

Budget Address for Fiscal Year 26-27

Presented to the Tulsa City Council on April 22,2026

Good evening,

To the members of the Tulsa City Council, Council Chair Gilbert, Vice Chair Bengel, and members of the Tulsa community here today - thank you for being here.

I also want to wish a special happy Administrative Aides Day to all of the administrative aides across the city.

Let me begin by acknowledging the many people who made this budget possible. This is a collective effort, and it reflects months of disciplined work and thoughtful collaboration.

I want to extend my sincere appreciation to our budget and finance team, especially Christy Basgall and Jarrod Moore, for their leadership and attention to detail throughout this process. I also want to thank our City Administrator, Mike Miller, for his steady guidance and commitment to fiscal responsibility.

To our department heads and their teams: thank you for your diligence in submitting thoughtful requests, identifying efficiencies, and continuing to deliver high-quality services to our residents every single day.

Our Fiscal Position

Because of great planning and fiscal discipline, the City of Tulsa is in a stronger, more stable fiscal position than we were this time last year. We have benefited from some good signs like positive sales and use tax numbers this fiscal year, but the key has been our discipline given the uncertainty of the broader economic outlook. While things are better than they were, we remain disciplined in how we manage our resources.

Remaining disciplined means identifying cost-saving opportunities and maintaining a commitment to a high degree of scrutiny for every dollar spent - ensuring that our investments reflect our collective priorities and accountability to our residents.

The theme for this year's budget is no different from last year's budget or the theme of this Administration - clarity, consistency and accountability.

The Budget Overview

The proposed budget before you tonight represents \$1.22 billion in total expenditures for FY27. That number is inclusive of both our general fund and our capital budget. The total general fund budget is \$443.7 million.

This budget is designed to:

- Provide clarity by investing strategically in the priorities we all share;
- Maintain consistency by building on current service levels, honor commitments to our employees, and address infrastructure needs and project shortfalls and;
- Demonstrate accountability by reducing our reliance on fund balance by \$5.1 million over the current fiscal year, which is helping us further bring our expenses in line with revenues.

A Strategic Opportunity: Vision Funding Proposal

As part of the budget before you tonight, we are also presenting a proposal that in addition to fiscal responsibility, also reflects strategic thinking.

Over the past 12 months, we have taken a comprehensive look at all available funding sources to determine how we can best meet Tulsa's current and future needs.

In addition to identifying vacancies and scrutinizing every dollar spent, we have also vetted the use of the 2016 Vision Fund.

This fund has outperformed its original projections and after every project is fully funded and the debt service on the projects is paid - the fund would have a balance of over \$100 million in 2032.

Instead of letting those resources sit, this budget strategically invests a portion of that money into things that matter, putting them to work now for the Tulsa taxpayer.

This budget invests in things such as:

- Ongoing and competitive employee compensation adjustments;
- Addressing funding gaps on critical projects, including the Public Safety Center;
- Continuing the progress of Safe Move Tulsa and our homelessness efforts;
- Providing for localized neighborhood needs;
- And investments in upcoming economic development opportunities across our city

While these funding priorities will ultimately be shaped by your input and guidance, our shared priorities are clear:

- We all want to improve public safety
- We all want to end homelessness as we know it; and

- We all want to improve economic opportunity for our residents

Now, some might suggest that this year's budget is proof we don't need a longer-term revenue solution and that notion couldn't be any further from the truth. What you have in front of you is a budget built on freezing 45 long standing vacant positions, the infusion of nearly \$40 million from the 2016 Vision Fund, and an administrative focus on conservative spending.

To be clear, we still have critical needs that will require a long-term solution. The use of Vision 2016 funds, again \$40 million in this budget, should be viewed as a ONE TIME "ARPA-like" short-term funding strategy that will act as a bridge to get us further down the road on key priorities.

Shared Priorities: Public Safety

When it comes to our key priorities and core functions of government, public safety is at the top of the list.

I want to start by expressing my appreciation to Commissioner Laurel Roberts for her leadership in leading the way in achieving our goal of being the safest big city in America. Her work overseeing the Police and Fire Departments, Tulsa Municipal Court, Tulsa Animal Services, and serving as our interim Emergency Management Director has been a game-changer for Tulsa and that is reflected in the investments we propose we make into public safety.

