



Mayor's Budget Address

Delivered by Mayor Bruce A. Harrell

September 23, 2025

A budget represents more than dollars and cents. It's not just a funding document or a financial plan. At its core, a budget is a guide for the future, a course for the year ahead, and an investment strategy for our community.

That's why I'm excited to share my 2026 budget proposal. With a focus on proven solutions for the challenges of today – from affordability and homelessness to accessible food and childcare – this budget will keep Seattle on our positive trajectory and advance our vision for making Seattle the safe, welcoming, thriving city we know it can be.

And as we look to the future, there's perhaps no more appropriate place than our Waterfront – Seattle's new front porch.

The completion of the Waterfront represents an end to an infrastructure project that began when I was on the City Council. It also represents a new beginning for our city.

Just as neighbors have flocked to Overlook Walk, we know people from around the globe will soon do the same at the 2026 World Cup. And, if this city is to set the standard for our nation with the best pedestrian experience in the country, safety must be our highest priority.

As the Market continues to learn from a pilot for a more walkable, accessible street – it's time to move that effort forward to its next stage.

That's why my budget will include a \$2 million investment in removable vehicle barriers – true pedestrian safety improvements – to protect the people, patrons, and neighbors of the Pike Place Market.

I'm grateful for the partnership of the Pike Place Market PDA, and their focus on practical solutions that make the market a friendlier space and protect accessibility for residents, those with disabilities, and the vendors that drive the vitality of this special place.

Those vendors – and small businesses across the city – are what make our many neighborhoods what they are. That's why my budget includes more than \$40 million toward both supporting current small businesses and helping new ones get a foothold. And soon, voters will consider our proposal that would reduce taxes for 90% of small- and medium-sized businesses, while

also raising more than \$80 million in revenue, focused on protecting critical services in light of President Trump's cruelty.

Our plan includes nearly \$30 million in new investments directly aimed at insulating us from Trump's regressive gutting of the sacred pact that the federal government should help cities and their people – not hurt them.

This investment leads with a 70% budget increase for our Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs, with supports for legal services for those who are targeted by Trump, job development programs for new residents, and more.

Not a day goes by where Trump doesn't threaten Seattle's funding, but our plan makes clear we will not retreat in the face of bullying and scare tactics. We are prepared to invest in critical food programs, rental assistance, and crucial shelter and housing supports.

While Trump and his family lob lies and insults at our beautiful city – look around us... this is a "craphole"? *Really?* – we're writing our own narrative. A narrative that recognizes we've come a long way from the pandemic, but that we still have work to do. Unlike the other Washington, we don't ignore the complexity of our challenges just to make false promises and scapegoat others, we invest in real solutions and do the hard work.

We recognize that to have vibrant neighborhoods, we must have safe neighborhoods. That's why my budget includes a \$4 million investment in taking the program we've piloted Downtown and in Little Saigon citywide.

This place-based strategy means a coordinated, cross-department public safety approach. Increased trash removal, spot pressure washing of sidewalks, improved lighting, outreach and social services, and police actions focused on those causing neighborhood harm, all designed to boost economic growth.

Where we've tried it, this approach is working: Along 3rd Avenue, 9-1-1 calls have fallen by 15% and violent crime is down 20%. In Little Saigon, 9-1-1 calls are down almost 25% and burglary down by 32%.

I'll be the first to tell you we have more work to do in these areas to make them safe and welcoming, but this investment also means we can bring this proven approach to more neighborhoods across our city.

I also recently shared our plan to double the City's CARE Department responder team – which means twice the ability to dispatch trained behavioral health responders to those in need or in

crisis. This groundbreaking effort is nationally recognized for shifting the entire paradigm on public safety.

We're also investing in additional firefighter recruits, growing our post-overdose response team, and expanding treatment and behavioral health services. Proven solutions that we know will make a real difference.

Over the last several years, we have turned the tide on police hiring. It has been a long road from the depths of the pandemic, but with a clear commitment to the values and communities that make this city great, we've hired nearly 130 officers in 2025 – almost three times as many as we had at this time in 2024.

My budget proposal will ensure we do not go backwards and keep hiring with urgency – helping us toward the right number of officers that we need to restore staffing, strengthen investigations and responses, and deliver the visible police presence in communities that Chief Barnes, neighbors, and I want to see.

Right here – FAME Housing's Bryant Manor – is a great example of what we're seeking to achieve by continuing record investments in affordable housing. The building behind me opened in 2024 with 100 affordable rental homes for low-income families and an onsite early learning center. Even further behind us is a building that's currently under construction and will deliver 148 *additional* affordable rental homes.

As our administration has grappled with the City's forecasted deficit, my direction from the beginning has been clear: we cannot slow down on affordable housing. That's why we are accelerating our efforts to address two of our most urgent challenges: affordability and homelessness.

My budget invests nearly \$350 million toward affordable housing – a historic amount reflecting our urgency and commitment. We're also launching the Anti-Displacement and Reparations Housing Fund – committing \$80 million over the next four years to address the impacts of redlining and displacement that hurt communities like mine for decades.

This builds on our proposal's \$29 million investment in the Equitable Development Initiative – the largest amount in city history – to keep diverse cultural spaces alive in our city.

My budget increases ongoing funding for rental assistance by \$4 million – helping invest in the most economical and effective solution to homelessness: keeping people in their homes.

Every affordable home we build or preserve, and every family we keep housed, means fewer neighbors living in cars or tents and more people living with the stability, dignity, and opportunity that everyone deserves.

