

## **2021 RECOMMENDED BUDGET MESSAGE FROM THE FRANKLIN COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR**

I am Kenneth Wilson, County Administrator, and I am pleased to present to the Board of Commissioners the 2021 Recommended Budget for Franklin County. Under the Commissioners' sound and prudent leadership, we present a budget that is fiscally responsible yet resident-centered and prepares us to address our opportunities and challenges head-on as we continue to fight COVID-19 and continue to build a foundation for economic recovery over the course of the coming year.

As you will see this afternoon and over the course of the budget hearings, the budget includes funding for policy initiatives that reflect our commitment to every resident, every day, whether it is creating pathways out of poverty, opening doors for the underserved in our community, promoting social and economic justice, and implementing life-changing programming in smart justice and community re-entry, allowing for the creation of additional affordable housing units, preventing homelessness & evictions or addressing the County's infrastructure needs. The 2021 Recommended Budget before you today supports our true focus on public polices that have the goal of fostering an environment where every Franklin County resident can live their best life.

The 2021 Recommended Budget continues the County on a long-range course that is solid. But the COVID-19 pandemic has tested the County's fiscal strength and sustainability: The Board of Commissioners took decisive action back on March 12<sup>th</sup>, when it passed Resolution No. 0181-20 to authorize actions to be taken to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the residents of Franklin County. In working with our elected officials, the courts, and other agency partners, we were able to keep the business of County government open throughout the pandemic.

In addition to the weekly elected officials' meetings, County Administration facilitated countywide senior staff meetings and established "new normal" workgroups to provide recommendations for maintaining County operations in a safe and consistent manner.

The workgroups were organized around committees to deal with Facility Needs and Business Access, Human Resources, General Meetings, Technology, and Communications. The committees had tremendous participation from throughout the County along with participation from both the City and County Public Health Departments to provide insight.

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The recommendations looked at adjusting operations to reduce the number of staff in County facilities, including the use of telework and the limit of in-person meetings; investing in network infrastructure and purchase of computers and laptops to support staff work from home; establishing protocols for social distancing, including the installation of barriers where keeping six feet apart is not possible; and increased cleaning, including the availability of hand sanitizer throughout County facilities.

In addition to a focus on keeping County services available to the public, we have worked to provide support in the community. The Board of Commissioners has partnered with Franklin County Public Health to communicate the importance of hand washing, maintaining social distancing, and wearing facial coverings to stop the spread of the coronavirus. We have partnered with the African American Male Wellness Agency on M.A.S.C. Up events throughout the County for the distribution of free mask kits.

The Board of Commissioners has also invested with a number of our non-profit and community partners to address our residents needs through various COVID-19 Response and Resilience Initiative grants.

- Rev1 Ventures received nearly \$2.5 million to establish the Columbus-Franklin County COVID-19 Small Business Response and Recovery Fund. The fund provided relief through Recovery Grants of up to \$10,000 to provide financial assistance to sustain small business operations through the COVID-19 pandemic and Small Business Return Safely Grants to provide a one-to-one matching grant of up to \$5,000 for personal protective equipment.
- Mid-Ohio Food Collective received \$1.5 million to respond to increased requests for assistance due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Forty-seven thousand new, unduplicated customers were served 2,000,000 meals from March 1 through May 30, 2020. This represents a 540% increase in service demand.
- The Center of Science and Industry (COSI) received \$375,000 in support of the Learning Lunchbox program. The program provides critically needed digital educational experiences and content in science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics, enabling Franklin County students to learn during the COVID-19 pandemic and in subsequent years. Children's Hunger Alliance works in partnership with COSI to provide free healthful lunches for children to accompany their Learning Lunchboxes. This program has been recognized by the Greater Columbus Arts Council with a Community Arts Innovation Award.

The funding from these initiatives has been provided through the Coronavirus Relief Fund which was authorized by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security, or CARES Act. Of the \$150 billion that was authorized by Congress, the County received a direct allocation of \$76.3 million.

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Through the end of September, the County had identified \$58.0 million in costs, which represents 76.0% of the allocation. In addition to supporting these economic support and public health grants, the CARES Act dollars have been used to support various payroll expenditures for public health and safety employees.

As a result of this federal support, the County was able to avoid a significant draw down of General Fund reserves during 2020. In the recommended budget, it is estimated that over \$40 million of 2020 projected expenditures will be supported from the Coronavirus Relief Fund, avoiding the need to utilize cash balances in the General Fund. However, based on current guidelines, this funding must be used by December 30 and is not available for use in the 2021 budget.

As a result, the circumstances in which this budget was crafted required prudent budgeting that called for a 2.5 percent reduction in baseline budgets in order to reduce reliance on cash reserves, preserve service levels in critical health and human services agencies, and protect the county's stellar bond rating status.

