



# Divest-Invest Participatory Budgeting

## How Divest-Invest PB Works

Participatory Budgeting (PB) is a democratic process in which community members decide how to spend part of a public budget. It gives people real power over real money. PB is an annual cycle of engagement that is integrated into a regular budgeting process. Criminal justice-focused PB processes run across the state could allocate dollars to municipal- or county-based public agencies or nonprofit institutions who would each follow these steps:



### DESIGN THE PROCESS

A steering committee that represents communities highly impacted by criminal justice systems creates the rules and engagement plan.



### BRAINSTORM IDEAS

Through meetings and online tools, residents share and discuss ideas for projects.



### DEVELOP PROPOSALS

Volunteer "budget delegates" develop the ideas into feasible proposals, with guidance from experts in restorative justice, health and social services, education, and community development.



### FUND WINNING PROJECTS

The government or institution funds the winning ideas.



### VOTE

Residents vote on the proposals that most serve the community's needs.

## Why PB for Divest-Invest?

*"...as we enact reforms, we divest from punitive institutions, such as the police, jails, and courts and invest in the supportive services our people need, such as transportation, education, and health"*

- Law For Black Lives

**Communities across the US are organizing to bring greater transparency, accountability, and equity to our criminal justice systems.**

PB can ensure community members impacted by the war on drugs and other systematic overcriminalization are leading development of more just and humane systems and practices.

When policy reforms result in government savings from reduced incarceration costs or new tax revenues from legalizing formerly criminalized activities, PB offers impacted communities and allies the power to reinvest public dollars into programs and services that provide healing from, reduce, and prevent involvement with criminal justice systems.



# PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING PROJECT

## Which communities would receive Divest-Invest funds?

**Agencies or independent institutions can set equitable, data-driven formulas that allocate funds generated by public savings or new revenue to communities most impacted by a criminal justice policy reform.**

For example, revenue for funds generated by taxes from legalized recreational marijuana sales could be allocated according to a formula that considers a community's rates of incarceration related to drugs, and proportion of residents with identities that are over-represented in drug-related arrests relative to their rates of drug use (e.g., race, age, income).

## Who is centered in community leadership and participation?

**Equitable PB is deeply inclusive of a broad cross-section of community members in all phases of the process** (from steering committee formation to voting), including those who identify as:

- Black, Indigenous and People of Color
- Immigrants, regardless of immigrations status
- Individuals experiencing houselessness
- Individuals with mental illness
- LGBTQIA+ individuals
- Youth

**People represented and prioritized in invest-divest PB can include:**

- Currently or formerly incarcerated people
- Children and family members of currently or formerly incarcerated people
- People who live in neighborhoods, attend public schools, or live in public housing developments with high rates of incarceration
- People who grew up in or previously lived in communities disproportionately impacted by criminal justice system involvement
- People who currently use or formerly used drugs
- Current or former sex workers

*“Most [public safety] interventions have taken a “top down” approach in which federal and state officials develop, fund, and implement policy and practice changes based on their priorities and perceptions. In these strategies, resources flow disproportionately to criminal and juvenile justice system actors. The communities most acutely impacted by mass incarceration, which face a multitude of structural challenges and are disproportionately populated by people of color, have been largely excluded from policy conversations to identify solutions.”*

- Urban Institute

Depending on the source of public savings or revenue, a PB process may focus more specifically on engaging people directly impacted by particular issue (e.g., center people impacted by the war on drugs).

## Endorsements

**Our work has been recognized as a best practice in civic engagement by:**

- The US Conference of Mayors
- The Movement for Black Lives
- Center for Popular Democracy
- Law for Black Lives
- Black Youth Project 100
- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
- PolicyLink
- Local Progress
- US Department of Housing and Urban Development
- The Obama White House
- Harvard University- Ash Center for Democratic Governance & Innovation
- The US Conference of Mayors
- National League of Cities
- 100 Resilient Cities
- The Aspen Institute

## Where PB is Happening

- New York City, where over 100,000 people decide how to spend \$40 million
- Oakland, CA, for federal community development funds
- Phoenix, AZ, in public high schools
- Vallejo, CA, for proceeds from a city sales tax
- Boston, MA, where young people decide how to spend \$1 million each year
- Over 10,000 cities around the world.

