

Engaging in the Budget Process

What are ways I can impact the budget as a community member?

Engaging with the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) can be done year-round by attending public meetings, quarterly town halls, or emailing your Commissioner. The more important time to engage with the BCC on community priorities is between October to December. This is the time the BCC considers and formulates the County's policy priorities and directions for the coming year(s) which will influence the proposed budget priorities in the later months. You can also make an impact on the Washington County budget by applying to be a member of the Budget Committee.

What funding can be impacted by the public?

Put simply, the General Fund is discretionary in nature, meaning this is the part of the budget Oregon State law allows the County Commissioners to prioritize, while most Special Fund resources are dedicated due to the source of funding. The discretionary part of the General Fund is usually budgeted based on the BCC's policy priorities. Engaging with the BCC on important policy decisions is the best way to influence the County's operational and budget priorities.

General Budget Questions

How much is the current County budget?

The County's fiscal year (July 1st - June 30th) 2021-22 total budget is about \$1.4 billion, \$1,403,438,419 to be exact.

What services are included in the County budget?

All County services are included in the County budget. These services are covered under what is called the Operating Budget which includes general government, public safety and justice, housing, health and human services, land use and transportation, and culture, education and recreation. The budget also includes the County's capital budget and what is called the non-operating budget.

How is the County budget established each year?

There are four steps in the budget process:

- *Requested - The County's budget is first drafted by each department as the Requested Budget.*
- *Proposed - The Requested Budget is reviewed and modified by the County Administrator and designees into the Proposed Budget. The Proposed Budget is then reviewed and possibly modified by the Budget Committee.*

- Approved - After review and possible modifications, the Budget Committee approves the budget for Board of County Commissioner (BCC) consideration.
- Adopted - The BCC then takes action to create the Adopted Budget.

Do the County Commissioners have complete control over establishing the budget?

While the budget is first developed by departments and then officially by the County Administrator, the development process is strongly influenced by the policy direction established by the Board of County Commissioner. After the Proposed Budget is presented to the Budget Committee and then the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) for consideration, both the Budget Committee and the BCC have the authority to modify the budget before adoption.

How does the County budget promote equity, diversity and inclusion?

The County is currently focused on implementing the main pillars of the Equity Resolution adopted by the Board of County Commissioners in February 2020. This includes, but is not limited to:

- *Establishing a staff Leadership Equity Council and related committees that will help inform internal equity, diversity and inclusion efforts across County departments;*
- *Establishing an Advisory Council on Racial Equity that will foster collaboration with, and seek input from, communities of color on County policies and programs;*
- *Updating our purchasing policy to increase access and opportunity for minority and women-owned firms to contract with Washington County to ensure that minority-owned and women-owned businesses have equitable access to these contracting and purchasing opportunities;*
- *Creating a workforce pipeline and training program that will promote recruitment, employment, hiring, training and retention opportunities for communities of color and other disparate communities in Washington County; and*
- *Delivering quarterly reports to the Board on the progress of implementing this resolution and ongoing DEI efforts.*

Are there parts of the County budget that can't be changed?

Yes. Many revenue sources the County receives come with a very specific spending requirement. These funding sources as well as their uses cannot be changed.

What's the difference between the General Fund and a Special Fund?

The General Fund holds the County's discretionary resources, mostly from tax revenues. Special funds are usually established due to a special funding source that is not a part of the County's discretionary revenue sources. These funding sources usually come with specific target areas of spending and specific community services to be provided.

How is the County budget affected by unexpected circumstances like a recession or COVID-19?

During a recession, the County historically experiences revenue shortfalls which results in service reductions and reprioritization around maintaining the most important core services. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the County's property tax revenues remained stable while some selected areas experienced revenue shortfalls. Examples of these selected areas include the transient lodging taxes, over-the-counter service charges, as well as state-allocated taxes and funding related to transportation. With the help of much-needed federal funding and by taking early actions in reducing operating costs in these impacted areas, the County has been maintaining core County services without interruption through the pandemic.