Despite these reductions, the General Fund ending cash balance will dip in 2021 by approximately \$31 million. This draw down will be from cash reserves saved from prior years, and the County's rainy-day fund will remain at \$62.5 million.

As an indication of the County's fiscal strength, the 2021 Recommended Budget includes a projected General Fund ending cash balance of 37.6% of the total 2021 Expenditures. This keeps the cash balance among the highest levels of other counties rated triple-A by Moody's and Standard & Poor's.

**GENERAL FUND BUDGET**

General Fund revenue in the 2021 Recommended Budget is expected to be \$461.4 million, which reflects a 9.9% decrease when compared to the 2020 projections. In addition to the loss of revenue from the CARES Act, Investment Earnings are estimated at \$14.4 million, which is \$10.1 million or 41.1% less than the projected actuals for 2020 as a result of the current Federal Reserve Policy.

The largest proportion of General Fund revenue remains the Sales Tax, which comprises nearly 66% of the General Fund revenue. With collections of \$303.5 million, the 2021 Recommended Budget includes an anticipated 1.8% growth in the overall County sales tax collections when compared to the 2020 projections. However, the sales tax revenue in the Recommended Budget is \$10.5 million less than what was included in the 2020 budget approved last December. It is not expected for sales tax revenue to rebound to pre-pandemic levels until 2022 at the earliest.

The state biennial budget for fiscal years 2020 and 2021, House Bill 166, includes a provision effective October 16, 2019 to increase the reimbursement rate for county indigent defense expenditures up to 75.0% in state fiscal year 2020 and up to 100.0% in state fiscal year 2021. Due to the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the State Public Defender’s reimbursement rate was reduced to 70%. This did not have a significant impact on the County since County agencies and courts agreed last year in the development of the 2020 budget to assume a 70% reimbursement rate based on historical fluctuations. We would continue to urge the state to complete the progress made in the last state budget to fully transfer the funding requirement of indigent defense services from counties to the state in the upcoming biennial budget.

The 2021 Recommended Budget contains \$492.0 million in General Fund appropriations, which is \$20.4 or 4.0% less than the 2020 projected expenditures.

During the 2021 budget process that began in May, the Franklin County Office of Management & Budget, or OMB, assessed the budget request of every agency, office, and court within the context of the County’s mandatory requirements, statutory duties, and the demand for services. OMB’s reviews and suggestions were then used by County Administration to develop the Recommended Budget. As a result of this analysis, the 2021 Recommended General Fund Budget is \$8.0 million or 1.6% less than the total amount requested.

The decreases in General Fund appropriations from the 2020 projections are primarily attributed to the COVID-19 Response Grants supported by the CARES Act and reductions in Salaries & Wages and Fringe Benefits associated with the 27<sup>th</sup> pay that occurred in 2020. The 2021 Recommended Budget includes \$5 million in Contingency

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to meet unforeseen expenses during the year. This is less than the maximum 3% that is authorized by the Ohio Revised Code.

As shown in the chart, \$287.8 million, or 58.5%, of the General Fund Budget is allocated to the provision of Justice & Public Safety. Of that amount, \$162.1 million supports the operations of the Franklin County Sheriff's Office.

The 2021 Recommended Budget for Justice & Public Safety also includes \$84.2 million in the General Fund to support the operations of the courts and \$35.3 million for criminal and civil prosecution and legal defense services.

A new judgeship for the Domestic & Juvenile Court will begin in 2021, and the Recommended Budget includes funding for the judge and necessary support staff to maintain effective operations within the Court. Also included in the Recommended Budget is the addition of a Civil Protection Clerk to address the increased number of filings. Between 2016 and 2019, the number of protection orders filed increased 34.6%. The addition of a new Civil Protection Clerk is supported because timely protection order processing is in the public's best interest. As annual filings increase and COVID-19 creates stress for families and relationships, adequate staffing is necessary to ensure residents receive protection orders in a timely manner.

In addition to the positions at the Domestic & Juvenile Court, the 2021 Recommended Budget includes support for two new full time Assistant Prosecuting Attorneys that will be required to hear additional cases, primarily abuse, neglect, and dependency, as a result of the new judgeship in 2021.

Along with the amounts noted in the chart, the Recommended Budget includes \$331,500 in support of the Municipal Court Specialty Dockets and \$250,000 for the Guardianship Services Board in 2021. Also planned is a Rapid Resource Center co-located at the Franklin County Corrections Center will be staffed and operational with a minimum of 150 justice involved individuals referred to treatment by December 31, 2021.

