

Emphasizing the Essentials and Responding to Urgent Community Needs – 2023-24 Proposed One Seattle Budget Speech

Thank you for joining us here today. I want to express my great appreciation to members of the City Council for being here with us, to our City Attorney, to our Cabinet, to Mildred for that introduction, and all the City employees, including those who work every day right here at Charles Street.

Thank you for all you do for our city.

When I took office at the beginning of the year, I challenged all of us to help move our city government in a new direction. To commit to collaboration and innovation. To break down silos and build up new ideas. To focus on getting the basics right, and to set an example for our neighbors as ambassadors for our city.

I asked you to embrace a vision for **One Seattle** – where we work to find common ground and reject divisiveness. Where we strive to bring people together. Where we inspire the best in one another by leading with equity, kindness, inclusion, and humility.

It's clear that this team was up to the task. You've stepped up to the plate and the residents of Seattle are seeing early results. There is progress to be celebrated for sure, but there's much more work **we** must do together.

We are at this location today – the City's Charles Street Vehicle Maintenance facility – because of what it means for the core services we offer to our residents.

On any given day, there are on average 150 City staff working here. Drivers and operators, firefighters and police officers, fleet mechanics, autobody repair and painting specialists, metal fabricators, and tire and towing specialists.

This highly skilled staff delivers maintenance and repair services to many of the 4,000 vehicles in the City's fleet. They come from different departments and have unique specialties, but they are united by the common mission of serving the public. That's **One Seattle**.

Many of these workers are here today. Let's acknowledge them and thank them for their good work.

As we developed the **One Seattle** Budget I present to you today, our guiding principle was how best to meet the urgent needs of our communities and empower our employees to deliver the essential services our residents expect every day.

The Structural Challenges We Face

In my first State of the City address in February, I shared concerns about the City's worsening revenue gap – an issue years in the making and the result of increases in spending outpacing City revenues.

Since then, our country and world have experienced new bouts of economic uncertainty and instability. Inflation and other issues have furthered this challenge – and we continue to see that ambiguity in economic forecasts.

In the face of these economic conditions, our responsibility to support our residents is magnified as they feel that same strain.

Which is why, when faced with a \$140 million revenue gap, we made a commitment to take a hard look at the budget, to disrupt past practice, bend the curve on spending, and prioritize essential city services and urgent community needs.

We closely scrutinized the work we do, looked for efficiencies, and found savings wherever we could. We used revenue from the payroll expense tax to balance the budget – a necessary decision to prevent harmful reductions in services.

Above all else, we learned the most by listening – creating a collaborative budget built in partnership with community, City staff, and the Council. By hearing from the people who provide and use our services, we were able to recognize what helps you do your job and what meets the needs of our neighbors.

Through this process, I'm proud to say that we're able to propose a budget that sustains the high-quality City services our residents expect. It protects critical staffing and makes smart funding decisions to address emergent needs.

After two very long pandemic years and so many challenges along the way, today we stand at a pivotal moment in our city's history. At this intersection of change and challenge, we know the investments we make in this budget can chart Seattle's course for years to come.

To my fellow City employees, we must rise to this opportunity – step up in the face of difficulty – and set the example for our residents by showing resilience and commitment to progress. This budget empowers you to act on that simple mission.

Together, we will uplift our Seattle communities, showing in the face of hardship that our bias toward action, commitment to service, and desire to help others shine through.

Safety

Delivering public safety is our core Charter responsibility. As a City, that's what we were founded to do. But too often, residents feel unsafe on the streets – I believe that in ***One Seattle***, every person has an absolute right to safety.

I pledged to make the investments necessary to fund public safety services at the level our residents expect and demand – this budget accomplishes that goal.

We've seen short-term improvements responding to many types of crime in areas where we have implemented emphasis policing and increased services. But to ensure effective long-term public safety and undo longstanding issues, it's clear we need additional resources and staffing — in all our categories of first responders.

That's why my proposal calls for a 50% increase in next year's Seattle Fire Department recruitment class. This addresses staffing shortages and will reduce record overtime costs. The fire department needs this staffing increase to keep us safe and protect every neighborhood. I'm proud of our fire service, it is

ranked in the top 1% of departments across our country; it's the only fire service in the state of Washington to be ranked in Protection Class 1, the highest possible rating.

