

DOUBLING DOWN ON WHAT'S WORKING AND INVESTING IN A BETTER CITY
2024 Proposed One Seattle Budget Speech

Good afternoon – and welcome. It's my honor to join you today and to share my 2024 proposed budget.

Thank you to members of the City Council, City Attorney Ann Davison, our administration's Cabinet, and members of the press. Thank you to our City Budget Office colleagues and staff across the city who helped make this proposal possible. And most of all, thank you to our hosts at Plymouth Housing, the residents here at Blake House and the workers, case managers, and leadership like CEO Karen Lee who make an incredible difference for our city and its residents every single day.

Last year, you saw a different approach to the budget process: One marked by collaboration, not conflict; conversations in conference rooms, not through press conferences; phone calls, not call outs. I'm grateful for that because it was rooted in our commitment to building **One Seattle** together. I'm hopeful that this year we can repeat that process.

I value and appreciate working with my City Council colleagues. Some have announced they are not seeking reelection this year – Councilmembers Herbold, Sawant, Pedersen, and Council President Juarez – let's focus on the opportunity to pass one last budget together.

While it wasn't a perfect budget – Is there such a thing? – we were able to pass a two-year budget for the first time since the pandemic, focusing on critical needs like public safety and homelessness, a renewed commitment to the essential City services residents deserve, and embracing a back-to-basics philosophy needed to restore Seattle's economy and quality of life.

This is a different city than when I took office nearly two years ago – and it's even a different city than a year ago. Together, we've made a difference on issues that can't be fixed overnight, but that with a plan and a solid investment strategy, we can show meaningful progress. Our city is radiating with hope and a belief that answers are within our grasp, even while acknowledging some of our most difficult and complex challenges are still before us.

On many of these transformational investments, we're just getting started. I believe we must be a learning organization – studying what works, growing from the mistakes we make, and applying those lessons to do better. The budget I am sending to the City Council today builds on the 2024 endorsed budget, recognizes critical needs, and reflects changes in our economy.

You may have heard me say before that we strive to do the best with the hand we're dealt. The good and the bad – whether a pandemic or a housing crisis, an All-Star Game or a waterfront brimming with promise. We aim to make the most of what we're faced with.

For those of you who like to play cards – you know that when you have a good hand and a plan that's working, you double down. And that's what this budget proposal does – it doubles down on the priorities that matter for the city and it invests in a better tomorrow for Seattle.

We need to double down where we're seeing progress on our approach to the crisis of homelessness. That's why we're here. Plymouth and Bellwether Housing jointly developed Blake House and The Rise, and these buildings represent the kind of outcomes we're trying to achieve. These projects provide

affordable housing for our neighbors and bring people who have experienced chronic homelessness indoors with the support they need to live healthy, fulfilling lives.

This building was funded and developed by a coalition of supporters – bringing together nonprofits, businesses, the state, and over \$13 million dollars in City investments through sources that include our 2016 Housing Levy, along with JumpStart Payroll Expense Tax helping to fund services and operations.

Together, these represent the first affordable high-rise apartments in Seattle in over 50 years – with over one hundred units of permanent supportive housing for veterans and seniors, as well as nearly 250 units of workforce housing for low-income families and individuals. But it's not the buildings that demonstrate the return on our investment, it's the lives shaped by living here.

We need more Blake Houses, more permanent supportive housing with services to help people restore their lives, and more affordable homes that allow people and families of all income levels and backgrounds to live in our city.

We are at a delicate place in our homelessness response – a complex issue that requires nuanced solutions. Instead of open-and-shut decision-making, we need to advance actions that open doors for people to come inside and keep them open.

Some will argue that we should take a zero-tolerance approach – we've seen that strategy play out in tent and shelter bans in cities across the state and country, including from suburban neighbors here in King County.

Others will say the right answer is to leave people out in the elements – we all witnessed that approach during the pandemic, where more people suffered in tents and parks and sidewalks became unusable.

The truth is we've shown over the last two years that we can bring people inside on a path to stability and ensure accessible, vibrant, welcoming public spaces. Those are guiding **One Seattle** principles – an approach that works.

Since we opened up the data with our Homelessness Action Plan, we have delivered a record number of referrals to shelter; resulting in a 43% decrease in tents and a 35% reduction in RV encampments, and greatly improved access to parks, public spaces, and downtown sidewalks.

Our proposal ensures this work will continue, with the Unified Care Team fully funded and neighborhood teams on track to complete their roll out this year, working to create a clean, accessible Seattle for all.