### **ALL FUNDS BUDGET**

While a majority of the General Fund supports Justice & Public Safety, the largest portion of the all funds budget is dedicated to Social & Human Services. The total amount of budget appropriations recommended for all County funds in 2021 is \$1.8 billion, which represents a \$5.1 million, or 0.3%, increase from 2020 projected actuals.

As the largest category in the all funds budget, Social & Human Services represents 42.2% of the total 2021 Recommended Budget. These Social & Human Services are primarily supported by property tax levies approved by the voters. In order to become more integrated and collaborative in approaching this work last month Joy

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Bivens was appointed into the position of Deputy County Administrator for Health and Human Services.

Franklin County delivers a variety of Social & Human Services in order to meet the needs of its residents, which are mostly supported by property tax levies, as well as state and federal funds. As seen in the chart, nearly one-third, or \$244.0 million, of these expenditures are for the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities. The Board serves over 20,000 individuals with developmental disabilities so they can live, work, learn, and participate in the community.

Another \$214.8 million or 28.7% of these expenditures support the work of Franklin County Children Services. The agency is projecting to conduct 19,000 intake related assessments this year. While intake-related assessments are down due to a reduction in referrals caused by COVID-19, the agency is still projecting to conduct 19,000 assessments during the year.

Another \$106.5 million or 14.2% of these expenditures support the work of the Alcohol, Drug, & Mental Health, or ADAMH Board. The successful passage of the 5-year, 2.85-mill levy on the November 3, 2020 ballot will enable ADAMH to maintain its System of Care. Over the past three years, ADAMH-funded agencies provided treatment and other non-prevention services to just under 30,000 Franklin County residents annually.

The 2021 Recommended Budget for the Franklin County Office on Aging, which provides centralized access to programs and individualized services for older adults and their caregivers so they can preserve their independence and quality of life, is \$46.8 million. In addition to serving seniors enrolled in the Senior Options program, the budget supports assistance to procure a replacement of the current outdated case management system.

These services will continue to be provided to the residents of Franklin County despite an expected drop in revenue from property tax collections next year due to the economic impact from the pandemic. In consultation with these levy-supported agencies, the 2021 Recommended Budget includes a reduction of 2.5% from the revenue estimates provided by the Budget Commission, which represents a loss of \$11.1 million for these four agencies.

Also within the 2021 Recommended Social & Human Services Budget are General Fund dollars for a “mandated share” of \$4.5 million for programs administered by the Franklin County Department of Job and Family Services, a \$3.3 million subsidy to the Child Support Enforcement Agency, and \$12.5 million for various grants funded through Community Partnerships.

## **SERVING, SUPPORTING, AND UPLIFTING ALL RESIDENTS**

In order to review the 2021 Recommended Budget in more detail, we will now highlight major 2020 achievements and planned 2021 initiatives of Franklin County agencies. Our first priority is to focus our efforts on serving, supporting, and uplifting all residents.

As Ohio's most populous County, our residents represented 11.3% of the state's population in 2019. Since 2010, Franklin County's population has grown by more than 150,000 individuals, or 12.9%, to over 1.3 million residents. There is little indication that this trend will slow over the next decade.

While Franklin County has seen population growth and increasing opportunities, not everyone in the community has benefited. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the poverty rate for all people in Franklin County was 13.4% in 2019. Even more distressing are the racial and other disparities—the poverty rate for African Americans is twice the County average, and 18.4% of all children in Franklin County are living in poverty. These numbers will only get worse as an additional 8 million Americans fell into poverty amid the pandemic.

As the leading provider of safety net services, Franklin County agencies serve many of the nearly 200,000 residents who struggle to make ends meet every day. Disrupting poverty in Franklin County requires a response from the entire Central Ohio community to bring residents out of poverty to share in the progress. Our social service agencies will continue to be challenged to meet these needs.

In June, the Commissioners voted to establish a first-of-its-kind Family Stabilization Unit that will provide wraparound assistance, while taking a tailored approach to meet the unique needs of each family – all through a social determinant of health and racial equity lens. The Unit will collaborate with the courts, primarily through the Juvenile Court's Truancy Intervention and Prevention Program; Board of Commissioners agencies like Office on Aging and Child Support Enforcement; as well as levy-funding social services agencies including Children Services and the Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health Board to create an integrated network of support for families. The Unit also plans to incorporate a workforce development component for families that are unemployed or underemployed through a partnership with Columbus State Community College.