Our budget funds the Comprehensive Police Recruitment and Retention Plan, bringing to scale efforts to hire not only more officers, but the kind of officers who reflect our commitment to equitable policing.

This plan looks at innovative programs, modern recruitment tactics, education and family supports, and incentives for new recruits and lateral transfers. We need to make every effort to bring officers here and reverse the staffing crisis that impacts everything we want to do with policing in Seattle.

Candidly, we know it's not just dollars and incentives that will bring more police officers to Seattle. It's making this a place where they want to be – changing the narrative to ensure Seattle is where we lead with service. A city where we acknowledge the good work our officers do, a city where our police officers earn our trust and confidence through their day-to-day actions.

And, for the first time in over two years, we will have a permanent police chief – Chief Adrian Diaz.

Supporting victims and those in need is also an essential City service and a key component of our approach to safety. My budget adds additional victims' advocates to support survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and other crimes.

We also know that evaluating and expanding how we respond to emergencies and to crime will improve safety outcomes. Our Parks District proposal reestablishes the Park Ranger program, which would reduce the need for police visits to parks. And, this budget puts nearly \$2 million towards programs to explore and diversify 9-1-1 responses. We know that just sending a police officer is not always the right approach. This is how we begin to build more options.

We are working hard to stand up a third public safety department strategically deployed hand-in-hand with fire and police to help community members in their moments of need. This investment will provide critical insight to further inform that effort, as we aim to be bold and diversify our approach to public safety.

As we continue to work together to develop a more effective public safety system, I am proposing returning Parking Enforcement Officers from the Seattle Department of Transportation back to SPD. Having heard from our employees and their labor representatives, we understand that our PEOs feel better equipped to do their work from SPD at this time. PEOs office space, human resources, IT resources and equipment are currently still located within SPD.

While we continue our work to reimagine public safety, this may not be our PEOs final home, however this move will avert nearly \$5 million in general fund costs that can be applied towards important community investments. To ensure a smooth return, our budget includes funding for a transition project manager.

Crucial to safety is direct involvement by the community. Our budget adds nearly \$4.5 million dollars in community-based solutions focused on safety through our Seattle Community Safety Initiative and \$1.5 million for the Regional Peace-Keepers collective, part of a \$47 million overall investment in the Human Services Department to support safe communities.

This focus on community solutions and diversified response has only been enhanced by Councilmember Lisa Herbold's commitment to seeing meaningful change and better outcomes. Thank you.

Violence interrupters, credible messengers, and community leaders are effective partners in reducing gun violence and diverting crime. While gun violence has worsened through the pandemic, we can't make change without these community programs helping prevent harm before it happens and connecting those impacted with the support they need.

When it comes to safety and support for victims, we must be impatient. We reject the status quo because any extended delay has human impacts. This budget makes improved response times and innovation priority Number One. Beyond the reactive, safety will come from the proactive – the recognition that everyone needs housing, an education, a good job, and support. In other words, a holistic approach.

Housing and Homelessness

Our administration refuses to be complacent on homelessness. It is inhumane for people to live without sanitation, heat, and running water. Walking the streets of Seattle, the need for compassionate and urgent action is obvious.

While the issue of homelessness is too significant for any one city to solve on its own, we are committed to the partnerships needed to move forward.

As long as people live in parks and on sidewalks, sleep in tents and on benches, we cannot sit still. Our budget reflects that urgency – investing in emergency response, shelter, housing, and our partnership with the King County Regional Homelessness Authority.

The budget includes funding for ongoing shelter beds and the creation of hundreds more, including tiny homes and safe lots. Our proposal ensures we meet our 2000-unit goal and keeps open thousands of shelter units that would otherwise disappear.

Further, this proposal increases our investment in the King County Regional Homelessness Authority -- funding \$88 million dollars in total for outreach, shelter, and other critical programs. Excluding last year's one-time federal dollars, this represents a 13 percent increase in our investment in KCRHA.

We are committed to this regional approach **AND** we demand sustained action. We have seen early indicators of success in this first year of work. Now it's time to move beyond early indicators and into permanent improvements.

Positive outcomes must be more common, more visible, and sustainable. Our continued funding reflects our commitment to that mission – we're going to do our part, but we can't do it alone.

