

City and County of Denver

City Council

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Stacie Gilmore	District 11
Bonita Roznos	Executive Director

May 25, 2023

Honorable Mayor Michael B. Hancock
City and County Building
Denver, Colorado 80202

Dear Mayor Hancock,

We write to you today to present a list of budget priorities Denver City Council believes are essential for the well-being and prosperity of our city. As elected representatives of our communities, we have drawn upon our experience and knowledge of the needs and aspirations of our constituents to help us inform the development of our 2024 budget priorities.

On Friday, May 12, council members convened at Raices Brewing Company in the La Alma/Lincoln Park neighborhood for their annual budget retreat. Our discussion, drawn from year-round engagement with residents, resulted in six budget priorities that captured the growing needs of the people of the City and County of Denver. We anticipate the administration will communicate these priorities to the involved agencies as they embark on their respective budgeting processes.

Each of these priorities shares the core values of equity, access, and sustainability. They remain focused on making the city stronger after the pandemic, ensuring an inclusive and sustainable economy, resolving housing and homelessness issues, and providing for the safety and well-being of residents and neighborhoods.

With this in mind, we present to you our list of budget priorities, which we believe will help us all make the difficult decisions required to manage our city's finances while continuing to provide the essential services that our residents rely on.

2024 Denver City Council Budget Priorities

Budget Priority: Focus on improving Community Engagement and Customer Service to support residents navigating city services, resources, and accessibility, including language access.

Primary considerations for this budget priority:

- Fund the implementation of the recommendations for an Office of Community Engagement laid out in the recent study of the issue, including community navigators, translation services, resident education on Denver's government, education for nonprofits and RNOs, and volunteer coordination and directly collaborate with the council in developing the framework.
- Allocate funds to reframe the 311 service for customer service and city services navigation to resolve multiple issues residents encounter, including prematurely closed service tickets and numerous inconsistencies in how tickets are handled across the city.
- Enhance the participatory budgeting program by allocating funds for consultants, public processes, and community grants for another round. Also, convert the time-limited participatory budgeting staffer to a permanent position and fund a \$15 million program in 2024. The funding for the program should come from both capital and non-capital sources, which will allow for a broader range of one-time projects, such as art and program infusions, that may not meet the technical definition of "capital."

Budget Priority: Increase affordable housing and support those experiencing homelessness throughout our city. Mitigate and reduce the involuntary displacement of community members.

Primary considerations for this budget priority:

- Fund a performance audit for the permitting process in Development Services and ensure appropriate staffing levels based on the audit results for Community Planning and Development to speed up review and development processes.
- Ensure access to a full range of supportive services, including community navigators, for all pathways out of homelessness for those in shelters or temporary managed communities, those contacted through street outreach, and those transitioning to permanent housing.
- Expand funding and explore new sustainable annual sources of revenue for rental assistance, single-family housing rehabilitation and repair, tenant-landlord counseling, and other eviction and foreclosure defense and prevention services including but not limited to legal assistance and mediation.

Secondary considerations for this budget item:

- Maintain, at a minimum, current proportions of funding for permanent housing from Denver's investment in addressing homelessness generally, but also from the Homeless Resolution Fund specifically, and strive to expand the proportion of investments going into land purchases and housing outcomes to replace the nearly depleted Denver Housing Authority Delivers for Denver program's land purchase revenue source.
- Fund the Office on Aging to assist the elderly population with finding and applying for services.
- Grants for Accessory Dwelling Unit construction.

- Gap funding for targeted construction and preservation of deed-restricted rentals and for sale housing.
- Funds for immigrant legal defense.
- Funding for Community Planning and Development to implement Blueprint Denver’s advanced equity and area plans, including acceleration of Neighborhood Planning Initiatives and increasing the number of small area plans.

Budget Priority: 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.

Primary considerations for this budget priority:

- Increase funding for positive youth development with community-based organizations to include violence prevention, childcare, year-round employment, and mental health support.
- Allocate resources toward the expansion of mental health, wellness, and recovery services, addressing critical areas such as provider shortages, service gaps, and programs that effectively tackle trauma and culturally competent needs. Broaden treatment options across the entire spectrum, including peer support, outpatient facilities, and inpatient care to enhance resident access to timely recovery and care services.
- Increase funding for Support Team Assistance Response (STAR) program.
- Funds for litter and graffiti clean-up in neighborhoods.
- Funds for the activation and overhead of community recreation centers (parks, rec. centers, facilities), including recommendations made by the Department of Parks and Recreation’s alternative outdoor recreation plan, and investment in built environment (CPTED) interventions in parks and identified “hotspot” locations. Includes funding overhead of city-owned property leased to nonprofits.