The Rise Together Blueprint remained in the forefront in 2020, and if anything was elevated in the midst of this pandemic. The Commissioners continued to take direct action to support the 13 goals and 120-plus action steps including funding a first-of-its-kind school-based health center at Whitehall Yearling High School – a partnership with Heart

of Ohio Family Health Center. Commissioner Agencies, including Job and Family Services, began to use the Blueprint to guide their funding and contracting decisions. You heard it each time I presented a resolution to you during general session. Even my new position reflects the Blueprint's charge to bring health and human services systems into greater alignment.

The Leadership Council for the Innovation Center – the entity that will be charged convening partners and aligning systems to implement the goals and action steps of the Blueprint long-term – made progress this year as well. It helped secure a physical space the Center to operate out of at SmartColumbus, which is a natural and vital partner in addressing transportation barriers low-income residents face. It also secured a fiscal sponsor, the United Way of Central Ohio, to solicit and receive funds, grants, contributions and other revenues to support the Innovation Center's work in the short-term. The Council voted to approve articles of incorporation so that the Innovation Center can apply to become an established 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation in order to carry out the mission of the Blueprint for the long-term. The Commissioners will continue to serve as the appointing authority and for the Innovation Center in addition to taking additional action to support the goals and action steps.

The Blueprint also pointed out the role of racism as an underlying factor in poverty, and here the Commissioners took action as well in 2020. It began with a historic, though still just initial, investment of \$125,000 to re-envision the county's approach to racial equity. Hundreds of county employees have already gone through implicit bias training led by Raising The Bar Performance Group. We became the first county in the state to declare racism a public health emergency, and earlier today, adopted a resolution recognizing racial equity as one of the Commissioners' core principles. These and other immediate actions that will be highlighted throughout this presentation are just the first steps on a journey to engrain racial equity in our county's DNA.

The continuation of Building Futures, the Commissioners' premiere workforce training program, and expansion of similar models in other fields is an immediate County action related to the Rise Together goal to increase access to high paying jobs. Building Futures is a first-of-its-kind pre-apprenticeship program, developed in partnership with the Columbus/Central Ohio Building and Construction Trades Council and administered by the Columbus Urban League. It was recognized with a NACo Achievement Award for Community and Economic Development in 2018.

The 12-week pre-apprenticeship program is designed to help low-income Franklin County residents from traditionally underrepresented populations (African Americans, New Americans, women, restored residents) pursue careers in the skilled construction trades, including electrical work, iron work, carpentry, painting, plumbing and more. It lays a foundation to build career in the skilled trades and serves as a pipeline to the



middle-class. These are good paying jobs with benefits that help ensure local workers fuel our county's continuing growth. It is also a program that is slowly helping to bridge down historic divides in union construction trades.

Participants receive both "soft skills" training, including interpersonal skills and financial literacy, followed "hard skills," including safety certification and trade-specific instruction, all while receiving a weekly \$250 stipend. At the end of the cohort, participants complete an entrance assessment to progress directly into an apprenticeship program. They are also connected with other supportive services offered by Franklin County to help address barriers like transportation, housing, child care and more.

To date, the Commissioners have committed more than \$2.3 million in combined TANF and General Fund dollars to support this innovative partnership. By blending TANF and General Fund dollars to support the program, there is greater flexibility to connect participants with the supportive services (e.g. car repair, child care, stipends) to remain in the program and avoid some of the issues associated with the benefits cliff. During the last program period, 113 participants were enrolled in the program with 70% meeting the graduation requirements. Sixty-one of the graduates were placed into apprenticeships or jobs, earning an average wage of \$23.00 per hour.

A similar program is Roads2Work, which prepares participants to pass the state and national licensure exam for commercial driver licenses. Impact Community Action in partnership with Capital Transportation will enroll 75 individuals in the program and help to place them in unsubsidized employment opportunities offering livable wages. During the last program period, 75 participants were enrolled with 84% graduating from the program. Many of the graduates have secured employment, earning an average salary of \$50,000 per year.

These are just two examples of programs that the Commissioners are committed to funding that align with Goal #3 of the Rise Together Blueprint – Increasing access to relevant training and credentials that meet local demand with employer commitments.

Both the Franklin County Board of Health and the Board of Commissioners declared Racism as a Public Health Crisis earlier this year, and as such, racism is a root cause of poverty resulting in disparate outcomes in health, education, employment, housing, and criminal justice. The 2021 Recommended Budget also includes continued support to Franklin County Public Health to support the Associate Director of Equity and Inclusion to address health disparities and advance adoption of the Health and Equity in All Policies policy.

The budget includes funding to support the first ever Franklin County Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion within General Services-Purchasing. The Chief Economic

Equity and Inclusion Officer Keena Smith will work on a number of initiatives of the course of the next year such as advancing the work of the Franklin County Equity Alliance.

