

Date: 12/29/2021

To: County Board of Commissioners

CC: Tanya Ange, County Administrator

From: Office of Equity, Inclusion, and Community Engagement

Re: Summary of the December 2, 2021 Quarterly Town Hall focused on centering equity in the Washington County budget process

Overview

On December 2nd, 2021, at 6pm, The Washington County Board of Commissioners hosted a Virtual Town Hall focused on equity, diversity, and inclusion in the County budget process. The Board welcomed representatives from several County departments, as well as community partners, to help co-host this event. Among these were Centro Cultural, Coalition of Communities of Color, SOAR Immigration Legal Services, Vision Action Network, and Washington County's Office of Equity, Inclusion, and Community Engagement.

After a brief presentation about the County budget and efforts to center equity in the budget process, the public was invited to participate in an engaging virtual group activity, asking questions and sharing their perspectives with the Board as well as leadership staff from various County departments.

Documents that were shared with community in preparation of the Town Hall, as well as this summary memo, the questions and answers from each breakout session, and a link to the recording of the main room discussion from the Town Hall can be found on the County [Town Halls \(washington.or.us\)](https://www.washington.or.us/town-halls) webpage.

Process

Due to COVID-19 considerations, this session was conducted virtually on the Zoom platform. Because of statutory and quorum requirements, the "main room" session where all County Commissioners were in attendance was recorded and posted on the Washington County BoC website. The main room session was also simultaneously interpreted in American Sign Language and Spanish.

Given Washington County's numerous budget considerations, eleven simultaneous virtual breakout session focused on different topics for community members to select and participate. Each breakout session discussion period was twenty minutes long with enough time allotted in the event for participants to attend three different breakout sessions. In each breakout session there was a topic-relevant County representative (at least 1 per room), a facilitator, and a designated note taker.

- The role of the County representative was to listen to feedback from community members, ask clarifying questions, and answer questions that could help the conversation.
- The role of the facilitator was to help guide the conversation.
- The note taker captured detailed notes on community member feedback, additional questions to be answered later, and provided a 2-minute report-back to the main session.

After the three twenty-minute sessions were concluded, everyone returned to the main room to hear a summary of themes from each of the breakout sessions by the designated note taker and closing thoughts from the County Commissioners.

Breakout Sessions

The breakout session topics included Culture, Education, & Recreation; Disability, Aging, and Veteran Services; Housing Services; Land Use & Transportation; Mental Health & Addiction Services; Public Health; two rooms for Public Safety & Justice; two rooms for Conversations in Spanish which included all topics; and one room Other Departments or topics areas that did not have a specific focused session.

Attendance

Throughout the event 227 independent email addresses logged into the Zoom meeting, including County staff, interpreters, and facilitators. The YouTube video of the main session was streamed live and recorded; at the time of this report, the video had 529 views.

Summary of Community Feedback

The comments and questions from all eleven sessions were analyzed and sorted into main themes based on number of comments relating to a specific topic. The themes, along with some specific examples, are listed below:

- **Language Access & Culturally Specific Services** - 25 comments related to provision of information, services and resource navigation in languages other than English as well as support and need for culturally specific services across various County departments
 - *When you call the county or go the website or fill out a form, the majority of the information is English. You have to wait a really long time to speak with someone who speaks Spanish. And most of the forms are just in English.*
 - *Please invest in culturally specific mentors for mental health and addictions services*
 - *Concern about prevention, youth being supported so they don't end up in criminal justice system, especially for those who are non-English speaking who are disconnected from services, information, and advocacy*

- **Mental Health & Addictions** – 18 comments related to mental health and addiction services with 6 comments related specifically to youth
 - *Mental health services are massively underfunded. Still a lot of stigma, not treated like a “health” service. Underfunded.*
 - *MH investment is key, specialized teams for domestic violence/sexual assault, have strong uniform investment in service providers (specialized) who accompany law enforcement; officer plays support role but specialist (e.g. MH) is the one who directly deals with the unique situation, police officer is better suited to support the community by partnering with specialist—officer isn’t alone to figure out complex, tense, difficult circumstances*
- **Inclusion** - 16 comments related to inclusive practices for all people in the County
 - *The County says they want more involvement from communities of color but doesn't go out and meet them where they are at*
 - *Leadership development for people with disabilities and communities so they learn how to participate in the process.*
- **County Resources** - 15 comments related to awareness of available resources
 - *There needs to be better resources to provide information to people, because most people are unaware of the resources that can help them.*
 - *Would like to see meet and greet workshops across the county. Most people don't understand what the county does.*
- **Community Building** - 14 comments related to building trust and sense of community
 - *If the county continues to support all communities, the county will continue to thrive. The county is better off if we are all successful. Some of come here as immigrants and there is no sense of community, we don't know who our neighbors are*
 - *Building trust with communities of color, once they feel safe they will feel more comfortable in participating*
- **Education & Recreation** - 14 comments related to needs in our education and recreational areas
 - *Need collaborative services that encourage recreation and culture for at-risk and underserved students*
 - *There should be a focus on early education, so all children have access to it. There should be education to parents about the benefits of early education and help and support for the service providers. Early education provides an environment where children feel loved and learn.*
- **Land Use & Transportation** - 11 comments related to natural resources, urban growth, and transportation issues
 - *Concerns about habitat preservation, would like to see a tree code implemented, and concern about Tillamook State Forest land being sold off.*
 - *I’m really concerned the County's transportation money is focused on building and widening roads; not enough on crosswalks and sidewalks. Seems like the*

County is focused on roads rather than trying to improve people's ability to walk or bike. Need to focus more on active transportation and climate change.