Our budget furthers investments in outreach to bring people indoors, along with spending on safe places for people to go like tiny home villages, RV parking, and enhanced shelter spaces. Our proposed budget contains over \$105 million toward these spaces and additional services to help unhoused residents through the King County Regional Homelessness Authority.

For a truly effective and comprehensive regional approach to homelessness, the KCRHA must be part of the solution. We are committed to this, and in partnership with Executive Constantine we will continue working to strengthen the organization's governance structure, oversight, and accountability systems.

An example of our shared commitment to collaboration with KCRHA, we worked with the Authority to identify funding to keep open 300 shelter beds that otherwise would have closed next year because they relied on one-time investments.

We know the ultimate answer to solve homelessness and to prevent homelessness is housing. Housing that meets the needs of families, low-income people, those with behavioral health and substance use conditions.

Last year, we advanced the largest single-year investment in our City's history to fund affordable housing. Today, I am proposing we go even further with a \$334 million dollar investment – a 32% increase.

This work starts with the Housing Levy we proposed this year – which, if approved by the voters, will triple the resources of this proven solution. A bold plan that meets the moment during an affordable housing crisis. Historically, for every \$1 spent by the City, these investments have leveraged an additional \$3.50 from public and private partners.

We're also open to new approaches to affordable housing – that's why we're providing the Social Housing PDA with \$850,000 to fund their start-up costs as they examine how to apply a new approach as we work together to support an affordable Seattle where everyone is housed.

This \$334 million in investments will go toward creating more buildings like Blake House. But again, more important than the physical structures are the people inside. That includes case managers and workers who connect residents with the personalized care and services to get well and to thrive.

I want to highlight a few of the workers here at Blake who exemplify this critical work.

Beruke Giday, the Site Director here, has been at Plymouth for many years and regularly plans agency-wide cultural activities for more than 1,200 residents – working to ensure every person in Plymouth Housing feels at home.

Tiffany Sangster, a residential specialist here, gets to know residents and visitors, greeting them with the warmest smile and making sure they know they are welcome, each and every day.

And finally, Angel Cezear, a Housing Case manager here, is a First Nations Cowichan, who begins her work helping residents find housing stability with a personal touch, always offering to cleanse the apartments of new residents by burning sacred herbs – a gift from her culture.

Human service providers are among the hardest working people in our city. They don't do these jobs for the pay, they do them to serve their community and give back to those in need.

But that doesn't mean pay isn't important. Last I checked, compassionate providers still have to eat and pay the bills.

Earlier this year, I met with workers and human service providers who told me about the compassionate, tireless work they do. But they also told me about the hardships they face because of low pay, which impacts their ability to stay in these jobs. They asked us to look at the numbers, work with the state and county, and increase wages.

Look, we need these workers. That's why I am proposing an investment of over \$25 million to support the workforce for organizations that provide permanent supportive housing.

And, I am also proposing a \$23 million investment to increase wages of our contracted human service providers. On top of full inflationary increases for these workers, I am proposing a wage equity investment representing a cumulative 9.5% increase in pay – part of an 18% total increase over the last two budgets. This isn't just the right thing to do, it's necessary to deliver sustainable progress.

Wages and affordability challenges do not stop at the City limits. That's why we're asking our government partners at the county, state, and federal levels to support these workers too.

This kind of collaboration is even more important as we address the fentanyl and synthetic drug crisis that is killing people on streets, in homes, and across the nation. While our core Charter obligation is public safety, governments at all levels have a responsibility to support the health and well-being of our communities.

The County's Crisis Care Levy means additional tools to help people with behavioral health challenges are on the way. But we cannot and will not sit idly by while people suffer and die from the effects of these drugs and substance use disorder. This is why, in addition to our work in partnership with the county, state, and federal governments, I issued an Executive Order in April directing our departments to implement new and bold solutions to the fentanyl crisis.

One example is our contingency management pilot – an evidence-backed, treatment-based approach to addressing addiction. The pilot will launch right here at the Blake House next month, for the first time applying this treatment where people live.

It's also why we're investing \$7 million toward capital improvements in treatment centers, including a post-overdose facility to bring people in their moment of need to a place where they can recover and access services.

It's why we're expanding Seattle Fire Department's Health 99 Post Overdose Response Team, committing \$2 million this year from our opioid settlement fund toward that effort and several others to improve health outcomes.