The Regional Homelessness Authority is responsible for developing and executing evidence-based strategies to address homelessness in the City of Seattle and across King County. Other local governments can't sit on the sidelines; they need to be engaged in the solutions. In this first year, I believe we have put in place the relationships to foster that action and collaboration.

We will never succeed without addressing this issue at its foundation. Lack of access to housing is the source of homelessness; gaining access to housing is a solution.

That's why our 2023 budget will put forward **an unprecedented investment in affordable housing** – nearly a quarter of a **BILLION** dollars. **This is the largest one-year investment of this kind in City history.**

This will create hundreds of units of permanently affordable housing and advance affordable homeownership opportunities. It will tackle homelessness and displacement at their root.

By merging investments from our Housing Levy, Payroll Expense Tax, and more, we are taking historic action to create places for people to not just get out of the elements, but to be stable, to recover, and to thrive.

This work is done in tandem with ongoing initiatives to make permitting for affordable housing swift and streamlined. Councilmember Dan Strauss: your action-oriented eye toward a more affordable Seattle has inspired significant new investments in our Department of Construction and Inspections to reduce permitting bottlenecks – a total of seven new positions to speed housing production.

I pledged as mayor that we would make parks and playfields, streets and sidewalks accessible to all. To do so, we created the Unified Care Team– bringing together departments to streamline processes, improve data collection and analysis, and identify duplicative work. We have worked to rapidly create a more inviting and open city. A **One Seattle** approach to problem solving.

As I've shared before, in mid-2021, nearly 100 parks and natural areas managed by Seattle Parks were closed or impacted by unauthorized encampments. Today, 93% (over 450 parks) are fully open and accessible to the public for their intended use, in large part due to our Unified Care Team.

In this budget proposal, we are expanding the work of the Unified Care Team — to address trash cleanup, graffiti removal, and other physical improvements to create a more welcoming Seattle. A cleaner, more vibrant Seattle.

Much of this work has previously been funded by one-time investments. In this budget, we are making that funding ongoing through a \$13 million commitment – making clear that a clean city is a safe city is an inclusive city. We cannot allow this level of service to lapse.

In seeking to improve the way we work with neighborhoods and those experiencing homelessness, the structure of the Unified Care Team will transition from a citywide focus to geographically based teams. This will allow every neighborhood to receive the attention it deserves. We will build relationships with community groups, small businesses and BIAs, and housed and unhoused neighbors.

We will increase staff capacity by 150% for workers connecting those experiencing homelessness with a place to go inside, as the Unified Care Team has done with hundreds of shelter referrals this year.

Simply put, this more localized approach will drive a better understanding of communities, improve support, and create meaningful connections between members of our Unified Care Team and the neighborhoods they serve.

Opportunity for All

Public safety, homelessness action, and a clean city are critical for fostering the conditions that allow for a revitalized Seattle and local economy. But we must go further.

We have the power to marshal resources to share opportunity and help every person reach their full potential. From good jobs, education, small business support, and a healthy environment, this is work we can do by delivering support and services. This too is a core responsibility of government; it's an essential responsibility.

The earliest and most effective investment we can make is through education. In addition to our levy-funded work to support the Seattle Preschool Program and the Seattle Promise program, we are working to expand capacity for learning by supporting the educators needed for kids to learn.

There's been a lot of talk about essential workers the last several years, including those attending this speech today. Childcare workers are no different – they are indispensable. That's why my budget proposal leverages \$5 million in payroll expense tax revenues to support hiring and retention bonuses for Seattle's approximately 4600 childcare workers, who serve over 20,000 kids in Seattle. This is a cause Councilmember Teresa Mosqueda has long championed, and her advocacy for workers and kids makes a big difference in countless lives.

It also includes \$5 million to support the University of Washington's new Rainier Valley Early Learning Campus. This exciting partnership with UW, the state, King County, and many community-based groups will deliver childcare and educate hundreds of kids through the Seattle Preschool Program. Just as important, it will train the next generation of educators, driving an incredible boost of opportunities and skills through workforce development.

For our local and small businesses, after several years of pandemic uncertainty, the questions have moved on from learning about viruses and vaccines to wondering what's next.

When the plywood comes down, what will go up?