57% of the General Fund is dedicated to public safety functions.

It includes:

- Funding for two police academies, adding 55 new officers;
- Funding for two non-sworn positions in the police department to process digital evidence and police records to address the increase in demand;
- A fire academy of 22 cadets to maintain full staffing; and
- \$7 million in capital funding for fire apparatus and equipment

This budget also invests the \$25 million needed to fully fund the move to the public safety center and sets aside \$18.9 million to support the ongoing effort to secure long-term space for municipal courts and our lock-up facility.

The shake-up in leadership at the Tulsa Area Emergency Management Agency last year gave us an opportunity to pause and take a closer look at how other major cities structure their emergency management operations.

In Tulsa, TAEMA has existed since the 1970s as a blended, City-County funded agency, with the City of Tulsa serving as the primary responding entity during activations. That model has served us in many ways over the decades but is no longer the desire of the city or the county.

Tulsa has faced at least one major disaster per year over the last decade, along with the daily task of incident response. As mayor, I am so proud of how our team has worked in the face of these disasters. These are not rare, one-off events. They are recurring, disruptive, and increasingly complex to navigate as a city.

It is critically important that Tulsa has a team whose sole responsibility is to plan for, respond to, and recover from emergencies within our city limits - an office that is fully embedded in city operations, aligned with our police, fire, public works, and communications teams, and focused every single day on preparedness and resilience.

That is why the budget before you today reflect that reality and includes funding for three positions, Director of Emergency Management, a grants compliance officer, and an administrative aide for the department, along with the technology needed to promptly and efficiently respond to emergencies such as our siren system and communication tools.

Let me be clear, our internal team will continue to partner alongside Tulsa County as we all work hand-in-hand to keep our community safe.

Tulsa Animal Services & Tulsa Municipal Court

In addition to police, fire and emergency management, Tulsa Animal Services and Tulsa Municipal Court are critical parts of our overall strategy.

Last year, Tulsa Municipal Court saw a 10% increase in the number of people showing up for their court dates. This is an incredible testament to the team out there - and without that team - this work wouldn't be possible. So, the proposal before you today would begin moving 10 temporary grant-funded positions permanently for FY28 into the general fund to help us continue the momentum at the courthouse.

Additionally, the budget supports the move to our new animal shelter by providing a boost in staffing levels at Tulsa Animal Services - including two new animal control officers, a new veterinarian, and six other positions to support operations at the facility.

These positions will improve the lives of animals, improve neighborhoods, help improve response times, help decrease loose animals, and improve public education around the importance of spaying and neutering pets.

At the end of the day, we are committed to ensuring that every Tulsan feels safe in their home, their neighborhood, and their city. And our work in all these areas does just that.

Code Enforcement

As many of you know, for years our city has struggled with a growing backlog of code enforcement cases. Today, there are roughly 1,600 cases waiting in the queue and during peak growing season, that number can climb to more than 3,500 complaints.

For many residents, issues like tall grass and basic property maintenance have meant waiting 90 days or more just to see action. That's not acceptable and it's not the level of service our residents deserve.

Our current situation is not a new problem. In fact, it's one that has been raised for years and a point of emphasis during the Mayor/Council retreat. This budget finally puts the resources in place to address the problem at its root by including four new positions and \$550,000 in additional operating support dedicated to code enforcement.

That means more code officers in the field, faster response times, and a shift from a reactive system to a proactive one. With this investment we will:

- Cut response times to less than 30 days - no matter the priority level; and
- Eliminate the current backlog of code enforcement complaints

That is a fundamental change in how this city delivers basic services. It means when residents call, we show up. It means neighborhoods don't wait months for action. And it means we are finally bringing this system back in line with the expectations of the people we serve.

Neighborhoods and Essential Services

This administration believes everything starts in neighborhoods and this budget reflects extensive feedback from residents and builds on the work of our Planning and Neighborhoods Department with the Neighborhood Conditions Index (NCI).

I want to give a special shoutout to Susan Miller and her team for their work as the NCI continues to engage citizens, invest in solutions and help us track neighborhood needs and be responsive to what we hear.

