

DENVER CITY COUNCIL

1437 Bannock Street, Room 451
Denver, Colorado 80202

 denvergov.org/citycouncil



Amanda P. Sandoval
District 1

Kevin Flynn
District 2

Jamie Torres
District 3

Diana Romero Campbell
District 4

Amanda Sawyer
District 5

Paul Kashmann
District 6

Flor Alvidrez
District 7

Shontel M. Lewis
District 8

Darrell Watson
District 9

Chris Hinds
District 10

Stacie Gilmore
District 11

Serena Gonzales-Gutierrez
At-large

Sarah Parady
At-large

Bonita Roznos
Executive Director

October 6, 2023

Mayor Mike Johnston
City and County Building,
Denver, CO 80202

Dear Mayor Johnston,

We want to extend our appreciation to you and the participating agencies for your involvement in the recent series of budget hearings. These hearings play a pivotal role in enhancing the City Council's and the public's understanding of the administration's goals, strategies, and challenges. The candid dialogues we had with agency leaders during these sessions were very valuable.

Additionally, these hearings afford City Council members a unique opportunity to gauge the alignment of the administration's objectives and plans with our budgetary priorities. Those priorities come from the council members' unique relationships with residents of the city. To review, our key priorities are as follows:

- Focus on improving Community Engagement and Customer Service to support residents navigating city services, resources, and accessibility, including language access.
- Increase affordable housing and support those experiencing homelessness throughout our city. Mitigate and reduce the involuntary displacement of community members.
- Strengthen community safety, decrease youth violence, and foster healthy families by investing in community-supported, data-driven, and anti-racist public health strategies, addressing root causes, and implementing interventions that ensure appropriate resources are allocated to the most suitable responders, following comprehensive de-escalation and race sensitivity training.
- Support a robust infrastructure within our city and a strong network of partners throughout the community to sustain a thriving workforce, a flourishing local business sector, and a resilient network of community organizations upon which our community relies.
- Protect our natural environment through policy, public education, and investment in communities to combat climate change.
- Increase complete, safe, and predictable multimodal transportation connections throughout the city including community outreach and education about these transportation options.

As we evaluate the proposed budget against those priorities, several proposals from council members have gained prominence. These proposals have undergone rigorous discussion and scrutiny to ensure their consistency with our funding priorities. In that light, we support the following adjustments to the 2024 proposed budget as detailed below.

PROPOSALS RECEIVING THE SUPPORT OF A SUPERMAJORITY OF COUNCIL MEMBERS

Community Planning and Development

Increased funding for Participatory Budgeting – \$2,500,000.

This increase will cover the Near Southeast and Near Northwest NPI's that have been approved or will be approved before 2024. In addition, it will convert the current "limited" FTE to a "permanent" FTE.

Implementation of the Neighborhood Plan Integration (NPI) initiative – \$1,000,000.

This funding will support the creation of citywide and area-specific zoning districts, policies, and recommendations outlined in newly adopted neighborhood plans specifically the Preservation Bonus.

Denver Health & Hospital Authority

Contract to Serve More Qualified Patients – up to \$15,000,000.

As Denver's public, safety net hospital, we must support Denver Health in treating the most vulnerable and in need throughout our city. Suggested Source: unspent IDDEAS balance.

Support Psychiatric/Mental Health Beds – \$1,800,000.

We all agree that mental healthcare is crucial to tackling many other issues the city faces. This funding will allow Denver Health to fully use the designated mental health and substance in-patient beds it currently has open. Suggested source: Transfer Wellness Winnie costs from the Denver Department of Public Health and Environment.

Denver Human Services

Renew the Botanic Gardens Fresh Food Contract – \$19,000.

This program provided fresh food weekly to Sun Valley and Montbello residents and was abruptly canceled. At a minimum, we'd like the program restarted, if not expanded. Suggested source: The Department of Human Services.

Denver Public Library

Continue the Plaza program – \$680,136.

The Plaza program supports recently arrived immigrants and fosters cultural inclusion. This is a shared value that should receive our continued support at a time when the city is experiencing an increase in newly arrived immigrants. This would fund the program for all of 2024 and begin to convert the grant-funded program to the General Fund. Suggested source: DPL reserves.

Department of Housing Stability

Fully Fund Emergency Rental Assistance program – \$17,500,000.

We are currently under an emergency declaration on homelessness, and we believe it is important to address the issue from many angles especially prevention. As we all work to bring people inside and into housing, this crucial program helps keep people housed. Suggested sources: General reserves as part of the emergency declaration.

Continue support of the Basic Income Project – \$4,000,000.

The Basic Income Project has shown success and is a powerful tool in our arsenal fighting poverty and homelessness in our city. We believe it deserves continued and additional support.

Department of Parks and Recreation

Provide day passes to those experiencing homelessness – \$25,000.

As winter approaches, this funding is just one more way to help protect our most vulnerable residents. This would provide day passes to our non-profit partners to distribute in their work, outreach, and engagement.

Department of Public Health & Environment

Expand the Support Team Assisted Response (STAR) program – \$6,900,000.

The success of the program is undisputed, and this amount would allow the program to expand its services and respond to more 911 calls identified as STAR-appropriate

Department of Economic Development & Opportunity

Business Impact Opportunity Fund support – \$250,000.

Businesses along the 16th Street Mall have benefitted from this fund to mitigate construction effects and stabilize them. Businesses along other corridors have not seen such an investment. This addition to the BIO fund is needed to increase that level of support.

