The Federal Priorities document outlines a number of broad priorities identified by the Mayor and City Council.
The COVID-19 outbreak and associated economic hardships have resulted in an increase in homeless counts in the city. This has forced the city to reevaluate homeless programs and provision of services. To that end, the city supports measures that provide additional funding for the homeless population to shelter in non-congregant shelters including vacant motel and hotel rooms, and alternative sheltering options such as safe outdoor spaces, tiny homes, and pallet shelters.

The city supports the following principles to be included in the annual fiscal year (FY) Transportation/HUD Appropriations bill.

- Require participation in treatment and training services when enrolled in federally funded homelessness assistance programs, similar to PELL grants, unemployment assistance, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.
- Develop a state block grant system, to replace the Continuum of Care system, in order to eliminate the detrimental impact of inflexible mandates, ensure a more efficient delivery of services, eliminate conflicts of interest, increase accountability, and improve overall outcomes.
- Support investments in programs that provide non-traditional sheltering options, such as safe parking lots for people who are living in vehicles.
- Support increased funding for the HUD CDBG and Emergency Solutions Grant Programs.
Federal programs and grants for housing assistance
Congress and Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

Housing assistance is a critical measure to prevent additional renters and homeowners from falling into homelessness.

The city supports the following principles to be included in the annual fiscal year (FY) Transportation/HUD Appropriations bill.

- Private Activity Bond Financing Program - Lower the threshold of required Private Activity Bond financing which would free up more funds for affordable housing projects and allow states to fund nearly twice as many affordable housing developments.
- The 4% Low-Income Housing Tax Credit – The Low-Income Housing Tax Credit is a primary tool to produce and preserve affordable housing. However, the requirement that at least 50% of such projects are financed by tax-exempt bonds limits access to the 4% tax credits for the rehabilitation of affordable housing, greatly reducing the number of affordable housing produced. The City of Aurora requests the minimum threshold of tax-exempt bonds needed to receive an automatic 4% Low-Income Housing Tax Credit award be lowered from 50% to 25% to increase the rehabilitation of affordable housing.
- Housing Choice Vouchers – The City requests an expansion of the housing choice vouchers program which would sharply reduce homelessness, housing instability, and overcrowding.
- Investments in housing and development programs including rental vouchers and mortgage assistance programs to prevent individuals and families from falling into homelessness.
- Increase in funding for the CDBG and HOME Programs.
- An increase of the HUD maximum income restrictions for the down payment assistance and the rental assistance program in order to stay relevant in the current market.
- Programs that preserve housing for extremely low-income households, including those that address chronic homelessness among veterans, youth, and families.
- Raise the Davis-Bacon project threshold to $250,000 for non-residential and increase the CDBG housing unit threshold to 12 units to coincide with the HOME program.
- Eliminate the 15% set-aside of HOME funds for Community Housing Development Organizations (CHDOs).
- Safe Parking Lots Programming to address the growing number of individuals and families experiencing homelessness and living in their vehicles.

The city of Aurora requests Congress and federal agencies support the following:

- The Eviction Crisis Act, sponsored by Senator Bennet (D-CO)
- The Fighting Homelessness Through Services Act
- The Housing is Infrastructure Act, sponsored by Rep. Crow (D-CO-6)
- Repealing the Faircloth Amendment to increase public housing
Supporting Mental Assistance Responder Teams Community Policing Act (SMART Community Policing Act) - The city supports Senator Bennet’s bill that would provide dedicated funds for collaborative partnerships with law enforcement, health professionals, case managers, and outreach teams to improve public safety and connect people with mental health services and community resources. The bill would pair a mental health clinician with a paramedic or emergency medical technician (EMT) to respond to certain low-risk calls to the 911 system; train crisis workers to respond to calls; provide mental health services; and stabilize encounters between law enforcement officers and people experiencing a mental or behavioral health crisis and connect them with appropriate support programs.

High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA) funding provides training and support to respond to violent crime and drug trafficking in the Rocky Mountain High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area. The RAVEN taskforce, which Aurora is part of and serves as the fiduciary agent, received $614,000 from this program for 2023 to respond to violent crime in the region. The city supports continued funding for this program.
Aurora’s water supplies originate in the headwaters of three major basins within Colorado and include portions of the Arapahoe-Roosevelt, Pike-San Isabel, and White River National Forests. Protecting Aurora’s watersheds is critical to the success of Aurora Water’s mission to enhance and protect the quality of life for Aurora’s residents by providing safe, dependable, and sustainable water services. The passage of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021 (IIJA) is a great step forward in securing needed funding to carry out prevention, mitigation and restoration in our forests and our ability to build other essential water infrastructure projects.

