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PROBLEM OF LOUISVILLE'S 'DISCONNECTED' YOUNG PEOPLE TACKLED



YOUTH IN CRISIS

After investigation, changes are underway

Mandy McLaren Louisville Courier Journal | USA TODAY NETWORK

Two years ago, Jefferson County had a burgeoning crisis on its hands — one that both tarnished Louisville's image as a "compassionate city" and posed a dire threat to the community's future workforce. The crisis — that roughly one in 10 young adults in Metro Louisville sat idle, both out of school and out of work — was estimated to potentially cost taxpayers \$15 billion over the "disconnected" youths' lifetimes.



From left to right, Mahogany Mayfield, Dr. Billie Castle and Dr. Aishia Brown of the Office of Youth Development. JEFF FAUGHENDER/COURIER JOURNAL

And Louisville's even grimmer statistics for Black youth — that one in four were disconnected — marked the city with a more sobering distinction: For young people struggling to find work or to reenter school, Louisville had the worst racial gap in the country.

Yet for all the scathing statistics, mind-boggling cost estimates and distressing stories of young people's personal plight, Jefferson County officials had no coordinated plan of attack to address its disconnected youth crisis. In fact, they had no plan at all.

These findings came to the public's attention through a multipart Courier Journal investigation published in December 2019 — a

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Coalition Supporting Young Adults' (CSYA) executive director, Darryl Young, Jr., right, and network coordinator, Brittany Brown, inside CYSYA's offices at the YouthBuild building on June 17. ALTON STRUPP/COURIER JOURNAL



COURIER JOURNAL

CITY GOVERNMENT

Who won and who lost on budget

Police dept. won't see significant funding cuts

Darcy Costello
Louisville Courier Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Hello, boosted violence-prevention funding. But goodbye, Synergy Project.

Louisville Metro Council signed off Thursday on a fiscal year 2021-22 budget that largely preserves the police and public safety spending proposed by Mayor Greg Fischer — choosing not to cut the embattled Louisville Metro Police's funding.

The \$1.04 billion budget, approved

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Gregory Bush sentenced to life in Kroger shootings

Billy Kobin
Louisville Courier Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

In an emotional hearing in federal court Thursday, Gregory Bush received confirmation that he will never leave prison for murdering two shoppers at the Jefferson-town Kroger simply because of the color of their skin.



But not before he Stallard heard from the family of his victims, Vickie Lee Jones and Maurice Stallard.

Both were Black. Bush is white.

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Budget

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24-2 Thursday, comes after months of discussion including an engaged public calling for funding changes to public safety following a year of protests and record violent crime.

Councilman Bill Hollander, D-9th District, said before the vote that the proposal is not the "exact budget any of us would pass. It never is," because of the necessary compromise among 26 council members.

But, he said, it's a budget that "moves our community forward."

Mayor Fischer praised the approval.

"As our city regains the economic momentum we had before the pandemic, the budget approved tonight provides a roadmap into the promising and exciting next stage of our city's history — one based in greater equity and justice," he said.

One of the Metro Council's votes against the budget, from Councilwoman Paula McCraney, D-7th, came after she voiced her belief the budget should have been bolder. She pointed to the need for a centralized location to house the homeless, the need for universal broadband and Internet accessibility, more money for affordable housing and lingering questions about the police contract under negotiation, saying the department is 200 officers short.

She was joined by Councilman Brent Ackerson, D-26th, who also called this budget a missed opportunity to make "bold statements."

Thursday's vote won't, however, mark the end of conversations around city spending.

The city has another \$300 million more to dole out from the federal American Rescue Plan, and debates about what to prioritize with the influx of cash aren't going anywhere.

At least one councilman, Kevin Kramer, R-11th, said that pool of federal money was where the "real hope" for bold movement comes.

For now, here's what to know about how agencies fared in the budget:

Winner: Louisville Metro Police

Louisville's police department won't see significant cuts in its \$195 million budget, despite calls from organizers to reduce the agency's sizeable budget and invest it in other social programs.

In fact, LMPD officers could see a raise in the coming fiscal year under a contract that is under negotiation between union leadership and the administration.

A group of organizers from Black Lives Matter Louisville, the 490 Project and Take the Seat tried Thursday to submit petitions with more than 500 signatures to council members. But they weren't allowed in the City Hall building because of COVID-19 restrictions.

"We have been listening to over 40 hours of budget hearings, and what we

The council largely agreed with the mayor's police spending strategy.

hear is the libraries begging for money, Public Works begging for money — all these departments that could help us prevent crime in the first place are begging for money," said Shauntrice Martin of Black Lives Matter Louisville, who has proposed pulling \$50 million from LMPD and sending it to other city agencies.

Metro Council members did amend Fischer's original budget proposal by stripping the \$2.9-million "deflection" program from LMPD's budget and sending it to Emergency Services, which handles dispatch calls.