Being responsive means addressing persistent concerns. For years, lighting in neighborhoods has been one of those persistent concerns.

Lighting improves walkability, it improves quality of life, and most importantly it improves safety.

Based on recommendations from NCI and recent Improve Our Tulsa workshops, this budget includes funding for four new neighborhood areas that will receive a total of nearly 1,200 new lights.

These neighborhoods include:

- **The Sequoyah, Suburban Hills and Charles Page** neighborhoods
- **As well as the Riverwood Neighborhood at 61st and Peoria.** Tulsans in this part of our community have been asking for a long time for added public safety infrastructure in this area, and we're happy to report that this proposal would add 630 new lights between 51st and 71st Streets along Peoria.

This will be a big investment for Tulsa's neighborhoods and will be a critical component to improve neighborhood conditions across the city.

Shared Priorities: Homelessness

Improving Tulsa means continuing our aggressive focus on addressing homelessness. Over the past eight months, we've witnessed the success of Safe Move Tulsa - our new effort to eliminate street sleeping on our pathway to functional zero homelessness by 2030.

Safe Move Tulsa is a new way of doing things through a strategy spearheaded by the City and a network of partners and business leaders to drive real results. Since November, we have housed nearly 120 people and closed five encampments - six if you include Downtown. And every day since, we've worked to ensure those encampments do not return.

At the same time, we're working to ensure our efforts include other supports including rapid exits for those who need a quick resolution to homelessness. And it's our hope we can house more than 1,000 people by the end of the year through this strategy.

But as many of you know, this work requires investment. The best experts in the field and our partners have all made it clear, we will not reach our goal without a significant financial commitment from the City.

The budget proposal before you today is reflective of a significant commitment. In FY27, we propose spending \$6.5 million as part of a \$23.5 million overall commitment for homelessness from the Vision 2016 funding fund.

These resources ensure there will be no gaps in service delivery for at least the next couple years as we work for longer term funding solutions. This level of investment is the largest the city has ever committed directly into a strategy to get unhoused folks off the streets.

Economic Development

In addition to addressing our challenges, this budget is also designed to grow our economy from the bottom up.

When it comes to transforming communities and creating more opportunity for our residents, we must invest in the people and places we all rely on.

This includes continued investment in initiatives designed to support job growth and attract new businesses. With the proposed investment from the Vision 2016 fund, this budget will infuse resources to make quality of life improvements in the amount of \$18.5 million to create stronger economic and neighborhood conditions across the city.

Utility Rate Adjustments

Economic growth is not possible without great infrastructure, and this proposal reflects necessary adjustments to utility rates based on the five-year Capital Improvement Project Plan and updated contract negotiations with our refuse and recycling haulers. I know that an increase to monthly bills is never an easy thing to hear, especially as affordability continues to be a challenge for residents across the city.

However, these adjustments aren't about making a profit. They are about the urgent reality of maintaining the invisible systems - our waterlines, sewer plants, and drainage systems that allow our city to actually function. We have all seen what happens when you don't prioritize this type of infrastructure in places like Flint, Michigan and Jackson, Mississippi.

Unlike those places, we have a bold vision for Tulsa. Through various capital programs, we have committed hundreds of millions of dollars to address these needs. But we cannot build Tulsa's future on top of 19th-century infrastructure.

By making these modest annual investments, we keep pace with our city's growth, stay on top of inflation, and prevent the massive, emergency failures that would cost us all far more in the long run.

In this year's budget - the typical residential customer can expect to see an increase of about \$5.82 per month. These changes reflect a:

- **7%** increase for water
- **4.7%** increase for sewer
- **7%** increase for stormwater; and a
- **4%** increase for refuse and recycling;

These adjustments are based on professional, multi-year modeling and have been approved by the Tulsa Metropolitan Utility Authority and the Tulsa Authority for the Recovery of Energy.

These investments are critical and they have a huge impact not just on us currently, but on future generations as well.

Children, Youth, and Families

As we think about the next generation, I'm mindful of the commitment we must hold to young people in this community.

If you were to ask the average citizen what their top issues of concern were, they would list off public safety, homelessness, infrastructure and education.

