



Seattle Office of City Auditor

David G. Jones, City Auditor

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2020 Annual Report

Advancing accountability, efficiency, equity, and transparency throughout City government

Message from City Auditor

2020 was an unprecedented year with many challenges. Seattle residents experienced health and economic impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic, protested structural racism and had difficult conversations about policing. On March 9, 2020, our office successfully transitioned to remote work and continued to respond to City Council requests and deliver high-impact results for the City of Seattle.

- In 2020, our performance audits focused on some of the most complex and urgent topics that Seattle faced, such as homelessness, transportation infrastructure, utility billing issues, and surveillance technology.
- We also continued our program evaluation work related to equity issues addressed through the Sweetened Beverage Tax, a federal grant to prevent youth violence in Rainier Beach, and the Secure Scheduling ordinance.
- We produced non-audit reports on the implementation of our office’s audit recommendations, reported losses of information technology assets and summarized research on how communities could resist gentrification.

2021 marks the 30-year anniversary of the Seattle Office of City Auditor (OCA). We have important work planned for 2021 (see our work program on page 6) that will cover effectiveness, efficiency, and equity issues. These issues include evaluating the Seattle Municipal Court’s probation services, conducting a Surveillance Technology Ordinance required review of the Seattle Department of Transportation’s (SDOT) use of traffic cameras, examining the implementation of an ordinance requiring a Notice of Intent to Sell by owners of certain types of low-income housing, auditing SDOT’s sidewalks maintenance program, and reviewing Seattle Public Utilities’ billing for residential solid waste services. We will also continue our annual process of following up and reporting on the implementation status of all our open audit recommendations and our involvement in program evaluations.

I appreciate the commitment of our team in tackling these difficult issues and we look forward to contributing to the City of Seattle’s success in 2021. Finally, I am very pleased to report that our office received the [Association of Local Government Auditors](#) highest award for a 2020 audit report for our September 2020 report [Seattle Department of Transportation: A Strategic Approach to Vehicle Bridge Maintenance is Warranted](#).

Key Audit Issue Areas of 2020



Homelessness



Infrastructure



Utility Billing



Surveillance

Highlights from 2020

Transportation Infrastructure: At the request of the City Council's Transportation Committee Chair, Councilmember Alex Pedersen, we assessed the physical condition and maintenance investments in Seattle's vehicle bridges. In spring 2019, severe cracks on the West Seattle High Bridge led to its emergency closure. Our audit responded to public and policy concerns about the rest of the City's bridge portfolio. The audit analyzed the condition of Seattle's bridge portfolio, previous City spending on bridge maintenance and repair, and practices for major bridge upkeep. Based on our findings, we recommended that the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) act immediately to implement changes suggested in an informal Federal review of its bridge maintenance program, and to conduct lifecycle analysis on its bridge portfolio so it can make more informed budget requests. We also recommended immediate changes to improve SDOT's bridge maintenance program, such as eliminating unnecessary annual reviews of private bridges, and working to reduce the amount of reimbursable work that bridge maintenance workers do on non-City structures.

OCA Auditor and SDOT Inspector at the Spokane Street Bridge, July 2020.



Electric Utility Billing: In 2020, we issued two reports on this topic. The first report was done at the request of Councilmember Teresa Mosqueda, in response to complaints she received concerning customers' high and unexpected electric bills. Accordingly, we conducted an audit of Seattle City Light's billing and customer service practices. The report includes 16 recommendations for improving City Light's customer service and billing. We found that City Light's newly formed Escalation Team was using leading practices for customer communication and could be a model for handling customer complaints. We recommended that City Light evaluate the effectiveness of this temporarily expanded team (now called the Customer Advocacy Team) and incorporate lessons learned from it into its policies and practices. City Light officials told us that this team has been piloting the use of a Customer Relationship Management tool to do transactional surveys and follow up with customers. Results appear to be promising and City Light may consider expanding the use of this tool to all its staff who interact with customers.

OCA infographic showing relevant features of SCL's advanced meters.



The second report concerned the several million dollars City Light receives annually from entities that attach equipment to City Light utility poles for cell phones, telephones, the internet, and cable television. We examined this process to determine whether City Light had adequate controls in place to help ensure the accuracy, completeness, and timeliness of pole attachment and replacement billing and the timeliness of payment collection. We also examined user access controls to systems that support the billing functions. City Light's billings for pole attachments and pole replacements were, in general, accurate and complete. However, we found that certain internal controls either lacking or need strengthening. For example, City Light has not inventoried their poles in at least 10 years and has no inventory of pole attachments. This means potential lost revenues from pole replacement work and from

annual rental revenue from pole attachments. We also recommended that City Light make greater efforts to collect delinquent joint pole payments.

Homelessness and Encampments: In 2020, we completed two reports concerning homelessness. First, in response to Seattle City Council President Lorena González's request, we reviewed the Human Service Department's (HSD) management of the City's homeless services contracts. The report included eighteen recommendations for improving HSD's management of homeless services contracts, homeless policy and program design, and service provider performance and contract compliance. In response to one of our recommendations, HSD developed a proposed timeline for executing contracts that would address the problem of untimely payments to service providers and has taken steps to improve contract monitoring, although the new King County Regional Homelessness Authority will have the responsibility for homeless contracting and adopting a contracting timeline.