Revitalization is more than recovery – it means giving businesses the individual level of support they need to be better than before.

That's what our budget will fund – helping an immigrant business owner renovate their shop in the International District, providing space for an entrepreneur to open their own retail store in Ballard, helping a longtime business owner open a new location in the Central District.

We're putting nearly \$17 million dollars in the Office of Economic Development to support commercial affordability, to drive small business development, transform workforce development and create a Seattle Jobs Center to help connect our communities with careers and new opportunities.

Councilmember Sara Nelson's voice as a small business owner is already helping our Office of Economic Development refine and strengthen this programming. I can't wait to hear more of the common-sense ideas you have, Councilmember Nelson, to advance our common agenda for local prosperity.

Even more critical than the services delivered to our residents is how those services are accessed.

We know that working together with businesses and nonprofits, we can provide better services for our residents. That's why we're developing CiviForm, a one-stop portal to make it easier and faster to apply for discounted City services and other benefits built in partnership with Google. Early results show an 85% reduction in the time it takes to fill out an application.

This budget supports putting more programs onto this common application so more residents can access them. That is both innovation **AND** a focus on the basics.

We, in city government, must work to operationalize equity – to play big ball, not small ball – driving tangible improvements in lives. That's why I'll soon be sharing more details of an Equity Action Plan – a new effort at the City to elevate the people, programs, and projects that are truly and meaningfully advancing equitable outcomes for our residents.

As part of that initiative, we are celebrating City employees who embody this work through the Mayor's Equity Award. And today, I'm excited to announce our first recipient: Kenya Fredie, Supervisor of our P-Patch program at the Department of Neighborhoods.

Kenya represents what we're trying to do to move the needle – using her position to meet Seattleites where they are and deliver equitable change. Kenya has done the hard work of diversifying our P-Patch program – removing barriers by working directly with communities of color. Her leadership has made community gardening more inclusive and helped expand access to locally grown healthy foods.

Kenya is truly getting her hands dirty creating a more equitable Seattle. Let's celebrate her work and strive to replicate her passion for progress.

Healthy Communities

In my inaugural address, I shared my enthusiasm for making Seattle the healthiest city in the country by connecting our most vulnerable residents with healthcare services and using data to track the indicators that most influence health in Seattle.

This budget introduces funding for a pilot for our Healthy Seattle initiative – investing in expanding Public Health Seattle & King County's Community Health Worker program. This will mean 1,000 of our most vulnerable residents will have a defined path to care and can better navigate our overly complicated health care system.

I also want to thank Executive Constantine for his leadership in building a coalition for the bold proposal announced yesterday to advance critically-needed behavioral health care. The time is now to bolster proven behavioral health solutions and improve outcomes with added capacity.

And, as we continue to watch states around the country react to the Supreme Court's dangerous Dobbs decision, we are also providing a quarter of a million dollars in ongoing support for the Northwest Abortion Access Fund, to ensure just access to reproductive care.

Climate and Environment and Parks

All of us, regardless of zip code or household income, deserves clean air, fresh water, and accessible open spaces. Parks and tree canopy cover are a critical part of the equation, while also playing a key role in our efforts to fight climate change.

Earlier this month, we shared our Parks District budget proposal, which the City Council will consider later this afternoon. I want to express my deep gratitude to Councilmember Andrew Lewis for his hard work to move the Parks District proposal forward, embracing the reasons it was created and building consensus on our shared approach to keeping parks clean, open, safe, and accessible to all.

We are investing in the maintenance needed to ensure a world-class park system. To open all bathrooms and renovate those in disrepair. To grow youth activities and mentorship programs. All with a focus on equity and expanding park quantity and quality in underserved neighborhoods. That's what Seattle deserves, and this level of care is what is needed to deliver.

At the same time, early data from our tree canopy inventory has revealed that Seattle's canopy has declined over the last several years. Most noticeably impacted are trees in our parks and natural areas. Protecting our trees and expanding Seattle's urban forests is essential. To increase our tree canopy and reach our goal of 30%, we need a years-long plan and commitment.

That's why our budget will invest in a Tree Equity and Resilience Plan, increasing tree planting capacity, and greening of industrial properties. This effort will prepare us for even more ambitious tree planting goals in the future – ensuring communities with the lowest canopy coverage see the most support. I know how much Councilmember Alex Pedersen values our trees, and I look forward to working with him as we build out this plan.