Expand the Legacy Business Program in the Division of Small Business Opportunity – \$1,000,000.

Our city thrives when small businesses thrive. This program addresses business displacement and encourages job retention and growth to help protect our small local legacy businesses that keep Denver unique. Suggested source: Contingency fund.

Department of Finance

Fund a contract to eliminate medical debt– \$3,000,000.

Medical debt can impact the ability to make mortgage or rent payments, can increase the cost of buying a car or insurance, and even make it more difficult to find a job, according to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. This proposal can eliminate up to \$280,000,000 of medical debt held by Denver residents and the other economic pressures that come with it.

Department of Transportation & Infrastructure

Match prior funding of the Vision Zero program and fund speed study – \$550,000.

The public-facing dashboard on the city's website lists 67 traffic deaths as of the date of this letter. We cannot let this important initiative wither as our city continues to grow. This funding covers the costs of a vital speed camera study and other Vision Zero projects and priorities.

Fully fund the Safe Routes to School program – \$5,000,000.

Too many schools are not benefiting from this program to ensure safe and equitable passage to school for our kids. This request fully funds the program to support schools most in need.

Fund speed tables across the city – \$3,000,000.

Laws against speeding are one vital avenue to safety. Traffic calming is far more immediate and effective to the safety of our streets. At a minimum, this funds at least one speed table in each council district.

Office of Children's Affairs

Increase staffing in Youth Violence Prevention – \$200,000.

Investing more in the future of at-risk youth serves us all. This funding would allow the addition of two staff members to this crucial program.

Increase grant-making capacity for Youth Violence Prevention – \$1,800,000.

Numerous nonprofit partners work in this vital area. Expanding grant-making capacity to these organizations also expands the positive impact of their programs on our youth.

Fill the gap in Out Of School Time funding – \$10,000,000.

After-school programs not only keep kids safe and enrich learning, but they also allow parents to continue to work and maintain their home and family. The Office of Children’s Affairs aims to ensure every child has access to an after-school program. It needs the resources to do that.

Add an FTE to manage the Bronco Fund and UNICEF Child Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI) – \$150,000.

The CFCI program uses the Convention on the Rights of the Child as a framework to help local governments prioritize the needs of children and young people, combat discrimination, and elevate youth voices in local governance and decision-making. This funding helps ensure the City and County of Denver and its families fully benefit from this initiative.

Office of Climate Action, Sustainability, and Resilience

Fund a study of climate benefits of social housing – \$250,000.

This would fund an important study of social housing to look at reductions in carbon output, mitigation of heat island effects, impacts of electrification, support of climate refugees, and other related benefits. Suggested source: Climate Protection Fund.

Office of Human Rights and Community Partnerships

Create an Office of Community Empowerment – \$500,000.

A study performed in the last administration by the University of Denver recommended a consolidation of the existing Office of Neighborhood Engagement, and the Office of Community Affairs into this new office. Given our experience with residents in our districts every day, we look forward to a collaborative approach in creating and using this crucial resource that can only benefit residents and the City and County of Denver government.

Office of the Municipal Public Defender

Three new staff to defend youth charged with municipal offenses – \$172,850.

This funding would add three new positions to ensure adequate staffing to comply with anticipated legislation effective July 1, 2024, that would allow the Municipal Public Defender to defend youths charged with municipal offenses.

Office of Special Events

Add staff for education and outreach on the “Waste No More” ordinance – \$105,000.

Passed by 70% of Denver voters in 2022, the “Waste No More” ordinance requires restaurants, apartment complexes, offices, and others to offer recycling and compost services. Sadly, the measure did not identify funding to support the ordinance. This funding begins to address that.

Multiple City and County of Denver Departments

Fund basic services to residents living in encampments – \$1,700,000.

With an aim to uphold human dignity and public health goals, this funding provides services to encampments from a variety of city agencies. Examples include water stations (DOTI, Parks and Rec), shower and laundry services (HOST, DOTI, Parks and Rec), trash collection (DOTI), and charging stations.

PROPOSALS RECEIVING THE SUPPORT OF A SIMPLE MAJORITY OF COUNCIL MEMBERS

Creation of the Office of Community Alternatives, Partnerships, and Solutions – \$1,500,000.

Also known as the Office of Neighborhood Safety, its creation was recommended by the Community Wellbeing and Neighborhood Safety Transition Committee for the mayor and the former Reimagining Policing Task Force.

Department of Housing Stability

Provide gap funding to the Second Chance Center – \$1,500,000.

This funding would allow the center to expand and continue to offer case management, mentoring, and vital resources to assist formerly incarcerated individuals returning to life in the community.

Department of Transportation and Environment

Provide for sidewalk improvements to begin – \$1,000,000.

While collection of fees has been delayed and a task force works on refinements to the program, this would support a study of sidewalk network needs and implementation of the program.

We know that the creation and management of a budget for a city of Denver's size and complexity is a long and arduous task. We appreciate the efforts of the hundreds of employees who had both small and large roles in that process. Your thoughtful and thorough consideration of these proposals is also appreciated. As always, do not hesitate to reach out for answers to questions or clarifications we can provide.

Sincerely,



Jamie Torres, District 3
President



Amanda P. Sandoval, District 1
President Pro-Tempore

CC: Margaret Danuser, Chief Financial Officer
Stephanie Adams, Budget and Management Director
Jenn Ridder, Chief of Staff
Janel Forde, Chief Operating Officer
Evan Dreyer, Deputy Chief of Staff
Dominick Moreno, Deputy Chief of Staff
Angela Casias, Legislative Director