But for those who *are* experiencing homelessness in Seattle, we know continued action is essential. My budget proposal will increase our investments in homelessness solutions to \$225 million.

Under my administration, we're turning one-time commitments into lasting investments, and continuing to strengthen our shelter system to meet the needs of our unhoused neighbors. Every shelter bed we fund now includes wraparound supportive services like meals, hygiene, storage for personal belongings, housing navigation, and caseworkers. This approach gives people more than a safe place to sleep; it provides a real opportunity to recover, get back on their feet, and move toward permanent housing and long-term stability.

Along with our strong housing investments, we've seen a 50% increase during my administration in the number of people moving from shelter programs into permanent housing, at the same time we've reduced tent encampments by 80%.

But there are too many people still suffering on our streets, so my budget includes \$8 million to open and operate three new shelters next year with over 150 new non-congregate beds with wraparound supportive services. This builds on the nearly 2,900 enhanced shelter beds we currently fund.

We know the scale of the homelessness crisis is too significant for one city to solve on its own. Recent King County Regional Homelessness Authority data shows that about 70% of people experiencing homelessness on Seattle streets became homeless outside of our city. And even with Seattle providing over 60% of the region's shelter beds and 85% of the region's tiny homes, we cannot do this alone.

I have called on the KCRHA to identify available land across King County cities to find possible locations with fewer land constraints than we have here. Put simply, if another city is willing to host needed shelter, we will help pay for it.

Just as we are working to combat a scarcity in housing, we must also take on the food deserts and lack of affordability that impact too many families in Seattle. My budget includes a \$52 million plan, with \$12 million in new program investments to increase the access and affordability of healthy, nutritious food.

While Trump works to eviscerate SNAP benefits and his tariffs, inflation, and dangerous policies put the most basic of needs – healthy food – out of reach, we are proposing a set of real actions

that will make a difference: more affordable food to address hunger, more healthy options to improve nutrition, and more access to reduce food deserts.

My proposal would invest in foodbanks and meal programs, and double investments in our renowned Fresh Bucks Program – clearing the waitlist to serve 16,000 families and increasing monthly stipends by 50%. To ensure a healthy city, our neighbors must have access to healthy food.

This budget invests in what makes our city great – now, and for the future. This Green Lake Community Center represents exactly what we love about this city – a place for growth, for community, for learning, and for joy.

This Green Lake Community Center opened in 1928. As it nears 100 years of age, my budget will deliver a comprehensive renovation in one complete phase, so this place is ready to serve our city for the next 100 years.

This is possible because of the creative financial thinking our team has exemplified throughout this budget process. With Trump's economic chaos and a fluctuating national economy, we were faced with a forecasted revenue shortfall of over \$200 million.

We took immediate action – extending our hiring freeze, stopping non-essential travel, training, and technology upgrades, and moving forward bold proposals to advance our priorities and safeguard funding for critical programs.

Because of this effective approach, we are able to propose this budget for the future without touching our "Rainy Day Fund" and without new layoffs.

This budget also reflects our Every Child Ready Initiative that is before the voters this November. It invests in doubling access to affordable childcare for low- and middle-income families, expands Seattle's nationally awarded pre-school program, and continues the Seattle Promise program that I originated as a City Councilmember.

Investing in the future means investing in our youth. I stand ready to work with the next Superintendent of Public Schools to make sure our investments in youth safety and our innovative approach to mental health resources for every young person up to age 24 are maximized in supporting a shared mission for excellent schools.

We know our parks and community centers are often just as important in the lives of young people. Under my administration, we've made restoring access to parks – like here in Green Lake – a central focus of our administration. Parks are often what people tell me they love the most about our city.

Sometimes that means a focus on the basics, which is why my budget goes even further to invest in bathroom access at parks, making sure more of our bathrooms are clean, safe, and open year-round.

That also goes for the beautiful trees that line our parks and our streets – we can't take them for granted. My budget enhances the City's tree maintenance efforts – but it also funds a new idea to help preserve and protect trees throughout our neighborhoods. I will soon issue a new Executive Order to protect and preserve trees in our city, which will include a new Tree Conservation Easement Program. This idea will allow for neighbors to receive a property tax break for protecting and preserving a tree on their property.

Seattle's local and national image has been informed for decades by our commitment to the environment. And my budget includes a nearly 25% increase in our Office of Sustainability and Environment – helping drive millions of dollars into climate efforts that support resilient communities and green jobs opportunities.

Just as important to our climate efforts is our \$7 million investment in staffing to support Sound Transit expansion in Seattle. In addition to the significant permitting reforms we passed this year, this investment in more than 50 employees leaves no doubt: Seattle is ready, willing, and able to deliver Light Rail expansion to Ballard and West Seattle. We are leading the charge on making sure these projects are built, so that our communities receive the generational transit investments that we voted for.

Seattle's profile has been uplifted by our incredible arts scene and the vibrant culture that radiates from it. I don't take that for granted – we must be intentional in cultivating the next generation of the artists and ensuring the arts are accessible to everyone in our community. My budget invests more than \$23 million through our Office of Arts and Culture to support the arts across all styles, genres and mediums.

This is a budget I'm proud of because it invests in our city, in our people, in the future of Seattle. Not in the narrative that Donald Trump and his allies spin about our city, but in the things that **we want** to define our city. This is a plan to invest in innovation and problem solving, in affordable housing and healthy food, in trees, parks, transit, and the arts. It's an investment in ensuring what we love about this city doesn't fade but only grows.

I look forward to the City Council's consideration and deliberations. Together – all of us, from elected officials and city employees to community advocates and neighbors – are building One Seattle. Thank you.