And it's why we are reinvesting in harm reduction programs that help prevent overdoses and provide low-barrier medication and treatment to those who seek to overcome their addiction.

Our recently passed law to address public consumption of drugs gives us another route to keep people safe. Applied right, that law will not only support safe, welcoming sidewalks and neighborhoods, it will prioritize diversion for drug users – keeping them out of the criminal legal system and putting them on a path to getting well.

To make this law effective, it requires reinvesting in diversion programs like LEAD. Our budget includes nearly \$17 million toward diversion programs. My proposal also supports the extension of We Deliver Care – outreach workers who take the time to build trust with people Downtown and use that trust to connect them with services.

This budget proposal also doubles down on safety, maintaining and expanding the critical investments we need to make Seattle safe for everyone.

As I shared last week, this means an increased investment in our new public safety department by 29% to a total of \$26.5 million. The CARE Department – Community-Assisted Response and Engagement – is a tangible step toward a new paradigm in public safety. It combines three critical functions: the 911 Center with call takers and dispatchers, CARE Team behavioral health responders, and an intensified focus on community violence interventions.

Along with diversion and treatment services, CARE represents another option to ensure the right help is delivered in the right situation, a response that may be different from traditional police or fire alone.

Next month, we will launch a groundbreaking Dual Dispatch pilot, partnering behavioral health CARE responders with our police officers to better help people in need. This pilot – fully funded in this proposal – will provide hard data and practical experiences to inform how we can scale up this approach.

Despite SPD's well known staffing issues, we are seeing improvement in many areas, including a statistical decrease in violent crime. But with homicides up, when SPD has recovered more guns than any previous time in city history, when people feel unsafe in any neighborhood in this city, we know we must not be complacent.

My budget maintains needed funding for our police department, including funds for officer recruitment. We are working every day to attract and hire more officers, seeing an average of 150 to nearly 200 applications a month – the highest rate in over two years.

Yes, we need the right number of police officers, but we also need police officers who uphold their oath and our shared values, who represent the city's diversity, who complete investigations quickly and effectively and in a culturally competent manner. And, who above all, treat everyone with the respect and dignity they deserve.

We cannot have safety without accountability and community trust. Sadly, we have seen that trust fracture through recent events where officers have disrespected or dehumanized our neighbors. Those comments make me incredibly sad – and disappointed.

To our police officers, I join communities across the city in saying: "You're better than that," and we expect you to be!

Each of you has taken a sacred oath to uphold the core values of our democracy, to acknowledge and uphold the dignity and worth of every person. Yes, your job can be extremely dangerous and traumatic, and it can wear you down. This role requires you to rise above that, to serve with honor every day, all the time. Our role is to provide you with the tools, support, and respect you deserve – and we will do that.

In policing, community trust is essential. When that trust is violated, we will use the independent, civilian-led accountability system we developed to hold officers accountable.

That's why my budget proposal increases investments in our Office of Police Accountability, Office of the Inspector General for Public Safety, and Community Police Commission – adding needed positions to help ensure a thorough review of misconduct, complaints, and the swift delivery of accountability. We set high standards for our police service, and we will uphold those standards.

Acting on our responsibility to provide effective, equitable public safety services for every community, our budget converts temporary Fire Department investments in South Park and West Seattle to ongoing services. The budget adds firefighter positions at Stations 26 and 37 to make sure these neighborhoods continue to receive the fire and emergency medical responses they deserve.

We're also advancing innovative solutions to enhance our ability to keep people and neighborhoods safe. Our budget calls for a nearly \$2 million investment in piloting a new suite of advanced safety technologies that will allow us to act faster and do more with limited staffing. This new technology will be used to protect neighborhoods impacted by recurring gun violence, collect new evidence to solve crimes, and help us address the unacceptable increase we see in stolen vehicles.

Our budget embraces a holistic approach to safety: Three public safety departments, high standards, strong accountability, victim support services, community-based violence reduction investments, and new technology tools. These approaches will reinforce progress made and accelerate our efforts to create a Seattle where everyone feels safe, supported, and secure.

In addition to challenges of behavioral health and substance use, we're also seeing the continued impacts of another kind of disease that harms the safety of our residents – bias and hate crimes, particularly those targeting our AAPI community.

Our budget invests in efforts to support immigrant and refugee families who experience disproportionate harm from violence through our Immigrant Safety and Access Network. It also takes a long view of supporting the community, specifically our endangered Chinatown-International District, by funding the development of community-centered solutions and supporting programs that counter Anti-Asian hate.