That's why, with the partnership of this Council, we created Tulsa's first Office of Children, Youth, and Families with a focus this current fiscal year on building the foundation, putting the right partnerships in place, aligning systems, and creating a structure that allows us to move faster and smarter on behalf of our kids.

While that work may not always be visible - it is essential. And today, we are beginning to see the results of that foundation take shape.

In just the past year:

- We've created Tulsa's first Children's Cabinet, bringing together over 30 leaders across systems to align around a shared goal. The cabinet had decided to focus on four priority areas to get to that goal: housing stability for children, transportation, early grade literacy and youth internships.
- We've launched five Action Alliances - consisting of over 100 representatives from organizations across our city, as well as high school students - to drive focused work in key areas; and
- Because of a shared goal and clarity on student outcomes we have seen improvements this year. More than 150 additional children enrolled in Pre-K, more than 830 students are no longer chronically absent, and more than 200 additional eighth graders are now proficient in math. All signs that more of our youth are finding that a path to economic mobility.

This budget builds on all that momentum while also strengthening how this work lives inside City Hall.

All said, this first year worked exactly as it should have.

We laid the foundation, thanks to the work of Deputy Mayor Krystal Reyes and Ashley Philipsen. Now, in year two, it's clear that our next step is to bring someone into City Hall that can have a laser focus on moving this work forward - moving us from strategy to implementation.

This is not about changing the partnership - it's about strengthening the structure as the Children's Cabinet moves to launch pilot initiatives to address early grade literacy and expand partnerships to increase youth internship opportunities. It ensures that this work is fully integrated with the city and continues to move forward with focus and urgency.

And importantly, we are doing all of this while maintaining the same level of funding as the current fiscal year at \$275,000 - which amounts to (.0006%) less than 1 half of a percent of the overall general fund budget. It is a huge impact for a relatively small investment in this budget.

Additional Investments

This budget supports a wide range of services that Tulsans rely on daily, including everything from:

- Maintaining parks and public spaces
- Keeping pools open during the summer
- Operating youth programs and day camps
- Fully funding our crossing guard program
- Supporting Route 66 Centennial-related initiatives
- Ensuring mowing cycles are covered across our city; and
- Making sure our trash and graffiti crews are funded

This budget also supports a variety of capital needs including:

- \$19.5 million for housing initiatives to help us meet our affordable housing goals
- \$3 million for neighborhood improvements; and
- \$16 million for streets and transportation projects

These are just some of the services that define quality of life in our city. Our budget meets these needs and more.

Employees

This budget reflects a careful balance of responsibility and opportunity, and it's defined by the people who carry out this work every day.

The City of Tulsa team is the reason we have the best tasting water in the country; it's the reason a 311 operator answers your calls; and it's the reason that in the middle of the night or in freezing temperatures, there's a team fixing a broken waterline or saving someone's property from imminent disaster.

As we have gone through the budget process, we have tried to ensure our investments reflect the core duties that our employees deliver every day.

The budget before you today builds on current staffing levels in areas with longstanding needs and it takes care of the people who make this city run by providing for compensation adjustments.

Our workforce here at the City of Tulsa shows up for citizens every single day, no matter who the mayor is or who is serving on the council at the time. They are the life blood of this organization and the city overall. I am grateful to call them all coworkers and friends.

Closing

In closing, I want to again lift what this budget does - it:

- Ends the backlog on code enforcement complaints;
- Raises wages for sworn and non-sworn employees;
- Increases permanent staffing levels at Tulsa Animal Services and municipal courts;
- Invests in homelessness as we continue our path to functional zero;
- Adds 55 police officers and 22 fire firefighters; and
- Infuses resources to spur economic growth across our city

This is a budget informed by so many, including the members of this council. In every meeting, every one-on-one opportunity, every retreat - I have listened, our team has listened and what we have provided is a pathway forward on the issues critical to you and our constituents.

Over the coming weeks, I look forward to working closely with each of you on the Council to refine this proposal, align our shared priorities, and ensure that we are meeting the needs of our community head-on.

I am confident that, together, we can navigate the challenges ahead and continue building a city that is not only strong today but sustainable for the future.

With that, I respectfully and humbly submit this budget for your consideration.

Thank you.