- **Accessibility** - 9 comments related to changing accessibility barriers
 - *There need to be more physical locations that people can access resources to help them, instead of one centralized physical location in Hillsboro that has to accept everyone from all parts of the county.*
 - *Barriers for the Aging and People with disabilities are related to be older and their disability, Vision impairment for example, large print at least 14 font and bold, high contrast on all forms and web sites.*
- **Community Resources** – 9 comments related to increasing knowledge of or showing support for community resources
 - *Beaverton and Hillsboro have CBOs but there is no help in Aloha*
 - *Churches are a resource that people use, but they are very limited and cannot help for very long.*
- **Economic Development** – 8 comments related to business, employment, and non-profits
 - *Grants did not end up going to minority owned businesses. There needs to be an easier way to find and access the information*
 - *Summer and year-round paying job opportunities, especially focused on communities of color*
- **Housing** - 8 comments related to housing and/or housing services
 - *People who immigrated during COVID have not been able to find housing. Current housing has too many restrictions.*
 - *What is the county doing to prevent market rate housing from being bought up from outsiders and flipped to investors that raise the rent until it is unaffordable.*
- **Public Safety** - 8 comments related to the importance of prevention rather than reaction, fully funding public safety, and a focus on equity
 - *More focus on preventative measures versus reactive – Public Safety budget is 3 times the amount of Health and Human Services Budget. The pandemic has highlighted that when people are insecure they react in desperate ways, therefore, we should put more funding into services to help people before they're pushed into harmful measures.*
 - *Public Safety budget is of utmost importance as there is peace in knowing public safety staff are available should someone require their service. Strong opposition to end up like Portland or Multnomah County where limited staffing directly affects public safety services available.*
- **Accountability/Transparency** - 7 comments related to accountability and transparency in the budget process and other County spending
 - *There are other good non-profits but it feels like the county only partners and gives money to the same couple of non-profits. Washington County should check*

to see where the money is going and if it is being used for what it says it being used for.

- *We don't just want this meeting be a "check the box type" of meeting. Don't just have it be where community speaks up but then nothing done about their comments and concerns. They want the County to be considerate about their opinions and thoughts.*
- **Communications** - 3 comments related to the importance of increasing the reach and effectiveness of County communications
 - *Facebook is a good outlet, but the County should invest in communicating in areas that the community trusts and are comfortable with.*
 - *Examples of what has worked during COVID include:*
 - *Cell phones, trusted leaders from faith organizations, word of mouth*
 - *Schools, flyers and infographics in backpacks*
 - *Community centers*
 - *Outreach through CBOs where people are receiving services*
 - *Importance of hiring people that look like the community*
- **Community Engagement** - 2 comments related to the importance of Washington County continuing to ramp up engagement with the public
 - *Community outreach is very important. Seeing that the county is more present now, need to keep going. ...I'm glad to be in this space to talk about these efforts.*
- **Budget** - 2 comments related to continuing conversations about the County budget
 - *Would like to see participatory budgeting*
- **Miscellaneous** – 1 comment related to advanced directives
 - *Should we educate the public on advance directives as they relate to mental health and addiction?*

Next Steps

The next quarterly Board of Commissioner's Town Hall will be held in March 2022 and will also be focused on engaging with community around budget equity. This Town Hall will be an opportunity for the Board to share with community how the County is building, and will continue to build, equity into the administration of County dollars, based on some of the things they heard from community at the December Town Hall.

The CAO will provide a memo and one-on-one meetings as needed to share with the Board, in advance of the Town Hall, departmental and Countywide highlights that include some of the connections between what the Board and staff heard from community and what opportunities there are to move forward with Community input in the 2022-23 fiscal year and beyond. In keeping with the County's commitment to transparency, the CAO will also speak to instances in which it may not be feasible to move forward with community suggestions given current constraints in the documents provided to the Board.

The Office of Equity, Inclusion, and Community Engagement will provide a proposed run of show for the March Town Hall to the Board by 1/18/22. They, in collaboration with the CAO Communications Team, will also plan to post the upcoming Town Hall information, any preparation documents, and a follow-up summary on the County [Town Halls \(washington.or.us\)](https://www.washington.or.us/townhalls) webpage.