This kind of bigotry is not new – to me as a Japanese and African American, to my family, or to this community. Decades ago, my family operated a flourishing flower shop in the International District. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, they were incarcerated because of their Japanese ancestry. They had done nothing wrong, but simply because of their race and this country's lack of understanding, they were forcibly moved – away from their homes and small business, their friends and their community.

Even after all this, my family came back to Seattle when the war ended. It was their love for this city and its people, and the purpose that rebuilding that flower shop gave them, that brought them home. My mother's love and dedication – and the opportunities in this city – allowed me to grow and succeed one generation later. While my mother didn't live to see me become mayor, her older sister is watching me and will no doubt give me some feedback on how I can improve, as my mom was prone to do.

We as a City have a role to play in creating these opportunities and giving families like mine the tools to advance and grow generational wealth. My African American family escaped the Jim Crow South and came to this city for that very reason – jobs and opportunity.

Our budget includes a strong investment in the Future of Seattle Economy agenda endorsed by the City Council. It invests \$10 million in our Office of Economic Development for new items that support commercial affordability, business improvement areas, and career pathway development.

An additional investment of \$3.9 million will go toward our Downtown Activation Plan – a priority for my administration, a necessity for our region, and a chance for us to reimagine what a downtown is – and who our Downtown is for. These investments will go toward event activations, streetscape management, and support for the small businesses that weave together people, jobs, and vibrancy in our city center.

To close out the summer, we closed down streets, hosting pickleball and youth basketball tournaments that brought thousands to our downtown. We need more of that – and this budget will deliver.

Finally, we wouldn't be the Emerald City without a budget that reflects our commitment to a healthy climate – and a robust tree canopy.

For years, Seattle has purchased trees to support our popular Trees for Neighborhood program, which gives residents the trees and support to plant in their own yards and along their streets. Our budget proposal will expand this program's planting by 30% and support the growth of urban tree canopy cover, especially in high-heat neighborhoods to improve public health, climate resilience, and equity across Seattle. This means more trees to move closer to our 30% canopy goal.

Much to this Husky's chagrin, this program has for years sourced its trees from Oregon. The expansion will also include funding to evaluate next steps on a new One Seattle Tree Nursery so we can grow our own trees that are native to the region and shade creating.

Importantly, we recently announced that our approach and commitment to tree equity and a healthy canopy was endorsed through a historic nearly \$13 million grant from the Biden-Harris Administration and USDA Forest Service. We will plant trees, advance climate justice, and restore forested places near schools, parks and low-income housing. Made possible by the Inflation Reduction Act, this investment will be a game-changer for our work to create a climate-forward future – we're ready to get planting.

While we need trees to provide cooling and capture carbon – we also need to produce less carbon from our buildings, transportation, and built environment. That's why I am including funding for the bold Building Performance Emission Standards I announced earlier this year. With funding to invest in planning, job training, and implementation, I am confident that we will come together and ensure that our downtown, commercial and large residential buildings become part of the climate solution – helping meet urgent local and state climate targets.

Our budget includes \$20.1 million across three City departments for needed Green New Deal programs and initiatives to support environmental justice, including nearly \$2 million for the Office of Housing to support residential oil-to-electric heating conversions.

Like I said earlier, we are doubling down on our climate agenda. My kids and grandkids, and yours, need – and demand – for us to act.

This budget and these investments are even more critical now, because they are going to inform lessons learned and best practices for next year, when the City faces a daunting and looming deficit – \$250

million dollars between forecasted revenues and spending needed to continue current levels of services. We will need to make tough choices about spending and realign our priorities to ensure we are meeting the needs of our residents and providing the quality essential services we all deserve.

But we will do the best we can with the hand we are dealt, following the strategy laid out in this budget – doubling down on the things that work and investing in the future we want to see.

Talking to mayors across the country, who face many of the same issues we do here, I brag about what Seattle has to offer – and how our combination of innovative spirit, embrace of the future, and willingness to set aside differences and push to a shared goal is helping us recover faster, do big things, and better serve our growing and diverse population.

We are a city of wonderful neighborhoods, beautiful scenery, great businesses big and small. Above all else – our greatest resource is our people. Compassionate people. Smart people. Hard working people—including our great City Employees. Creative and visionary people.

Despite the challenges we face, I like Seattle's hand. And I'm all in on Seattle's future. Thank you. Together, we are building ***One Seattle***.