Franklin County continued its commitment to expanding access to high-quality, star-rated early learning programs for low-income families throughout the year. That included continuing to offer free training to help state licensed child care providers meet the state's Step Up To Quality early learning mandates, which went into place this year. Franklin County Job and Family Services, or JFS, first began offering training in earnest in July 2018, and provided online training options from the onset. That move paid dividends this year, as they were ahead of the curve in the spring, when the pandemic made virtual meetings the new norm. To date, more than 1,000 early learning professionals representing just under 500 different center and home child care providers have completed the training.

The Commissioners have provided over \$3 million in support for this unfunded state mandate since 2015. The free online training and 1-on-1 assistance for providers is the centerpiece, but it has also gone toward research and targeted digital outreach as well as paid media and grassroots community outreach. We've seen a marked shift in the community perception around Step Up To Quality, with favorability rising 12 percentage points from 31% to 43%. Support for increased public funding in high-quality early learning programs also rose from 63% to 70% in the last year. JFS also partnered with the National Center for Urban Solutions on the "Calling All Dads" initiative, which trained fathers to serve as early learning ambassadors, who reached out to child care providers in their communities to encourage them to get star-rated and connect them with the resources to do it.

I don't want to steal thunder from the JFS testimony, but suffice it to say these efforts paid off when we reached the Step Up To Quality deadline in September. And while the pandemic has highlighted just how essential child care work is, it has also created its own new challenges for providers – things like reduced teacher-child ratios, smaller class sizes, and new sanitization protocols. Thanks to a joint allocation from the Commissioners and the City of Columbus, JFS was able to create the Child Care Recovery and Stabilization Grant program, which offers all Franklin County child care centers and home-based family providers that meet the eligibility criteria have the opportunity to request grants of up to \$24,000 and \$7,500 respectively. As of Monday, they have approved over 320 applications for a combined total of over \$5.4 million in grant awards.

These efforts will help ensure that children in our community are receiving the highest quality child care and their parents are able to continue working, with the peace of mind of knowing their child is in a safe, clean environment.

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Franklin County is also maintaining its commitment to the goals of Rise Together through Community Partnerships and the Catalyst Grant initiative. Community Partnerships has undergone a number of changes this past year in order to create funding opportunities for both current and new grantees throughout the County.

In 2019, the Commissioners allocated \$1.5 million to a new initiative called the Catalyst Grant Program, which is intended to spark meaningful change in the priority areas of Economic Security, Personal and Family Empowerment, Emerging and Basic Needs, and Community Enrichment. Thirteen three-year grants were awarded through an open grant review process, including the following:

- Family Mentor Foundation received \$75,000 in support of the Buddy Box program which provides nutritious, kid-friendly food for low-income, food-insecure Franklin County children. Children receive a Buddy Box on Friday afternoon with enough food to last throughout the weekend. Franklin County employees have packages thousands of Buddy Boxes through the Volunteer Initiative Plan (VIP).
- Columbus Works received \$75,000 to expand workforce training, job placement, wrap-around support, and long-term coaching for new members. Using a trauma-informed approach, Columbus Works' unique model creates long-term relationships with each member and their employer to ensure success in employment. The 2021 Recommended Budget includes funding for the third and final year of the Catalyst Grant awards.

In 2020, the Community Partnership grant application was open to all applicants. Unlike in previous years, all nonprofit and governmental entities operating within the boundaries of Franklin County for a minimum of 3 years were eligible to apply for funding. As a result of this process, a total of \$6.4 million was provided to 26 entities that seek to create well-paying jobs for residents and economic development opportunities for businesses, protect the environment, further the community's access to affordable healthcare, stabilize families and children, and keep our neighborhoods safe.

However, the programs in which the Board of Commissioners invested were upended abruptly in March. The Board of Commissioners recognizes and understands the hardships that our Community Partners are facing due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and is committed to helping to strengthen Franklin County's safety net of non-profit services. To help ease the burden of our current Partners, the 2021 Recommended Budget includes funding current Community Partners for an additional year. Current contracts will be amended to allow funding at current levels to continue for 2021, including the following:

- Riverview International Center received \$40,447 to expand services for New Americans to assist them in maintaining long term employment that pays a livable wage. Services include English as a Second Language instruction, general advocacy, free legal advice clinics, mobile health clinics, homework help, field trips, citizenship application assistance, summer programming for children, and workforce development.
- Freedom a la Cart received \$150,000 to support survivors of sex trafficking through their signature workforce training program. Along with teaching catering skills, Freedom a la Cart helps women to open bank accounts, get a driving license, purchase a car, live independently, pursue education, and regain custody of their children. Ultimately, women move on to other employers with newly acquired employment and life skills.