A challenge to creating essential water infrastructure projects is obtaining the necessary permits. Permitting can take decades with associated costs often becoming unnecessarily burdensome. It should not take decades to analyze alternatives and render a decision. The U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and the Army Corps of Engineers have all delayed analyses and decisions on Aurora’s requests due to lack of staff expertise and staff time. Aurora has current requests with each of these federal agencies that have been delayed due to lack of federal agency staff time. Congress needs to ensure that the federal agencies are adequately staffed. The ability to hire third party consultants is helpful, but even that work needs to be reviewed by agency staff. Processing permitting requests in a timely manner would significantly increase the affordability of these projects.

The city of Aurora respectfully requests additional staff and streamlining for permitting. Increased legislative support ensuring adequate staff resources for our federal agencies is necessary to enable the agencies to carry out mandates provided in the IIJA. Additional staffing, use of third-party contractors, and efficient permitting at the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and the Army Corps of Engineers will allow them permit water supply and watershed health projects in a timely and efficient manner.

Routinely, at least one area of the Aurora Water System is experiencing drought and reduced water supplies in any given year and the Colorado River system is currently experiencing a prolonged “mega drought.” Climate change (or global warming) is increasingly impacting water availability. Statistical trends show this continuing through increasing hydrological variability with impacts to quantity, quality, and reliability of future water supplies. As planning efforts continue on local, regional, and national scales, Aurora Water supports federal agencies’ collaborative and integrative approach in yielding the best science and prediction tools. Along with improving accuracy of hydrological and weather system prediction tools and technologies, Aurora Water is interested in promoting efficient energy use, increasing water storage capacity (both surface and underground), and further expanding reclaimed water projects to maintain a reliable drinking water supply. The city of Aurora supports collaborative, affordable approaches to local, regional, and national water resource quantity, quality, and reliability planning and implementation efforts.

The city of Aurora requests additional federal staffing and funding for weather and climate prediction technologies and research.
It is expected Congress will initiate an effort to list several PFAS (Perfluoroalkyl Substances) chemicals, more specifically PFOA and PFOS, as hazardous compounds under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act or CERCLA. Doing so could place both drinking water and wastewater utilities in a bit of a quagmire when it comes to disposal of waste products produced as part of their treatment processes. Both drinking water treatment and wastewater treatment facilities produce solids as part of their treatment processes that, more often than not, contain some level of contaminants that were present in the water sources prior to treatment. Due to the ubiquitous nature of PFAS compounds in the environment, the solids produced from these treatment processes are likely to contain some level of PFAS through no fault of the drinking or wastewater utility. The compounds simply accumulate in the solids as a result of the process to clean the water. These solids are often disposed at landfills or put to beneficial use and land applied. If a landfill, where these solids are disposed, were to become a Superfund site and listed on the national priorities list due to PFAS contamination under CERCLA, drinking water and wastewater utilities could be liable for a portion of the clean-up costs even though they were not responsible for the original contamination. These costs could be in the tens of millions of dollars and would have to be passed along to the rate payers.

The city of Aurora supports CERCLA and the need to clean up environmental contamination, but requests Congress to include an exemption from liability for water and wastewater utilities in any legislation that lists PFAS as a hazardous substance under the Act.

The passage of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) is providing an influx of funds to restore and repair transportation and infrastructure services in communities. The city will closely monitor the implementation of grant programs. Additionally, the city will compete for federal funding administered by Colorado Department of Transportation and Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG) through Department of Transportation (DOT) existing formula programs for important projects. These include mitigating congestion on critical freight corridors through the National Highway Freight Program and expanding the city’s EV fleets through the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program and the new Discretionary Grant Program for Charging and Fueling Infrastructure. Finally, systematic development of the city’s Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan and accompanying funding to prioritize projects will continue to be a priority as the city seeks to improve alternative transportation modes.

The City will also look at programs and funding that will support our regional approach to transportation including surface transportation and transit in order to support job and growth centers to connect people throughout our region to jobs and opportunity.

The city will be pursuing funding from the IIJA in 2023 for transportation projects and will be looking for congressional and DOT support for those grant applications.
The passage of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) provides an influx of funds to expand broadband access and services throughout the country.