## Contact

PBP has offices in NYC & Oakland. Contact us to learn more about starting PB in your community.

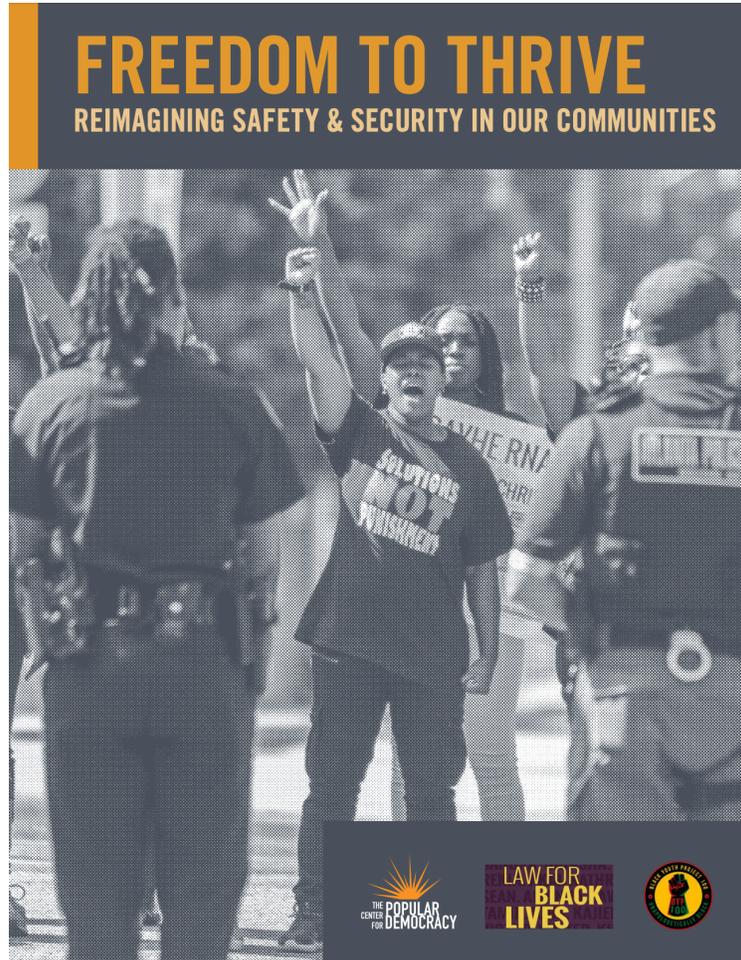
 [info@participatorybudgeting.org](mailto:info@participatorybudgeting.org)

 @PBProject

 ParticipatoryBudgetingProject



# PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING PROJECT



## FURTHER READING

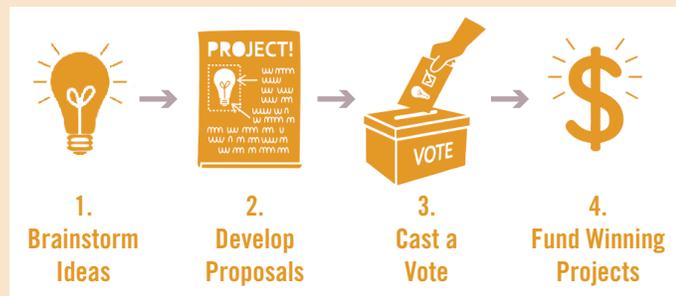
**Participatory Budgeting is the key action recommendation from the Freedom to Thrive coalition.**

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# A CALL TO ACTION FROM THE PEOPLE

