

## 2025-2026 PROPOSED BUDGET POLICY CONSIDERATIONS PAPER

### UNIFIED CARE TEAM

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This paper highlights selected policy considerations related to the Unified Care Team (UCT) in the 2025-2026 Proposed Budget. The UCT is an inter-departmental effort to: (1) address unsanctioned tent encampments and recreational vehicles, and (2) maintain public spaces. Considerations included here are not intended to be exhaustive and others may surface as Central Staff continues its analysis of the proposed budget.

#### **Background**

***UCT Structure:*** In 2022, the Executive established a new, multi-departmental effort called the Unified Care Team (UCT), which brought together multiple city departments to address unsheltered homelessness and related city cleaning and maintenance. The structure of the UCT can be described as follows:

Core Team: Based out of the Mayor's Office, this team of nine staff are responsible for Citywide strategy and policy, operations coordination, administration, data analysis and performance reporting. The team consists of a UCT director, UCT manager, training coordinator, four customer service positions, a UCT coordinator and a data analyst. The funding for these positions exists within various departments' budgets and are "on-loan" to the Mayor's Office.

City departments regularly engaged in field work: These City departments have staff and/or budget dedicated specifically to the UCT and are largely responsible for implementing UCT operations in the field. They include the Human Services Department (HSD), Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT), Seattle Police Department (SPD), Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR), and Seattle Public Utilities (SPU). Additionally, Seattle Information Technology (SIT) has a small role related to GIS services.

City departments engaged as needed: Other departments may be incorporated into UCT operations on an ad-hoc basis, depending on needs that arise. These departments do not have dedicated budget or staffing for the UCT. They include Seattle Public Libraries, Seattle City Light, Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections, Seattle Fire Department, and City Attorney's Office.

Prior to the establishment of the UCT in 2022, the City had tried several different strategies for addressing homelessness encampments and related issues. Prior to 2021, HSD operated the Navigation Team, whose main function was to coordinate the City's response to encampments, including responding to complaints, assessing conditions, managing the storage of belongings and centrally managing shelter vacancies. During the summer of 2020, the Council reallocated funding for the Navigation Team and its related functions and used it instead to increase funding for contracted homelessness outreach providers. Through the 2021 Adopted Budget, the Navigation Team was replaced with the smaller Homelessness Outreach and Provider Ecosystem (HOPE) Team. This action reduced the number of positions associated with assessing and addressing site conditions and called for a team that coordinated outreach and shelter referral among homelessness outreach providers, generally without direct engagement with people experiencing homelessness. While the Executive has moved away from the "HOPE Team" nomenclature (except for the budget program name), HSD continues to have staff dedicated to the UCT, focused on outreach and coordination.

**Changes to 2025 and 2026 proposed UCT budget:** The chart below shows UCT allocations in the participating departments in the 2024 Adopted Budget and the 2025-2026 Proposed Budget, along with a brief summary of each department’s role in the UCT. Overall, the UCT budget increases by 22 percent from the 2024 Adopted Budget to the 2025 Proposed Budget, with a 29 percent increase in dedicated UCT staff during the same time period. Some of those increases in budget and staffing are due to changes that occurred with the 2024 Mid-Year Supplemental ordinance, which are described in further detail below. The UCT budget increases three percent from 2025 to 2026 and there is no increase in FTE during that time period.

In Millions		2024		2025		2026	
		Adopted Budget		Proposed Budget		Proposed Budget	
Dept.	Role	\$	Dedicated FTE	\$	Dedicated FTE	\$	Dedicated FTE
HSD	Outreach & Referrals to Shelter	\$2.9	11	\$5.8	32	\$6.0	32
FAS	Customer Service	\$0.9	4	\$0.9	2	\$0.9	2
SDOT	Covers the south part of the city; cleaning, site visits, inspections, encampment removals and community engagement	\$4.7	18	\$6.1	21	\$6.1	21
SPD	Safety & Compliance	\$2.2	10 <sup>1</sup>	\$2.2	10	\$2.2	10
Parks	Covers the north part of the city; cleaning, site visits, inspections, encampment removals and community engagement	\$9.2	54.5	\$10.9	60.5	\$11.5	60.5
SIT	GIS technology needs	\$0.3	- <sup>2</sup>	\$0.3	-	\$0.3	-
SPU	RV remediation and some trash mitigation, including purple bag program	\$5.9	- <sup>3</sup>	\$6.3	-	\$6.5	-
<b>Totals</b>		<b>\$26.1</b>	<b>\$97.5</b>	<b>\$32.5</b>	<b>125.5</b>	<b>\$33.5</b>	<b>125.5</b>

