

Mayor Katie B. Wilson's 2026 State of the City Address

Good morning, and thank you for joining me today. Thank you to Northwest Tap Connection and to Ben Hunter for emceeding. And thank you to everyone who's here in person today, including members of the City Council; the City Attorney; the County Executive; local elected officials; consular officials; community, labor, and business leaders; department directors; city employees; and people from all across Seattle. This is your city.

I'm so excited to be gathered here at Langston Hughes. This beautiful building began its life more than 100 years ago as home to Washington State's oldest Orthodox synagogue. In 1969 the city purchased this building, and over time it evolved into the incredible cultural resource we all know.

The extraordinary visual artist Jacob Lawrence once had an exhibition here. The visionary author Octavia Butler appeared here. Langston Hughes himself never visited this structure, but he did come to Seattle several times to deliver lectures, and his work has been performed here many times over the years.

This is a place that has been a home to so many emerging artists and hosted so much extraordinary talent. It's a partnership between community and the city's Office of Arts and Culture that offers classes and performances and serves as a cultural hub, and I'm so happy to be here to deliver my first state of the city address.

It's especially meaningful to be here because this is Black History Month, and this year marks the 100th anniversary of the first declaration that February is a month to honor the history, experiences, and power of America's Black and African American communities. Here in Seattle, Black communities built neighborhoods, institutions, businesses, and social movements that continue to define who we are. And Black History Month calls us not only to remember, and to celebrate – but to act.

We are in a moment when our rights are under attack from so many directions. When it feels like, at a national level, we are moving backwards. When it can feel impossible to believe our country will ever emerge from the storm clouds. In these moments it is so important to look to history, and to recognize that we have stood at similar junctures many times before. And to remember how much has been achieved through social movements that emerged in the toughest times, brought people together, and won transformative change.

This month also marks the beginning of Ramadan, and also Lent, which are both times of fasting, prayer, reflection, and charity. And today is Lunar New Year, which is a time for renewal, for family, and to welcome the spring.

In this season of reflection, and new beginnings, I am so excited to be your mayor. And I am so hopeful about what we can accomplish together. But that doesn't mean I look at the city through rose-colored glasses. The hope I feel comes from history. From looking at an institution like this one here – how it's evolved over time and overcome challenges to become what it is today. And from recognizing how that history lets us better imagine what is possible.

As the writer, thinker, and organizer Mariame Kaba puts it, “Hope is a discipline.” It's something you have to practice. You have to actually put in the energy and time. You have to be clear-eyed, hold fast to a vision, and still make the decision every day to keep moving forward.

The discipline of hope is necessary, but it can also be challenging.

I want to start by acknowledging one of the hardest things that's happened this year in Seattle: the loss of the two Rainier Beach high school students late last month who were shot and killed while waiting for the bus after school. We have also recently seen deadly shootings in the Chinatown International District, and in Pioneer Square.

After the tragedy in Rainier Beach, we quickly coordinated with the Seattle Police Department and Seattle Public Schools to ensure increased security presence during the times when people are traveling to and from the school.

My team and I have spent time grieving with victims' families, connecting with community members, and talking about the changes that we need to make as a city. How can students be expected to learn if you are worried, as one young woman told me, that if you leave school for lunch you might never come back? How can you be expected to concentrate in class if you're living in a constant state of grief or fear? How can you be expected to thrive when you've seen so much tragedy and not nearly enough hope, and opportunity, and joy?

We have to do better for our kids.

And I know that hopes are not enough – my job as mayor is to do everything I can to turn those hopes into realities. My job is to take action.

In partnership with trusted community organizations, the Human Services Department, and the Department of Education and Early Learning, my office is implementing an intensive stabilization plan through the end of the school year to reduce conflict and prevent retaliation. In the Chinatown-International District, SPD will restore a late-night presence that was effective before it was discontinued last year. After hearing from key neighborhood leaders, we are also examining options for legal action against building owners who refuse to take responsibility for chronic nuisance properties with long histories of creating dangerous environments for neighboring residents and businesses.