## Participatory Budgeting: A Model for Community Control over Money

Together we are advancing toward the type of society in which communities decide how to spend their tax dollars and other city resources. A shared understanding of different types of governance models is necessary as we move forward. Participatory Budgeting (PB) is one such model. PB is a democratic process in which community members decide how to spend a portion of a public budget, and gives the community decision-making power over government funds. PB consists of four main phases:



Source: The Participatory Budgeting Project

PB was first established in Brazil in the 1980s and has since become a leading example of the potential for community-controlled decision making over government money.<sup>452</sup> For the past seven years, PB has been building momentum in the US and Canada. An organization called the Participatory Budgeting Project (PBP) has been leading the charge in pushing PB as a national model for community inclusion over decision making.<sup>453</sup>

For PB to be truly equitable, it must center the voices of those most impacted, thus giving marginalized communities power over the pots of money that most affect their lives. Poor Black communities in particular are more cynical of the idea of democracy because democratic processes have never served them justly or beneficially.<sup>454</sup>

Poor Black people have instead been alienated from all power and control in a system that has consistently suppressed their ability to achieve liberation in its truest form. The ongoing perpetuation of oppressive systemic impacts on Black communities that have been disinvested in has deepened the need for innovative ways of centering community voices and demanding reparations for Black people. Today's political demands must acknowledge the harms caused by chronic and intentional disinvestment and make democracy real by allowing self-determination in how those communities are funded.

Acknowledging the havoc that mass incarceration (a product of the same capitalist system through which chattel slavery was entrenched) has inflicted on the Black community, it is imperative that we center the voices of those who have been most directly impacted by the criminal legal system. One example of how PB centers the voices of those most impacted is the inclusion of "system-involved" people in decision making over government money. Some examples of PB processes that have successfully engaged system-involved community members include previously incarcerated people making decisions about reentry funds through the Participatory Budgeting Project in New York City;<sup>455</sup> the Participatory Budgeting Project in Hartford, Connecticut, which brought civic engagement into corrections facilities;<sup>456</sup> and several PB processes in the United Kingdom, which engaged communities in deciding on how to allocate police and safety funds.<sup>457</sup>

Marginalized communities are disproportionately overrepresented in prisons and excluded from democratic decision-making processes. Systems of policing are responsible for the mass incarceration of Black people with no authentic accountability to the communities that they disproportionately target. Community groups have pushed back against the many forms of state-sanctioned violence by launching divest/invest campaigns, which aim to redirect public money originally intended for funding policing institutions back into impacted communities. For example, community members in Greensboro, North Carolina, with a local population that

is 40.6 percent Black, decided to spend \$500,000 of the city's budget on pools and recreation center upgrades, crosswalk upgrades, and bus shelters.<sup>458</sup> Residents of Far Rockaway in New York City, part of a city council district where 68 percent of the residents are Black,<sup>459</sup> decided to spend \$1.85 million in city council funds on upgrades in their schools including computer labs, a new kitchen, and a greenhouse project.<sup>460</sup>

Because mass incarceration has a vastly disproportionate impact on Black and Latinx people, a model that centers the most marginalized would have them decide how to address and repair that harm. As stated in the 2015 report "Who Pays? The True Cost of Incarceration on Families," "all states need to restructure their policies to reduce the number of people in jails and prisons and the sentences they serve. The money saved from reducing incarceration rates should be used instead to reinvest in services that work such as substance abuse programs and stable housing, which have proven to reduce recidivism rates. Additionally, the focus of sentencing needs to shift to accountability, safety, and healing the people involved, rather than simply punishing those convicted of crimes."<sup>461</sup> Because PB processes are organized around intentional outreach and inclusion, PB it is one way to ensure that the people directly impacted are actually the ones making decision about how the funds are spent.

Divest/invest campaigns are a concrete example of how PB can build on current campaign work and endorse community control over money. Decisions made about funds that have been divested from policing, mass incarceration, juvenile justice detention facilities, and school pushout should center the voices of Black communities, especially system-involved and previously-system-involved people. The intention is not to replace current community-based organizing work with the PB model, but instead to supplement and build on that work. At this point, PB has been most successful on a small scale, typically at the city district or ward level. While PB has yet to be implemented at scale of larger city budgets, it nevertheless serves as a promising governance model and something to strive for as part of divest/invest campaign strategies.