<sup>1</sup> Central Staff is waiting on confirmation that these 10 officers, who comprise the Alternative Response Team (ART), are dedicated exclusively to UCT activities. SPD also occasionally staffs ART with officers from other SPD units on overtime, it is not known if that is to backfill ART officers on leave or to provide additional support.

<sup>2</sup> SIT does not have staff dedicated to the UCT. However, SIT’s UCT budget is for labor costs to provide GIS services. SIT estimated they provided 1,100 hours of labor in 2024 for the UCT.

<sup>3</sup> SPU does not have staff dedicated to the UCT. However, about \$1.2 million of its total UCT budget in 2025 and 2026 is for labor costs.

The increases in the UCT budgets are due to the following reasons:

1. *Changes made in the 2024 Mid-Year Supplemental ordinance, which were not reflected in the 2024 Adopted Budget.* The Mid-Year Supplemental added 19.0 FTE to HSD to support the UCT. Of those new positions, 14.0 FTE were Counselor positions, which will support outreach-led encampment removals, provide referrals to shelter during encampment removals, and provide support to individuals to move out of immediate hazard/obstruction locations. Five of the positions added were Regional Coordinators, four of which had already been filled through an administrative means. Funding for the 14 Counselor positions came partly from a \$1.5 million reduction in funding available for homelessness outreach contracts, the department's base budget, and vacancy savings. Thus, this funding reflects a reallocation of homelessness outreach resources, not a net add to HSD's Addressing Homelessness BSL. Additionally, funding for the five Regional Coordinator positions was added as part of the 2023 Adopted Budget, although the pockets for those positions were not created until the 2024 mid-year supplemental. Therefore, funding for those positions does not require a net add to the Addressing Homelessness BSL.
2. *Increased staffing to support UCT operations:* The Proposed 2025-2026 Budget provides \$210,000 of ongoing funds for a UCT Director; this is an existing position that had previously been funded through one-time sources. The budget also adds \$280,000 in HSD funding for a new UCT Administrative Specialist III to provide customer support and a UCT Administrative Staff Analyst to respond to more complex inquiries and support leadership. These two administrative positions were previously funded with one-time funds by FAS.
3. *Expansion of UCT capacity, including from 5 days a week to 7 days a week.* Currently, the UCT operates Monday – Friday and not during weekends with eight field teams. The 2025-2026 Proposed Budget adds funding to expand UCT capacity by four field teams, two at Parks and two at SDOT, for a new total of twelve teams. The teams added in SDOT and SPR (described in more detail below) will be full-time, allowing the UCT to expand operations to weekends and provide additional coverage during Monday-Friday as well.

The specific funding additions for the UCT expansion are described below.

- HSD: \$308,000 in both 2025 and 2026 for extended intake shelter intake hours. This funding would allow up to two shelter providers to hire 2 additional admissions staff (4 FTE total) to ensure they can process UCT shelter referrals daily, including on weekends.
- Parks and Recreation: \$882,000 in 2025 and \$1.1 million in 2026 for six additional staff and nonlabor expenses such as disposal of materials.
- SPU: \$85,000 in both 2025 and 2026 for weekend vendor-provided cleanup and solid waste disposal activities. The vendor will only perform exterior cleaning of encampments on weekends.
- SDOT: \$1.4 million in both 2025 and 2026. These funds would pay for 3 new FTE, two new vehicles, and increased contractor costs to remove trash and debris, and increased office and warehouse space.