But we can't just react and stabilize, we have to get to the roots of the problem. My office is working to develop a robust and multi-pronged gun violence strategy that will involve collaboration across City departments, County partners, and community experts, including those who have lost loved ones to gun violence. Chief Barnes and other SPD leaders bring extensive experience in gun violence reduction that will be invaluable in this effort.

In the coming days, my office will convene the panel of local and national experts who will develop and launch a strategy that is grounded in a clear understanding of Seattle's gun violence problem and is tailored to the needs of our neighborhoods and communities.

In the spirit of acknowledging where we are falling short, so that we can do better, let's turn next to homelessness.

Last month, I visited an encampment in Ballard that was scheduled to be cleared. After hearing from concerned community members, I decided to extend the timeline to clear the site because I thought that better outcomes were possible for the people living there, their neighbors, and local businesses.

The conversations I had there underscored the reality that we simply don't have enough housing, shelter, and services for everyone who is living unsheltered. I talked with a woman who was 5-months sober, owned three small dogs, and was struggling to find a place to sleep inside. And with some work, we were able to identify a spot for her in a tiny house village. Our teams also helped five more people living at the encampment to secure housing or shelter; by extending the deadline, we were able to help them make that transition without additional displacement. I'm grateful for that.

And I know it's not nearly enough.

Every year, thousands and thousands of people receive the support they need to stabilize their lives, thanks to the hard work of our dedicated city employees, and our housing,

shelter, and service providers. But if you take a step back or just walk around the city, I don't think that anyone can really argue that our overall approach to homelessness has been successful.

We can't get so used to the way things are that we start to feel it's natural for so many people to be left to sleep outside every night.

We have to make sure that everyone can access and enjoy our parks, trails, sidewalks, and other public spaces.

And we can't just keep moving people from place to place and calling that progress.

Here is what we're doing to find a better way forward.

First, we will continue and improve on our efforts to keep public spaces open and accessible. I will ensure that the city is prioritizing encampment removals based on safety issues and neighborhood impacts.

At the same time, my office will be working with our Unified Care Team to achieve better outcomes for people living unsheltered. That means conducting early outreach to people living on-site prior to any posting of a removal and allowing flexibility when housing placements are imminent. I'm committed to minimizing harm to people living in encampments at the same time as I take seriously the City's mandate to keep public spaces open and accessible for their intended use.

Most importantly, we are moving rapidly to expand shelter with supportive services. One of my first acts in office last month was to issue an executive order accelerating the expansion of emergency shelter, and the Interdepartmental Team I established in that order is already hard at work.

We are identifying parcels of city-owned land that could site tiny houses or micro-modular shelters. We are exploring every possible administrative and legal tool we have to accelerate the expansion of emergency housing and shelter. And we have been working closely with the city's budget office and philanthropic partners to secure the funding we need to ensure that everyone has a warm bed to go to at night.

In the coming weeks, my administration will also introduce legislation to city council to fund shelter expansion and make it faster and easier to build shelter in our city. I know this is also a key priority for several councilmembers, and I look forward to working with them to bring more people inside.

With well over four thousand people sleeping unsheltered in Seattle as of last year's Point in Time Count, I know we have a big hill to climb, and dramatic changes won't happen overnight. But I am determined to add 1,000 new units this year, with services matched to people's needs, and we are on our way to reach this goal.

Another central focus of my office's work in our first month-and-a-half has been ensuring that Seattle is prepared to respond to threats from the federal government. I was recently at the US Conference of Mayors, where I met with the leaders of cities that have faced surges of federal immigration enforcement and heard about the lessons they had learned about how to keep people safe.

Seattle has not yet seen a surge of ICE activity here like we saw in Minneapolis. But we're doing everything we can to prepare. That includes amplifying the work of our Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs, which provides Know Your Rights Trainings, legal consultations, safety planning, and broad partnerships with immigrant and refugee communities. Together we just launched a webpage to serve as a centralized place to communicate City policy and provide resources and updated information about federal immigration enforcement activity. That webpage is available at seattle.gov/stand-together.