But, largely, the council agreed with the mayor's police spending strategy. It includes:

- Funding for three recruit classes, which Chief Erika Shields has said the department is already struggling to fill (an argument that dissuaded some who might otherwise have argued for additional classes);

- \$6.2 million in salary increases from the temporary contract agreed to in late 2020;

- A 5-mile expansion of the Shot-Spotter system in the California and Park Hill neighborhoods, expected to cost about \$980,000;

- Roughly \$630,000 to purchase departmental firearms for officers, rather than requiring recruits to buy their own service weapons; and

- More than \$9 million in a "general adjustments" account in the city's Office for Management and Budget that could be used, in part, on salary increases for public safety agencies — Metro Corrections, Louisville Fire, Metro Animal Services and LMPD included.

The department's escape from budget cuts comes amid rising violent crime in Louisville and sharp scrutiny of the agency, following the fatal police shooting of Breonna Taylor in 2020 and a U.S. Department of Justice investigation into LMPD practices.

On Thursday, Metro Council spent a significant amount of time discussing whether to send an additional \$4 million to LMPD overtime, which was already funded in the budget proposal with \$9.6 million in nonscheduled overtime.

The original proposal, from Council President David James, D-6th, would have sent \$4 million of the city's roughly \$388 million in federal American Rescue Plan money. But county attorneys appeared to nix that, and an idea to reopen the city's budget for that amendment was not formally proposed.

James and others pointed to the city's crime rate and the need for more "boots on the ground," while critics questioned why LMPD couldn't use the \$9 million in overtime already directed to the agency through the budget and raised concerns about if there would be

sufficient oversight.

Shields did not request this overtime funding and James said he hadn't spoken about the idea with her.

Winner: Libraries

Three libraries in the Louisville Free Public Library system scored larger investments after Metro Council's changes to the budget.

- **Fern Creek**, whose branch closed through budget cuts in 2019, could see a new library project on the way. The budget includes \$1.4 million for Phase I of a project that could lead to a new library complex on Metro-owned property in the area;

- The **Portland** branch, called the location in need of the most renovation, will get \$2 million to put toward capital improvements, including an elevator; and

- The **Parkland** branch could see a push toward reopening, after decades of closure, with \$500,000 going toward initiating library services.

There's also a budget win for library patrons: the elimination of 20-cent fines for overdue library books.

LFPL Director Lee Burchfield has said cutting out fines will make the system more equitable: "The primary contributions of our overdue fines is to create a barrier to service to the people who probably need library services the most."

Winner: Violence-prevention strategies

Two years after curtailing the violence prevention work done in Louisville, Metro Council members left intact the funding request for the city's Office for Safe & Healthy Neighborhoods.

Officials estimate the cost of homicides in Louisville from January to November of 2020 to have been \$131 million — and the city is on pace for an even larger death toll in 2021.

The roughly \$4.6 million will include funding for:

- Hospital-based interventions, meaning outreach workers try to connect with shooting victims while they are being treated, including connecting them to additional services;

- Expungement work by the Louisville Urban League;

- Relocation support;

- Crisis management sites; and

- Capacity-building support for community-led programs working to prevent violence.

"We know that violence traumatizes our community and severely impacts young people," said Monique Williams, OSHN's director. "It's one thing to declare gun violence a serious threat to our collective well-being, and it's another thing to treat it like one."

The Fischer administration also proposed "public safety" funding through things like a new nurse triage program run through Emergency Services to prevent EMS or police from responding to

things like transportation or home health advice.

Loser: Synergy Project

A community engagement initiative from 2019 that sought to improve relations between the police department and the public isn't getting the \$675,000 it sought.

Critics of the program, dubbed "Synergy Project," thought it needed to be updated for current times, given the outrage over Taylor's killing, and needed to require LMPD to take "responsibility" for harms.

"I don't believe that people want another 'Kumbaya' type of program," said Angela Johnson, a pastor and co-president of CLOUT, a group of religious congregations that advocates for the community. "We need to see something that is going to have definitive action and actually make some transformative changes."

Instead, Metro Council is putting \$600,000 toward CLOUT's preferred alternative: Reconciliation, a program developed by the National Network for Safe Communities at John Jay College, the same group behind the group violence intervention program currently in the works in Louisville.

That program, according to the group's website, is similar to work done in post-apartheid South Africa, and involves three components: Acknowledging, understanding and repairing harm.

Loser: Downtown tourism marketing

Separate from the budget ordinances voted on Thursday, millions of federal dollars are pouring into Louisville as part of the American Rescue Plan, and the city is working to dole out the first round.

But don't expect Louisville Tourism to be getting a chunk of the money just yet.

A council committee last week stripped \$5.68 million that Fischer had proposed sending to the agency for marketing, with some council members arguing that's not an "urgent" need, as Fischer suggested.

Funding request materials from Louisville Tourism show they'd sought the money to boost advertising and position Louisville as a "top-tier travel destination."

"Travelers with pent-up demand will search out authentic, one-of-a-kind experiences," an application from Cleo Battle said.

"Louisville is uniquely positioned to capture this motivated audience and convert them into visitors."

It's possible this requested funding could return. Fischer's plan was to spend \$38.9 million in this initial round, of roughly \$388 million total. Metro Council cut roughly \$8 million from his request.

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