### ***Expanded UCT capacity***

Overall, the Executive anticipates that the UCT expansion will result in a “will result in a 60% increase from current levels of action,” with actions including obstruction and immediate hazard removals, site inspections, and trash mitigation at encampments. While tent encampment removals could happen during the new weekend hours, Recreational Vehicle (RV) removals would continue to occur only Monday through Friday, given the complex resource coordination required for this activity. However, RV sites with high debris accumulation may receive trash mitigation services during expanded UCT weekend hours<sup>4</sup>.

The Executive has cited SPD capacity as one factor limiting the potential expansion of UCT activity. As shown in the table above, SPD does not plan to provide any additional staff in support of the expanded UCT activity. As such, expanded UCT actions will likely focus on actions where SPD presence is not necessary – for example trash mitigation or removals where UCT staff determine SPD is not needed.

Shelter capacity is another potential consideration when expanding UCT actions. When removing encampments, the City operates under Multi-Departmental Administrative Rule 17-01 (MDAR 17-01) and the Finance and Administrative Department’s Encampment Rule 17-01 (FAS 17-01). Under those rules, the City only needs to make offers of shelter when removing tent encampments that are not considered obstructions or immediate hazards. The Executive has reported that even when removing encampments that are considered obstructions and immediate hazards, they do try to make offers of shelter when if possible. As such, some of the increased actions related to removal of obstruction and immediate hazard sites may result in more referrals to shelter.

The 2025-2026 Proposed Budget contains \$3.2 million to sustain to sustain existing shelters (\$2.2 million to replace expiring COVID funding for the 150-bed Benu shelter and \$1 million to help fill an operational gap for the Low-Income Housing Institute’s tiny house villages and one enhanced shelter). See the HSD 2025-2026 Proposed Budget Overview Paper for more information about shelter fund. The 2025-2026 Proposed Budget does not contain funding to add new shelter beds, although the expanded intake hours at two shelters may fill beds on weekends that would otherwise have remained empty until Monday.

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<sup>4</sup> Parking enforcement officers who enforce 72-hour parking rules for lived-in vehicles in coordination with UCT already work on Saturdays and will continue their normal activities related to RVs.

## **Policy Considerations**

### **1. Specific areas of focus for expanded UCT capacity have not been identified.**

The Executive has not identified the specific areas or sites where expanded UCT capacity will be deployed. The Executive will determine sites to be served on the weekends using the same data-driven methodology they do for regular UCT activity. For weekend activity, data to inform decision-making will include the frequency of repopulation and the amount of trash accumulation happening over the weekend hours, along with encampments causing major accessibility issues. The Executive will regularly evaluate data and may focus on different sites on the weekends through the course of the year, depending on highest need at a particular time.

#### **Options:**

- A. Adopt a Statement of Legislation Intent (SLI) providing further direction to the Executive on how and where they would like to have additional UCT capacity deployed.
- B. Adopt a SLI requesting regular reporting from the Executive on how expanded UCT capacity is deployed. For the last several years, Council has adopted a SLI requesting quarterly reports on UCT activities. Reporting on deployment of UCT capacity could be incorporated into that SLI, should Council choose to adopt it again.
- C. No change

### **2. Possible opportunities to enhance efficiency of UCT and ensure continuity of the service.**

While the Executive has recently reported a decline in tents encampments and RVs, it is likely that unsanctioned encampments and RVs will continue for the foreseeable future and that UCT services will continue. Through experience, the Unified Care team has developed an effective process for coordination and collaboration among various city department to address unsanctioned encampments and maintain public spaces. There may be opportunities to increase efficiency, such as by evaluating the bodies of work conducted by each department and what the cost differential is for similar bodies of work conducted by different departments. For example, the proposed 2025-2026 Proposed Budget transferred nine Graffiti Abatement Team positions from SPU to SPR, which generated a net savings of \$500,000 GF due to SPR's lower overhead rate as compared to SPU's. Additionally, there may be opportunities to strengthen continuity for UCT services by considering moving some, or all, functions currently provided in the Mayor's Office to a different department.

#### **Options:**

- A. Adopt a SLI from the Executive requesting that they explore ways to enhance efficiency and support the continuity of the services provided by the UCT.
- B. No change.