These contract extensions are a one-time exception for 2021 only. Although times are uncertain, the Franklin County Board of Commissioners remains steadfast in its commitment to improving the lives of Franklin County residents.

The 2021 Recommended Budget also maintains a total of \$4.0 million was set aside in Community Partnerships funding for the arts and cultural facilities. These dollars are managed in partnership with the Greater Columbus Arts Council to provide support to Franklin County artists, as well as arts and culture organizations, to enhance the cultural image of the Greater Columbus area.

## **COLABORATIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

In coordination with the development of the Rise Together Blueprint, the Franklin County Department of Economic Development and Planning underwent a strategic planning process to provide a roadmap for the next generation of economic development work in the County for the next five years.

The strategic plan identified five strategic priorities to guide Franklin County's economic development work:

- Assist Franklin County's communities in preparing for anticipated job and population change;
- Promote quality work opportunities in Franklin County;
- Include resident perspectives more intentionally in economic development efforts;
- Reduce disparities and expand economic inclusion among Franklin County residents; and
- Create an environment that encourages commercial activities and in which entrepreneurs and small businesses from all backgrounds are able to start up and grow.

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In an effort to expand housing opportunities, the Board of Commissioners entered into an agreement in 2020 with the Central Ohio Community Land Trust to facilitate the reclamation, rehabilitation, and reutilization of vacant, abandoned real property. The Central Ohio Community Land Trust has committed to the construction of 20 new affordable homes.

A community land trust achieves permanent affordability by retaining ownership of the land under a home, while selling or renting the home to an income eligible buyer or renter. In the case of homeownership, the income eligible buyer executes a 99-year land lease. As a condition of the lease, subsequent sales of the residential unit are limited by a restricted resale formula which keeps the price of the home affordable for subsequent eligible buyers.

This is one of the initiatives supported by revenue from the permissive conveyance fee that is deposited in the Affordable & Emergency Housing Fund. Despite the pandemic, revenue from the permissive conveyance fee continues to align with the budgeted estimates of \$13.6 million. With an additional transfer of \$2.0 million from the General Fund, the 2021 Recommended Budget will include \$15.6 million for these initiatives, including the \$5.5 million contract with the Community Shelter Board and the \$3.4 million contract with the Affordable Housing Trust.

The Columbus Urban League and One Columbus joined together in 2020 to form the Franklin County Business Growth and Equity Alliance. This partnership will focus on implementing economic equity and shared prosperity strategies that improve success outcomes for African American businesses diminished historically by systemic racism and more recently, the disproportionate detrimental impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In support of these efforts, the Board of Commissioners provided \$2 million in CARES Act Funding to establish the Franklin County Community Equity Fund to respond to the urgent need for business stabilization resulting from COVID-19. The longer-term goal of the Equity Alliance is to strengthen the county's entrepreneurial ecosystem by developing more sustainable community assets, such as a new Community Development Financial Institution, that will bring needed options for access to capital closer to the Black community in Franklin County. The Equity Alliance and the new financial services organization will be co-located with the Franklin County Innovation Center.

As part of the Economic Development and Planning Strategic Plan, Franklin County's commitment to regional objectives and sustainable economic development remains unchanged. The 2021 Recommended Budget includes \$11.4 million within the General Fund to support this economic development work.

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Of this amount, \$2.3 million is allocated for Experience Columbus. Prior to the pandemic, the Greater Columbus Region welcomed 41.1 million visitors every year, who directly spent \$7.0 billion at area businesses. The tourism sector supports nearly 78,000 jobs in Columbus and Franklin County, which is why it is critical to maintain this investment.

In addition, Franklin County will provide \$1.0 million to One Columbus. One Columbus, the economic development organization for the 11-county Columbus Region, has set forth a vision for the Columbus Region to be the most prosperous region in the United States. Working in partnership with state and local partners, One Columbus will be focused on helping existing businesses grow and compete, diversifying the economy through the attraction of new businesses, and supporting newly formed high-growth enterprises.

The 2021 Recommended Budget also includes the annual commitment of \$2.5 million for the development agreement with the City of Columbus and Crew SC Stadium Company for the support of Confluence Village and a Community Sports Park. Under the terms of the agreement, the County will provide an annual economic development payment in the amount of \$2.5 million to the Confluence Community Authority to support this project beginning in 2019 for a period of 30 years. It is estimated that the project and associated mixed-use development will support approximately 775 full-time equivalent jobs, which includes approximately 580 permanent full-time equivalent jobs relating to the Stadium, 70 full-time equivalent jobs relating to the Community Sports Park, and 125 permanent full-time equivalent jobs relating to the mixed-use development. It is estimated that an additional 605 direct full-time equivalent construction jobs will be supported during construction of the project.