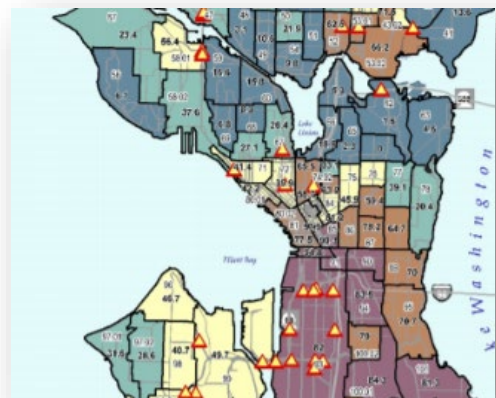
Our second 2020 homelessness report was completed as part of our [November 2017 Navigation Team Reporting Plan](#) requested by City Councilmember Lisa Herbold. We identified a strategic approach that includes five steps that the City could take to help reduce or prevent unsanctioned encampment trash from accumulating, and to track whether encampment trash accumulation was increasing or decreasing: 1) Track trash accumulation systematically, 2) Develop and implement strategies for persistent trash "hot spots", 3) Protect urban streams and watersheds, 4) Improve needle recovery efforts, and 5) Use best practices to deter metal theft. We offered recommendations associated with these steps that recognized that the complex issues surrounding unsheltered homelessness require a systematic, coordinated, multi-pronged response, and we hope the report's recommendations will help inform the City's future approaches to homelessness.

City of Seattle photo from our report about steps the City should take to reduce or prevent unsanctioned encampment trash accumulation.



Surveillance Technology: As required by the Surveillance Technology Ordinance, we reviewed the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) use of License Plate Readers (LPR) technology. We found that for about 10 years, SDOT has been sharing LPR data with the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) without a data sharing agreement. We recommended that an agreement be executed between SDOT and WSDOT that, at a minimum, addresses data sharing, retention, and deletion of LPR data, including what WSDOT can and cannot do with the LPR data outside of its agreement with SDOT. SDOT indicated that instead of pursuing an agreement with WSDOT, that they plan to completely phase out its use of LPR technology by the end of 2021.

Detail from an OCA map showing SDOT LPR cameras locations and equity.

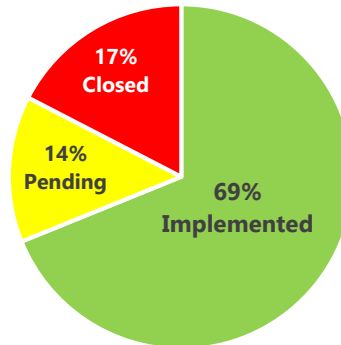


Follow Up on Recommendations

In 2020 we continued our annual practice of following up on the status of open audit recommendations. As can be seen from the chart at right, 69 percent of our recommendations made between 2007 and 2020 have been implemented.

High impact recommendations that were implemented in 2020 are detailed in [our annual recommendation report](#), which was published on March 26, 2021. We also added a new, interactive recommendation status dashboard to our website. A screenshot of the new dashboard is provided below.

Status of All OCA Recommendations Made Between 2007 and 2020.



Screenshot of our NEW interactive recommendation status dashboard online [HERE](#).

Office of City Auditor Recommendation Follow Up
Status as of December 31, 2020

NOTE: This report only covers the recommendations that were pending at the end of 2020, and does not include the status of recommendations implemented or closed in previous years.

We recognize that our office is located on the traditional land of the Duwamish People, the First People of Seattle. We honor the land and the Duwamish People, past and present.

Year: Report Title

- Select all
- 2009
- 2010
- 2015
- 2016
- 2017

Department

- Select all
- City Attorney
- City Council
- HSD
- ITD
- Mavor

Status (12/31/20)

- Select all
- Closed
- Implemented
- Pending

STATUS KEY

IMPLEMENTED: Recommendation is substantially complete or fully implemented.

PENDING: Recommendation is not complete. We will follow up annually.

CLOSED: Recommendation is not complete but our office will not continue to follow up on this recommendation because it is no longer relevant or unlikely to be implemented.