Potential campaign wins that PB could support include, for example, taking School Resource Officers (SROs) out of schools and reallocating funding to social workers and trained conflict resolution practitioners; closing an existing Juvenile Justice facility or prison and providing robust community-based alternatives; and ending new prison plans. These are all starting places for PB to help communities decide where to redirect funds. Campaign wins will not end at "no new jail" or "less police on the streets," but will instead be expanded to include community control over budgeting decisions for funds originally allocated toward those expenditures.

Economic and racial justice policy platforms that have already been designed by movement leaders such as "Vision for Black Lives: Police Demands for Black Power, Freedom, & Justice" and "Agenda to Build Black Futures" can provide the framework for where and how PB is implemented. While many proposals described in these policy platforms require continued political pressure and organizing to manifest, implementation of PB in our communities can and does happen now. Tangible strategizing that brings us closer to PB as an accountability tool for government money can include:

1. Building a research team to conduct in-depth research on municipal budgets and summarize their findings
2. Mapping out decision making points, decision makers, and pots of money to target
3. Designing and mapping out a national campaign web
4. Base building on the ground
5. Budgeting and PB training and development (with the support of organizations like the Participatory Budgeting Project)
6. Assembling an oversight and accountability team

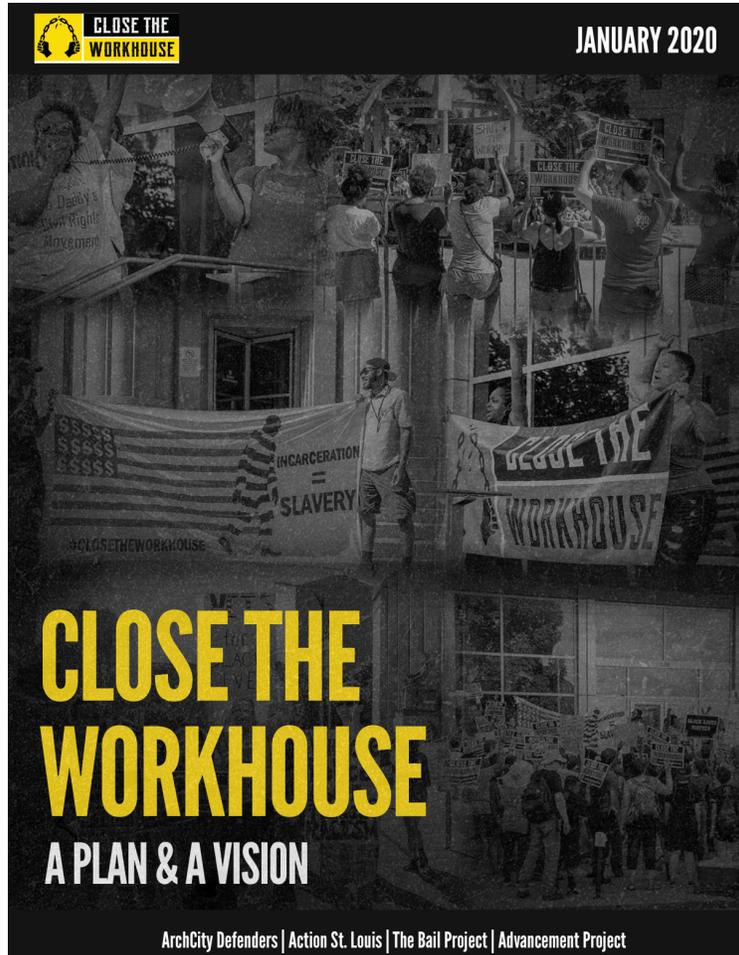
Taxpayer dollars are being over invested in the very systems that exploit and discriminate against people on the margins. It's time the people made good on our investment by taking that money back and redirecting it into our own communities.