These economic development grants, and other initiatives undertaken in 2021, will align with the six recommended areas of focus that are consistent with Economic Development and Planning's mission, goals, and strategic priorities:

- Partnership, Leadership, and Collaboration to engage internal and external partners more intentionally in pursuit of the County's economic development.
- Reconfiguration of the SmartWorks program, including the expansion of InfrastructureWorks, transitioning EnergyWorks to other financing options, reallocating PeopleWorks resources, and establishing PartnerWorks to report on progress toward County priorities from funds provided to partners.
- Financing Tools and Incentives that build on the current approach to maximize the potential for incentive programs to accomplish the County's intended objectives.

- Playing a meaningful role in the Small Business and Entrepreneurship Ecosystem to fill gaps and provide regional leadership by actively engaging with other City of Columbus and County initiatives around inclusion and diversity among small businesses and rethinking the County approach to small business.
- Leveraging Rickenbacker Area Opportunities through policy innovation with a comprehensive economic and community development approach that thoughtfully addresses workforce mobility, transportation, and housing issues that would allow the area to reach its potential.
- Leading Franklin County's response to the region's affordable housing challenge, including Housing Policy and advocacy.

### **SMART JUSTICE & COMMUNITY SAFETY**

In addition to the General Fund support for Justice and Public Safety mentioned previously, the 2021 Recommended Budget includes other smart justice initiatives.

The Franklin County Office of Justice Policy and Programs, or JPP, is the lead agency in support of programs under the Commissioners' courageous and leading-edge philosophy toward smarter and more equitable justice. In addition to expanding the award-winning Pathways program to even more women with substance use and mental health disorders who are incarcerated, there are plans to expand that program to men in 2021. JPP will focus on target populations who are impacted by incarceration in the County, such as engaging families with minor children who face the trauma and stigma associated with incarceration as well as the aging population who are incarcerated and reenter the community. In 2021, there are plans for expanded support for LGBTQ residents who are incarcerated, returning from incarceration, and who have mental health or substance use disorders.

JPP was notified recently of its successful application and award for funding in the amount of \$900,000 through the Office on Violence Against Women. The award will support implementation of the Blueprint for Safety Initiative, contracting with the City of Columbus for coordination of the grant, and staffing for Municipal Court. This will also pay for one full-time Blueprint for Safety Protection Order Coordinator.

We have successfully integrated the Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of Franklin County into the Office of Justice Policy and Programs. As you know this will ensure the long-term viability of this organization and will allow CASA to focus on the recruitment, training, and support of volunteers for service as Guardians ad Litem to abused and neglected children in the Franklin County Domestic and Juvenile Court.

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Families in Franklin County continue to be impacted by the opiate epidemic. According to the Franklin County Coroner's Office, there were 597 drug overdose deaths in 2019. The number of lives lost to drug addiction increased by 14% from the year before.

However, as the Journal of the American Medical Association recently pointed out, while the nation struggles to manage the COVID-19 pandemic another wave is building with rising rates of mental health and substance abuse disorders. During the first six months of this year, preliminary reports from the Coroner's Office indicate the number of overdose deaths increased by 73% from 2019.

To address this, the 2021 Recommended Budget includes support for a full-time Overdose Investigation & Intervention Specialist position. This new position is necessary to meet the operational demands required for performing quality overdose investigations and will be fully funded in 2021 by the Overdose to Action Grant.

In 2019, the Commissioners approved the agreements and contract for the new case management system project. This multi-year project will consolidate eighteen County systems and provide upgraded public access to court documents for the Clerk of Courts' Office, Court of Common Pleas General Division, Court of Common Pleas Domestic Relations and Juvenile Division, Probate Court, and the 10th District Court of Appeals.

The purpose of the project is to create an integrated, secure case management system that provides reliable, efficient, and accurate results to the public and increases the residents' access to justice. The new system, which will replace the Franklin County Justice System that is over 30 years old, will provide enhanced reporting capabilities, real-time data exchange with other County systems, and a more robust security model to combat cyber threats, as well as introduce cloud hosting to reduce the disaster recovery process.

The 2021 Recommended Budget includes \$3.3 million to assist in the implementation of the new case management system. During 2021, Phase 2 will begin with configuration, data conversion, testing and training on the new system for the Probate Court.



## **SUSTAINABLE GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS**

In a review of the highlights of the 2021 Recommended Budget, it is important to discuss some of the efforts that maintain responsive and sustainable government operations for the County's residents.

Without our employees, the Commissioners would be unable to sustain their commitment to serving, supporting, and uplifting all residents of Franklin County through a lens of respect, cultural sensitivity and human-centered care. As County Administrator, I truly value and appreciate the many daily contributions of the County's employees.