Department	Closed	Implemented	Pending	Total
HSD	47	6	15	68
SCL	1	11	21	33
SPD	8	3	17	28
OLS		12	9	21
SDOT			19	19
ITD			11	11
SPU		1	5	6
Mayor	5			5
City Council			4	4
SFD			4	4
OPCD	3			3
SDCI	2	1		3
City Attorney			1	1
OH			1	1
SCERS			1	1
SDHR			1	1
Total	66	35	108	209

Rec. #	Original Recommendation	Status as of 12/31/20	Status Detail 12/31/20
577	The City Council and the Special Events Office should consider establishing criteria and a schedule for setting the fees for police services for Citywide permitted events (e.g., updating SMC 15.52 or developing department policies). (Report Recommendation 5b)	Pending	City Council Center special events police is busy with the police that the review of now until 2022. H includes a Statement that SPD makes of City Auditor in the overtime worked events.
736	The Human Services Department should review and evaluate its goal for agency-wide fiscal audits.	Pending	The Human Services goals for fiscal audits cooperation with Specialists by Q4. this team's role and outcomes from co plan to support a

2020 Published Reports

Performance Audits

- [Five Steps the City Should Take to Reduce Trash Around Unsanctioned Encampments](#)
- [Seattle City Light Customer Care and Billing Audit](#)
- [Homeless Contracts Management Audit](#)
- [Seattle Department of Transportation: A Strategic Approach to Vehicle Bridge Maintenance is Warranted](#)
- [Seattle City Light Billable Pole Attachments and Pole Replacements Audit](#)
- [Surveillance Usage Review: Seattle Department of Transportation License Plate Readers](#)

Evaluations

- [The Evaluation of Seattle's Sweetened Beverage Tax 12 Month Report: Store Audits & Child Cohort](#)
- [The Evaluation of Seattle's Sweetened Beverage Tax Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\)](#)

Other Reports

- [Status Report on Implementation of Office of City Auditor Recommendations as of December 2019](#)
- [Follow Up on Recent Loss Reports filed by the Information Technology Department](#)
- [Community Resistance to Gentrification: What is Effective?](#)

Seattle Office of City Auditor Staff

David G. Jones, City Auditor
Sean DeBlicek, Deputy City Auditor
Rhonda Lyon, Office Manager
Claudia Gross Shader, Assistant City Auditor
IB Osuntoki, Strategic Advisor
Jane Dunkel, Assistant City Auditor
Luiza Barbato Montesanti, Audit Intern
Marc Stepper, Assistant City Auditor
Megumi Sumitani, Assistant City Auditor
Melissa Alderson, Assistant City Auditor
Robin Howe, Assistant City Auditor
Virginia Garcia, Assistant City Auditor



In addition to the work we performed in 2020 to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and equity of City of Seattle programs, members of our office contributed to the auditing profession by supporting the work of the Association of Local Government Auditors (ALGA) by serving on ALGA committees and contributing articles to ALGA's quarterly journal. For example, Virginia Garcia served as chair of ALGA's newly formed Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee.

We are very proud that Claudia Gross Shader earned her PhD in criminology, and that our intern Luiza Barbato Montesanti was hired as an analyst with the City of Seattle's Community Police Commission.

Our office fully supports the City's efforts to end institutional racism in City government and achieve racial equity across our community. To meet this end, we include race and social justice reviews as a standard part of our audit process and use internal metrics to encourage our staff to build their expertise in race and social justice issues.

Office of City Auditor Annual Work Program [As of March 2021 and subject to change]

Ongoing Projects	Source	Estimated Completion Date
Audit of Surveillance Technologies: Seattle Department of Transportation Traffic Cameras	Ordinance 125376	Q2 2021
Notice of Intent to Sell Low-Income Housing	Ordinance 125873	Q3 2021
Audit of Seattle Department of Transportation Sidewalk Maintenance	Councilmember Lewis Request	Q3 2021
Audit of Seattle Municipal Court Probation Program	2020 Budget City Council Statement of Legislative Intent (CJ-1-B-1)	Q3 2021
Audit of Seattle Public Utilities Residential Solid Waste	Initiated by City Auditor	Q3 2021
COVID-19 Emergency Federal Funding	Councilmembers González and Mosqueda Request	Q3 2021
Safe Gun Storage Statistical Reports	Ordinance 125620	Q3 2021
Management of Sweetened Beverage Tax Evaluation Contract	Ordinance 125324	Next report to be published in 2021
Management of Secure Scheduling Evaluation Contract	Ordinance 125135	Final report on Employer Implementation to be published in 2021
Participation in Federally Funded Evaluation of National Institute of Justice Grant: Rainier Beach Campus Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports	Follow-up to City Council requested report published by our office in 2011 on crime hot spots	Q4 2022
Follow-up Report on our 12/30/20 report on SDOT License Plate Readers Surveillance Technology	Ordinance 125376	Q3 2021

Future Required Projects	Source	Estimated Completion Date
Seattle City Light Binoculars/Spotting Scope Surveillance Technology	Ordinance 125376	Q3 2022
Seattle City Light Check Meter Device Surveillance Technology	Ordinance 125376	Q3 2022
Seattle City Light SensorLink Amp Fork Surveillance Technology	Ordinance 125376	Q3 2022
Seattle Fire Department Computer-Aided Dispatch Surveillance Technology	Ordinance 125376	Q3 2022
Seattle Department of Transportation Acyclica Surveillance Technology	Ordinance 125376	TBD
Seattle Fire Department Emergency Scene Cameras Surveillance Technology	Ordinance 125376	TBD
Seattle Fire Department Hazmat Camera Surveillance Technology	Ordinance 125376	TBD