## **A Call to Action from the People: Participatory Budgeting: a Model for Community Control over Money**

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- 453 "Participatory Budgeting is a Democratic Process in Which Community Members Directly Decide how to Spend Part of a Public Budget," Participatory Budgeting Project, accessed June 21, 2017, <https://www.participatorybudgeting.org/>.
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- 455 Oscar Perry Abello, "Ex-Prisoners Tell NYC How to Spend Money," *Equity Factor*, September 11, 2015, <https://nextcity.org/daily/entry/participatory-budgeting-new-york-city-meetings-ex-prisoners>.
- 456 Vinny Vella, "Hartford Inmates Help Decide How City Spends \$1.25 Million," March 30, 2015, <http://www.courant.com/community/hartford/hc-hartford-inmates-voting-0330-20160330-story.html>.
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- 461 Saneta deVuono-powell, Chris Schweidler, Alicia Walters, and Azadeh Zohrabi, "Who Pays? The True Cost of Incarceration on Families," Ella Baker Center, Forward Together, Research Action Design, 2015, <http://ellabakercenter.org/sites/default/files/downloads/who-pays.pdf>.



# PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING PROJECT



## FURTHER READING

### **Participatory Budgeting makes Divest-Invest possible in St.Louis Close The Workhouse Coalition Campaign**

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# WE COULD CLOSE THE WORKHOUSE TODAY!

The number of people jailed at the Workhouse is steadily decreasing as a result of community organizing, political pressure, community and Bail Project bailouts, and prosecutorial reforms. Based on current practices and trends, we could close the Workhouse today.

Public safety in St. Louis demands a new approach. It requires us to re-envision how we use our public resources so that we address the root causes of violence in our communities, instead of continuing to pour money into unnecessary and violent carceral institutions.

## We can and must act differently.

This section presents the campaign's plan to re-envision a new reality for St. Louis.

## A NEW REALITY FOR ST. LOUIS WILL LOOK LIKE

### Ending the criminalization cycle.

St. Louis could interrupt the cycle of poverty by de-criminalizing drug addictions, property damage, and poverty-based crimes, and instead address the root causes behind these issues.

### Budgets that reflect our values.

Budgets are value statements. \$16 million to operate an unnecessary jail does not reflect our values. Instead we could invite people from across the City to discuss how they want that money spent. Participatory budgeting makes this possible.

### Equitable development and opportunity.

Promote equitable development with an emphasis on affordable housing and good jobs.

219  
free beds

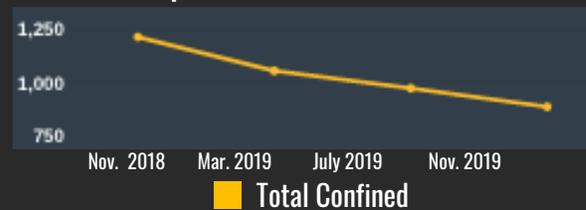
At the beginning of 2020, there were 219 free beds at CJC, based on CJC's capacity (860) and the number of individuals in City and state custody (641).

With all these free beds, St. Louis continues to operate an additional jail at a cost of over \$16 million a year.

### Decarceration is the trend in St. Louis.

The jailed population in City and state custody has decreased steadily in the last 12 months. There were decreases of 6% (Dec. to Feb. 2019), 3% (Feb. to May 2019), 11.6% (May to Aug. 2019), and 8.8% (Aug. to Nov. 2019).

### Confined Population in St. Louis



**NOTE:** Currently, over 25% of people jailed in St. Louis at the beginning of 2020 were federal detainees who could be incarcerated elsewhere, along with the rest of people in local and state custody who are unconstitutionally held pretrial.

## A PLAN TO CLOSE THE WORKHOUSE

1. End the detention of federal detainees.
2. Employ pretrial services that promote public safety without resorting to incarceration.
3. Develop a new approach to public safety that addresses root causes of violence.

