease debt. They receive a \$500 Technology grant, \$50/month for data entry, and \$150 per design session.

By June 2022, program participants were reporting lower levels of debt and increased assets. About 80% of participants have reported a positive increase in quality of life, economic stability, and child educational success.

**Commissioner Norton asked the following questions:**

The County is using the last of its federal dollars and "one-time" general fund dollars to continue programs in this budget. Last year we asked what would happen when the federal money ran out. Are these "one-time" programs destined to become permanent, ongoing expenses?

Commissioner Stegmann said when the County began making decisions about allocating ARP resources, commissioners were careful to stress to internal and external audiences that this funding was temporary and needed to address pandemic impacts. By applying a disciplined approach, they avoided funding normal County programs and functions with these temporary resources.

Starting in the FY 2023 budget development process, they tried to be honest about which programs initially funded with ARP would serve an ongoing purpose. This was based on the program's success and an evolving understanding of what the post-pandemic world would look like. The County has converted \$29.8 million of ARP-funded programs to General Fund funding. A breakdown can be found in the County's Budget Message.

In FY 2023, several programs were converted to ongoing funding from the General Fund, like Eviction Prevention Support and Community Violence Intervention programs, while we had the capacity.

In FY 2024, some Gun Violence Case Management in the DA's Office and funding for a jail dorm was converted to ongoing General Fund funding. Most of the County's Direct ARP allocation remaining for FY 2024 is dedicated to rent assistance. The other programs funded by ARP and moved from ARP to the General Fund as one-time-only are planned to ramp down in FY 2024.

Based on program experience, it is possible that the County would continue funding for a limited number of these programs in FY 2025. Still, they would go through the same decision-making process as the rest of the General Fund programs and requests. The forecast does not anticipate significant room to add ongoing programs to the General Fund.

**Commissioner Ofsink asked these follow-up questions:**

So, are rent assistance expenditures one-time only disbursements or will they become an ongoing expense?

Multnomah County Chair Vega Peterson said most ARP dollars have gone to rental assistance. The County lacks the General Fund's capacity to absorb all those rental assistance dollars. Conversations are ongoing with the State of Oregon about how to address the continuing need for rental assistance. Considerable thought goes into how the dollars are spent, and the expenditures benefit the community.

How does the County communicate the reason they prioritized the division of funds to meet the needs when there are just not enough pieces of the financial pie to meet all the needs of the community?

Chair Vega Peterson said the County has not done a great job communicating the reason for the investments and their impact. This needs to be done intentionally to connect with the community. This is a challenge. One key to this is for county officials to be available to talk about the issues, with folks explaining more than the numbers but also the scope of the work. Equality also needs to be addressed in these conversations, as well as livability, such as living wage, so the number at risk of becoming houseless here in Multnomah County becomes known.

Chair Quiroz thanked the Multnomah County Commissioners and staff for the responses to the questions and contributions to the hearing. Then, she closed the hearing and opened a regular meeting of the Tax Supervising and Conservation Commission to certify Multnomah County's 2023-24 Approved budget. She asked if the TSCC commissioners had any questions or comments to make concerning the budget. There were none.

Chair Quiroz asked Executive Director Allegra Willhite to give staff recommendations for the certification letter.

Ms. Willhite said staff found the budget estimates reasonable for the purposes stated and the budget to comply with Local Budget Law. She said staff have no recommendations or objections to the fiscal year 23-24 budget. She thanked Multnomah County staff for their help and willingness to answer questions during the budget review.

Chair Quiroz called for a motion.

Commissioner Norton moved to certify Multnomah County's Approved Budget with no recommendations or objections as recommended by staff. Commissioner Ofsink seconded the motion, which passed with a unanimous vote of the commissioners.

There being no other business, Chair Quiroz closed the meeting.