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**Comments on City of Portland  
2024-2025 Proposed Budget  
by Jeff Bissonnette  
Friends of Portland NET  
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Good afternoon, Mayor Wheeler and Commissioners. For the record, my name is Jeff Bissonnette and I am here today representing Friends of Portland NET.

The Portland Neighborhood Emergency Teams is a program of the Portland Bureau of Emergency Management that trains community volunteers to respond in the event of emergencies or disasters. FPN is an independent nonprofit organization that supports the NET program, the neighborhood-based teams, and the individual NET volunteers. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you directly about the proposed city budget that was released a week ago tomorrow.

My brief comments will focus on the Portland Bureau of Emergency Management (PBEM) budget and particularly on the Community Programs portion of that budget. While the overall budget for PBEM is held generally steady compared to last year, which we support, the Community Programs portion of that budget took a drastic cut of 74%. We strongly urge you to reconsider this proposal.

The 74% cut impacts not only the NET program but also other community-centric programs such as the BEECN, or Basic Earthquake Emergency Communications Nodes, program, and the COAD, or Community Organizations Active in Disasters program. These and other initiatives are all programs that the city has made steady investments in over the years to help Portlanders help each other in times of emergency or disaster.

While many of these programs were started with the large Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake in mind, over the years these community-based programs have shown themselves to be effective as a resource in a broad range of scenarios.

For example, looking at the NET program alone, volunteers were deployed at the city's request a total of 31 times in 2023 to meet a variety of needs. NET volunteers were deployed to cooling and warming shelters, helping to provide care and safety to our neighbors who are either houseless or displaced by extreme weather. They were deployed to downed power lines, maintaining a safe perimeter until utility crews could arrive thus freeing up fire and police personnel who otherwise would have had to maintain those perimeters. They were deployed to help clear storm drains and snow build-up, enabling PBOT to focus on larger issues. NET

volunteers also staffed first aid tents at Rose Festival events and maintained street blockages to enable the various parades, including the Grand Floral Parade, to operate safely.

And that's just a normal year. At the height of the pandemic, NET volunteers were deployed at twice the normal rate. In 2021, NET volunteers were deployed a total of 71 times at the city's request to make face coverings, to distribute public health posters in neighborhoods across the city, provided office support in the city's Emergency Operations Center, and staffed vaccination sites when those began operating. All told, the volunteer hours contributed by NET volunteers amounted to a nearly \$450,000 contribution to the city by trained people who are ready and want to serve.

I bring up the work during the pandemic because that gives us a glimpse into what is possible in the aftermath of a Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake. The work I described was just from the NET program, a slice of the Community Programs portion of PBEM's budget. We saw that NETs and other community volunteers were prepared to step up and help their neighbors at a time of crisis. That is exactly what we'll need after a massive earthquake and what much modern emergency response scholarship says will be needed in the aftermath of a massive earthquake when professional first responders are overwhelmed. Indeed, that type of community response will mean the difference between life and death for some community members and will influence either a smoother recovery or a recovery that takes longer with more tragedy.

But earthquakes aside, the city has invested over the years in a network of volunteers ready to help meet today's needs of responding to the issues of homelessness and severe weather response or as mundane as downed power lines. The proposed budget is a massive disinvestment in that network of volunteers.

It's a little like not saving for retirement. Not putting some money aside today, even a little bit every month, means you won't have the resources in the future when you need them. The Community Programs at PBEM are much the same. Unless you continue to maintain those quality volunteers, continue to train them, and continue to engage them meeting today's needs, that network will not be as strong during times of extreme crisis. Going from over \$1 million last year for Community Programs to about a quarter of that in this proposed budget is a bad policy decision and sends the wrong message to the community.

Again, we urge you to maintain PBEM's overall funding levels (which is not enough but that is another set of comments) and to maintain the funding levels from past years for the Community Programs portion of PBEM's budget.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify and I'm happy to answer questions.