**Request**

The City will advocate for and leverage these funding opportunities in the following areas:

- The city has a need for broadband infrastructure to support many city operations and functions. All city buildings currently use carrier-provided services for basic data connectivity and internet access to support their operations. The city needs federal funding to deploy city-owned broadband to support these current and future needs.
- The city currently provides free Wi-Fi access to the community at its facilities. As the City builds fiber connectivity the City will interconnect libraries, recreation centers, and community centers along the path of the fiber as it is being built. This will allow the city to expand access to computers and free Wi-Fi at all those facilities for underserved residents to gain access to digital services such as telehealth, tele-education, job aids, career building service, pay their bills online; and access digital government services.
- The city will utilize IIJA funding to provide digital literacy services. Many residents have limited or no experience with modern digital services. Dedicated instructors and/or online instruction courses will be provided on a scheduled basis to help community members update resumes, apply for assistance, attend digital career fairs, and any number of other services that are offered through the web.

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The passage of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) has dedicated a portion of funding to help state and local governments implement or improve specific cybersecurity tools and capabilities. Importantly, the funding can be used to address cybersecurity needs for critical infrastructure, such as water infrastructure, traffic control systems, and public safety systems.

**Request**

The city supports leveraging the available funding to further improve its cybersecurity capabilities and funding that is flexible and allows local governments to define their cybersecurity needs.

- Funding - The city supports more discretionary funding for local governments to define what cybersecurity needs.
- The City will monitor further legislative proposals that would impose regulations or requirements related to the reporting or handling of cyber activities and incidents.
Aurora welcomes immigrants and refugees from all over the world. One in five residents were born outside the US, making the city diverse and international. As such, the city created the Office of International and Immigrant Affairs in 2015 to facilitate the successful integration of immigrants and refugees into Aurora’s civic, economic, and cultural life. The office oversees the development and implementation of a strategic citywide plan regarding policy, programs, and initiatives for the local immigrant and refugee populations.

**Request**

The City of Aurora supports legislation that examines the barriers to employment for newly arrived immigrants and to provide policy recommendations for how to help them secure skill-appropriate employment opportunities in the United States. The city also supports legislation that assists with immigrant integration such grants for citizenship and naturalization programs, English as a Second Language programs, and civics programs.
The city of Aurora is home to Buckley Space Force Base (SFB), serving more than 100,000 active duty, National Guard, Reserve, civilian, and retired personnel throughout Aurora and the surrounding community. The Base hosts the Buckley Garrison, a unit of the U.S. Air Force Space Command, as well as the Colorado National Guard 120th Fighter Squadron. Since its establishment in 1943, the Base has served a critical role in the economic vitality of the city of Aurora. In the face of budget cuts and a potential base realignment and closure (BRAC) process, one of the city’s highest priorities is the support of the ongoing mission of the Base.

Toward that end, the City supports the Defense Community Infrastructure Program, created in the FY 2020 National Defense Authorization Appropriations Act, which provides critical funding for off-base but adjacent community infrastructure projects that are key to supporting the Buckley mission.

**Request**

The city supports the following principles related to Buckley Space Force Base:

- The city of Aurora asks the Colorado Congressional delegation to continue support of Buckley Space Force Base in the annual Defense Appropriations Bill and assist in directing future missions to the base.
- In addition, the city of Aurora seeks support for future requests of the Defense Community Infrastructure Program as the city protects the viability of the Base’s operations and defense capabilities.
In May of 2014, the City Council approved the licensure of retail marijuana establishments throughout the city of Aurora. The Council authorized 24 retail marijuana store licenses, with four licenses allowed in each of the six Council wards. However, the use, possession, and sale of cannabis remains a federal crime. This conflict in federal and local marijuana laws has made it difficult for legitimate recreational marijuana businesses to access basic banking services. With financial institutions hesitant to provide services to cannabis businesses, the industry has become cash reliant, creating public safety issues and the potential for money laundering to become more prevalent.

The city of Aurora asks the Colorado Congressional delegation to lift the illegality of banking services to the cannabis industry. Toward that end, the City asks for Congress to support the Secure and Fair Enforcement Banking Act that would prohibit penalizing a bank for providing financial services to a legitimate state-sanctioned and regulated cannabis business.
The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 (TCJA) repealed public issuers’ ability to advance refund bonds on a tax-exempt basis. This prohibition of tax-exempt advance refundings precluded municipalities from realizing interest savings which could be realized through reduced interest rates. Currently, such advance refundings may only be issued on a taxable basis, which are not as advantageous from a savings perspective. By allowing tax-exempt advance refundings, the City would be able to realize interest savings upon refinancings prior to the call date of the bonds, should interest rates allow.

Support legislation related to tax-exempt advance refundings.