Last week, I signed into law the first set of Green New Deal Oversight Board recommendations – laying the foundation for our **One Seattle** Climate Justice Agenda. As part of that agenda, in this budget we are taking bold action by advancing over \$20 million into creating a clean energy economy, good jobs, and climate resilient communities, while we reduce pollution. I'm thankful to Councilmember Kshama Sawant for uplifting the voices of those who advocate for winning solutions against climate change.

Our community-centered approach is receiving international acclaim because we are investing in the most impacted. Modernizing city buildings and creating resilience hubs – climate resilient spaces safe for communities during severe weather like smoke, heat, and floods.

We're opening up the new green energy economy to all communities, funding pre-apprenticeship scholarships, more workforce development, and small business support.

We're including millions to make Seattle buildings cleaner and greener, converting hundreds of dirty air oil-heaters to electric heat-pumps and developing groundbreaking clean buildings standards.

We know transportation is a huge driver of emissions, and this budget includes efforts to create transit-connected communities and walkable neighborhoods that reduce pollution. It includes investments in heavy-duty fleet electrification and charging stations for our City fleet, including vehicles serviced right here.

Transportation

Charles Street is a working shop. It isn't always glamorous, but it's work that has to get done to keep our City moving. The same goes for our transportation budget – despite current economic conditions, we're focused on the necessary steps to make Seattle a safe, reliable, and affordable place to get around.

Leading with safety and equity, our transportation budget is focused on Vision Zero priorities and necessary infrastructure maintenance. To support our goal to eliminate traffic deaths and serious injuries on our streets, we're investing millions toward needed safety investments along the city's high-crash corridors, including the Rainier Avenue corridor. This was rightly a priority of Councilmember Tammy Morales, and her advocacy for the most vulnerable who walk, ride, and roll in our most diverse communities should be lauded.

A bold and visionary transportation plan also requires us to think decades ahead.

With the federal government investing over a trillion dollars in infrastructure across the country through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, we are positioning Seattle to compete for those dollars.

As traffic flows again on the West Seattle Bridge, we are preparing so movement never stops on bridges across the city.

And as the largest infrastructure project in city history – the West Seattle Ballard Link Extension Project – moves forward, our budget proposal hires a team of engineers and leaders dedicated to the project. When it comes to generational investments, there are no do-overs. Our city must get it right.

When we invest in sidewalks and bike lanes, transit and freight corridors, it's because we know that transportation isn't just about the infrastructure itself. It's about where that infrastructure takes us.

A few examples: As we fund pedestrian and ADA improvements to sidewalks leading to the Ryther School, we think about the youth who will be able to safely access treatment and services. I thank Council President Debora Juarez for alerting us to why this specific investment is so needed – a result of her intense community involvement and district-level focus.

As we create a unique and bold new Waterfront Park stretching two miles along Elliott Bay, we also envision the trips to Seattle Center, a new Memorial Stadium, and a revived Bumbershoot. As we build out Sound Transit, we imagine quick convenient visits to parks in Ballard and small businesses in West Seattle.

Just like the work here at Charles Street isn't just about fixing trucks and maintenance vehicles. It's about putting our City and our employees in the best position to do their job and help our community.

Your jobs are not easy – but they are appreciated. By me, by our residents, by neighbors and families. You are making a difference every day.

Many, many years ago as a kid, I watched my mom and dad balance our household budget at the dinner table. I was taught early on about financial discipline and management, and this has stayed with me my entire life. While we no longer use pen and paper like mom and dad, one thing holds true in building this budget as mayor — I must be a good steward of your tax dollars. Our \$1.6 billion-dollar General Fund budget serves YOU — the 750,000 residents in our city.

Finally, our budget isn't just about spreadsheets and accounting, it's about services and people. If you remember anything about this budget, remember it as a recommitment to that higher value of public service — serving the people of Seattle with excellence.

I am the eternal optimist in our city. I know Seattle's best days lie ahead, and I know that they can only be realized through the teamwork of our community. We as public servants, community leaders, neighbors, **we** have the standing, the position — the opportunity — to inspire our community to move forward — together. Let's get to it. ***One Seattle.***