This is especially been true during the COVID-19 pandemic, our employees have been on the front lines every day since the beginning of this crisis in March providing excellent service to the residents of Franklin County in a much different way than they have ever been ask to work during their careers. In order to help our employees during this pandemic, the Commissioners authorized providing 80 hours of flexible wellness leave to use through July of next year.

Understanding that Franklin County's success depends on our ability to attract and retain qualified and committed individuals, the 2021 Recommended Budget includes a number of initiatives that are intended to improve employee engagement.

In 2021, the Commissioners will continue their participation in the COTA Downtown C-Pass program which provides a COTA transit pass for each employee as a general benefit at the County.

The Commissioners remain committed to pay equity through "The Columbus Commitment," an initiative of the Columbus Women's Commission that calls on employers to take action to promote gender- and race-based pay equity. County Administration is committed to periodically review our pay structure to ensure that we are operating in a fair and equitable matter.

Employees are encouraged to participate in professional development opportunities, such as training programs through the Human Resources Department's Office of Learning & Staff Development, tuition reimbursement for continuing undergraduate and graduate education, emerging leaders programs, John Glenn College of Public Affairs' Management Advancement for the Public Services seminars at The Ohio State University, and the National Association of Counties' High Performance Leadership Academy.

The Franklin County Health Improvement Program is working due to the efforts of all employees and their families. These efforts have resulted in a zero percent increase in health care for 2021, resulting in no increase in employee's cost share on health care

premiums. All employees should be applauded for their efforts that continue to make the Franklin County Cooperative one of the best county health care programs in Central Ohio.

The health plan is in a very favorable position right now we are doing much better than the national trends in medical expenditures. It is always exciting to see the active participation of our members in a variety of wellness activities such as preventative health screenings, the record-breaking participation in the ThriveOn Virtual 5K run-walk, and new programs such as Weight Watchers Reimagined!

We are going to offer more fun ways to contribute to better health and earn additional financial incentives in doing so. We will not rest on our success because better health improves the quality of life for our employees and their families. “Your best and most important project ever will be investing in creating a better you”.

As part of the Rise Together Blueprint for Reducing Poverty, the Commissioners have committed to a series of immediate action steps beginning with training and a community discussion on the role of race and racism in poverty and internal review of county policies. The 2021 Recommended Budget continues this work with the creation of a Diversity Equity Inclusion Administrator housed in Human Resources that will establish and lead the Race Equity Council which will advocate for an inclusive culture that inspires an exceptionally diverse and talented team. The Council will set measurable goals to advance diversity, inclusion and equity in our workforce while embracing differences, encouraging conversations, and raising awareness. Activities and results will be reported to County Administration and the Board of Commissioners.

### **SUMMARY**

The budget we present today places Franklin County on the path to ensuring that every resident’s needs are met on the fundamental social, wellness, economic, and environmental levels. As a result of the Board of Commissioners’ vision and actions, the 2021 Recommended Budget maintains the County’s strong financial position while providing for innovative programming to enable all residents to share in the progress and growth of our community.

As highlighted in today’s discussion, we cannot achieve success without collaboration with other governments, nonprofits, the faith community, and businesses to address poverty, increase access to quality child care, ensure an inclusive economy, implement smart justice initiatives, and sustain our infrastructure. We appreciate the many partners who offer their time and talents to collectively address our challenges and identify the opportunities to make our community even better. You are part of the reason thousands of new residents choose to call Franklin County their home each year.

## **2021 Recommended Budget Message**

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Budget hearings have been scheduled so that an open, public discussion may take place concerning the 2021 Recommended Budget. County Administration looks forward to working with the Board of Commissioners as it deliberates and takes action to finalize the budget for 2021.

I would like to thank all of the elected County officials and agency directors for their cooperation and commitment to the residents of Franklin County. Special acknowledgment goes to Zak Talarek, and his team in the Office of Management & Budget for their assistance in developing the 2021 Budget Recommendations. The Office of Management & Budget has made some very constructive changes to this year's budget brief document I hope that you will find the format cleaner and more focused upon the performance measures that are the most impactful.

I can't conclude this address without sharing my appreciation for the work and dedication of Deputy Administrators Erik Janas, Kris Long, and Joy Bivens. I also would like to thank Chief Economic Equity and Inclusion Officer Keena Smith for her work over the past year as a member of County Administration.

Finally, I would like to thank the Board of Commissioners for your continued support and leadership in serving every resident, every day; and following the words of Booker T. Washington - "If you want to lift yourself up, lift up someone else."

**Kenneth N. Wilson, M.P.A., CTA**

County Administrator

Franklin County Board of Commissioners