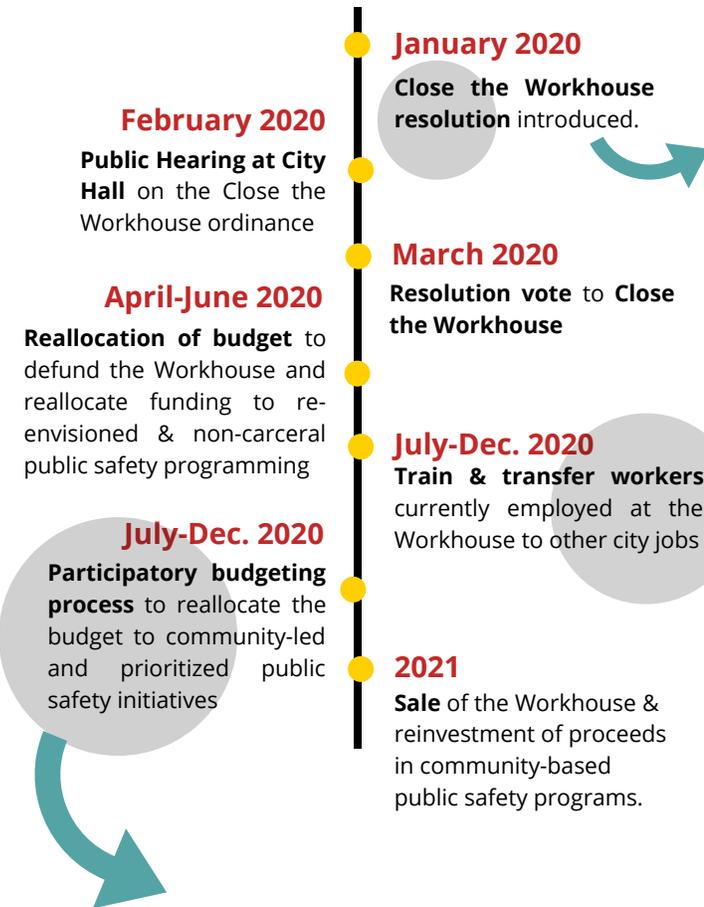
A Plan for a Just STL

# A TIMELINE FOR A JUST ST. LOUIS



THE CLOSE THE WORKHOUSE & RE-ENVISIONED PUBLIC SAFETY

## TIMELINE



### The Close the Workhouse Resolution

A resolution: to close the Workhouse, sever the contract to incarcerate federal detainees, defund the pretrial detention center, and re-allocate funding to other public safety initiatives.

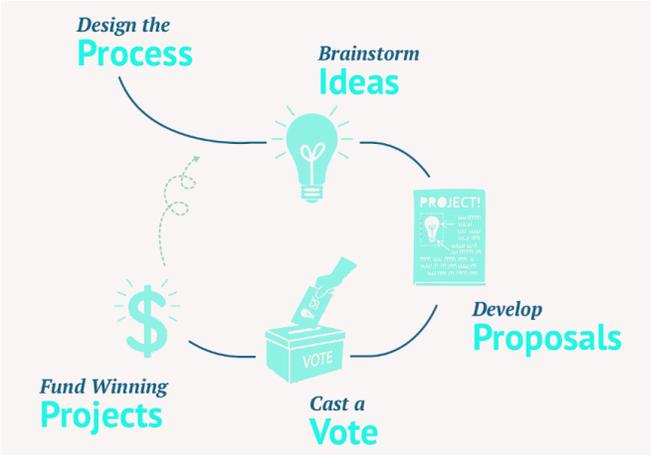
### City Jobs for Workhouse Workers

The City of St. Louis has around 700 vacant municipal jobs, including more than 20% of jobs at the airport. Workers currently employed at the Workhouse could be offered training to transfer to alternative City employment.

### Participatory Budgeting

Participatory budgeting is a democratic process where community members decide how to spend part or all of a public budget. It gives people real power over real money. Over 3000 cities now use participatory budgeting to decide city, state, county and school board budgets.