Secondary consideration for this budget priority:

- Respond to recently completed research and the report concerning establishing an Office of Neighborhood Safety connected to, but not run by, the Department of Safety.

Budget Priority: 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.

Primary considerations for this budget priority:

- Funding for small business assistance, including additional pop-up business funds for commercial areas in small commercial corridors, business improvement districts, and creative districts throughout the city.
- Create a Food Justice Fund for flexible funding of infrastructure, staffing, transportation, cold food storage, culturally relevant food purchasing, and food distribution.
- Fund Coop development at the Center for Community Wealth Building.

Secondary considerations for this budget priority:

- Funds for nonprofit assistance, including multiple nonprofit shared space initiatives, and funds to cover acquisition or rental assistance in neighborhoods throughout the city.
- Fund stipends for construction training, support services, and pre-apprenticeships.
- Fund Non-Profit capacity building and Community Benefit Agreements Pilot Fund

Budget Priority: Protect our natural environment through policy, public education, and investment in communities to combat climate change.

Primary considerations for this budget priority:

- Funding for tree canopy expansion and maintenance.
- Funding to add incentives and direction for removing bluegrass lawns in favor of xeriscape.
- Funds for community renewable and energy efficiency programs.
- Fund electric vehicle infrastructure (i.e., add more EV charging stations).
- Funding to continue e-bicycle rebates.

Secondary consideration for this budget item:

- Create a Green Alleys program with the Office of Climate Action, Sustainability, and Resiliency, and in partnership with the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure, to transform alleyways into safe, walkable, bikeable spaces, taking into consideration factors such as lighting, paving, and public art (murals).

Budget Priority: Increase complete, safe, and predictable multimodal transportation connections throughout the city including community outreach and education about these transportation options.

Primary considerations for this budget priority:

- Funding for neighborhood safety infrastructure with an eye to Vision Zero, including sidewalks, bike lane expansion, infrastructure for Safe Routes to School, construction and maintenance of roadway medians and other right-of-way structures — including the transition to indigenous vegetation where appropriate — and the upgrade and maintenance of multimodal transportation.
- Funding for speed reduction in residential areas throughout the city. For example, speed table location identification and funding for their construction.

Secondary considerations for this budget priority:

- Funds for right-of-way services personnel to ensure they can respond to requests throughout the city.
- Funds for installing, constructing, and maintaining accessible bus shelters, benches, trash cans, at RTD stops.
- Funds for additional electric micro-transit vehicle shuttle projects throughout the city.

- Funds for implementing the transit plan by encouraging transit solutions and alternatives to single-occupancy vehicles.

In addition to the stated priorities, we also understand that this year's budgeting will be particularly challenging due to the ongoing migrant crisis at the southern U.S. border and the subsequent impact it has here in our city. We realize the arrival of migrants in Denver has placed a significant strain on our city's resources. However, the council is committed to working with you to ensure that our city remains strong and resilient, and dedicated to a humane and caring response. While the City's emergency response was not planned or budgeted for in 2022 and 2023, we do expect planning for it in 2024 knowing this is not a temporary situation. We did not state it as an explicit priority or policy above, but we do expect it to be a planned expense in 2024 and one that we commit to working on with you and the Department of Finance.

Our continued collaboration will ensure that the 2024 budget provides all Denverites with access to programs and services that respond to their expressed needs in a vibrant city where everyone can thrive. We look forward to seeing those values reflected in this critical piece of your final chapter as Denver's Mayor.

Sincerely,



Jamie Torres
Council President



Amanda P. Sandoval
Council President Pro-tempore

CC: Alan Salazar, Chief of Staff
Evan Dreyer, Deputy Chief of Staff
Margaret Danuser, Chief Financial Officer
Stephanie Karayannis Adams, Budget & Management Director/Acting Deputy Chief Financial Officer
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