Through this process, residents can decide both how to use public money, and the process on how to propose projects and vote on the budget.



# A NEW VISION FOR THE WORKHOUSE MONEY

**\$16 MILLION A YEAR**

## AFFORDABLE HOUSING (\$2-3 M.)

This can look like:

- Full-time public homeless shelters instead of private shelters and increased City funding for the unhoused (e.g. the per person cost in San Francisco is \$35,000/yr. for care in a homeless shelter, \$12,900/yr. for supportive housing).
- Expand the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, a fund that promotes the preservation & production of affordable, accessible housing (e.g. Kansas Housing Fund of \$15 million./yr.).

## COMMUNITY BASED MENTAL & ADDICTION HEALTHCARE (\$2-3 M.)

This can look like:

- Community-based support for people with mental illness and addiction outside of the criminal legal system.

## VICTIMS' SERVICES (\$2.5-3.5 M.)

This can look like:

- Connecting victims to supportive services to address domestic violence protection & emergency shelters, trauma services, and medical care—outside of court.
- Supporting alternative accountability mechanisms, such as Common Justice in the Bronx, (\$3.6 million/yr.).

## PRETRIAL SERVICES (\$2-3 M.)

This can look like:

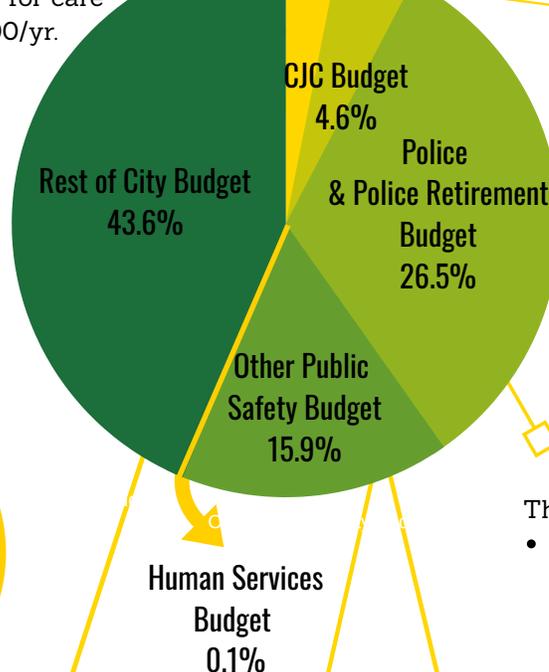
- Community-based pretrial support to address barriers to attending court, including bus passes, text message reminders, childcare, and social workers.
- Needs assessments should also be conducted upon release, and individuals should immediately be connected to community-based and free services.

## ECONOMIC & EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES (\$2-3 M.)

This can look like:

- City-funded job training programs, especially for youth, residents of neighborhoods with high rates of poverty, and people with criminal records or who are incarcerated (like *From Prison to Prosperity* a job training program for people in St. Louis custody).
- City-funded retraining programs and support to transfer workers currently employed at the Workhouse to alternate city employment.

## Workhouse Budget (3.9% or \$16 million)



## CURRENT CITY BUDGET

*Note: A participatory, community-led approach is key to a new vision for public money.*

## COMMUNITY PUBLIC SPACES (\$1-2 M.)

This can look like:

- The development of free and accessible community spaces in currently under-served areas—including community centers and gardens, parks and public restrooms.
- E.g., a public urban park with programming for youth and adults (\$200,000/yr.).

## COMMUNITY SAFETY & HARM FREE ZONES (\$2.5-3.5 M.)

This can look like:

- The creation of community-based Harm Free Zones (see Critical Resistance in Oakland) through the building of community and accountability, with a commitment to intervene to stop harm.
- Through the courts, creation of pre-arrest diversion projects (e.g., L.E.A.D. in Seattle, which divert people to service providers instead of being arrested and charged with a crime at \$2.3 million/yr).