I have already taken concrete steps to clarify the responsibility of the police to document unlawful acts by federal agents, to bar civil immigration enforcement from staging on city property, and to invite private property owners to post notice clarifying that their property may not be accessed by federal agents without a warrant.

Recently, I sent a member of my team to Minneapolis to support and learn from the community response there. One key lesson he brought back is that people are ready, willing, and able to support each other, and that the most important thing we can do as a city is to organize the strongest possible community response.

I also know that the pending expansion of the city's existing CCTV surveillance system is on a lot of people's minds.

So today I want to give you some insight into how I'm approaching this issue.

I continue to have the concerns I expressed during the campaign about data security and how surveillance cameras could be abused to target vulnerable communities. I have also been moved by what I've heard from families and communities impacted by gun violence. I understand how CCTV cameras have been a useful tool to solve crimes, and can reduce profiling and protect witnesses.

These are both valid points of view that come from wanting the same thing: to be able to enjoy our neighborhoods and live our lives, knowing we'll come home safe.

I know this is a contentious issue. I want to get this right, not rush to a particular deadline. So my team and I will continue to dig in, meet with people who have different opinions, and try to find the best way forward.

My overriding goal is that whoever you are, and wherever you come from: if Seattle is your home, then this is your city, and there's a place for you here.

That's also my message to renters, families, seniors, working people, small business owners, and everyone who's struggling with our city's affordability crisis. You shouldn't need a six-figure income to live here. You shouldn't need a half-million dollars to buy a house and have some stability in your life. And you shouldn't need to be a millionaire to afford to raise a child.

You should be able to raise a family in an apartment if you choose, spend time in vibrant neighborhoods and beautiful parks, and be able to pursue your dreams and live your life without being always haunted by the stress of whether you can pay your bills.

The economic squeeze has been going on for so long that it can be hard to believe we can do anything about it. So I like to look to the past and see what we can learn there.

Back around the turn of the last century, Seattleites were in an uproar over the high price of food. (Which sounds familiar, but back then it was the cost of onions people were most upset about, rather than eggs.) Farmers were also frustrated about how little money they were making, thanks to price-gouging middle-men who siphoned off most of the profit.

In response, the city took action. They passed an ordinance creating Pike Place Market as a place where producers could sell directly to consumers, and everyone could get a better deal. (That's right, a government-supported partnership to expand access to affordable groceries. Seems like an interesting idea.)

Today, it's hard to imagine Seattle without the market. And while costs are once again a major issue today, this history reminds us that together we are capable of doing big things.

And the biggest change we need is to make this city more affordable.

Affordability isn't just a poor person's issue, just a young person's issue, or just a working person's issue. The crisis reaches very high up the income scale. It hits baristas and

coders and artists. Longshore workers and electricians and caregivers. It hits small business owners who are struggling to pay their own bills too.

And it also affects the economy as a whole. If half of your income is going to rent and another few thousand dollars a month is going to childcare, that means you have less money to spend on anything else, and that lower spending hurts our neighborhood businesses. And if families can't afford to live here, it's almost impossible for employers to retain a great workforce.

So today, I'm launching my affordability agenda. We're focusing on four key areas: affordable housing, affordable childcare, affordable food, and an affordable city to build a small business.

I think you all know that I'm a renter myself, so I have firsthand experience of our city's housing crisis. But I think everyone knows home prices are out of control. Everyone knows the rent is too high. And everyone knows that it's almost impossible to find stability or pursue your dreams when so much of your money is going to pay for the basics.

A couple weeks ago, I launched my mayoral renter's survey in 16 languages to make sure we were hearing directly from renters across the city. And more than 6,000 people who aren't usually part of the policy-making process have already shared their experiences with us.

We've heard about people forced to move every year because the rent just keeps going up so much faster than their income. About junk fees on everything from package delivery to mandatory concierge garbage service. And so much more.

The survey closes this Friday, so if you're a renter and haven't filled out the survey yet, you still have a few days. Check it out at wilson.seattle.gov.

I will be working closely with the city council on policy in the months ahead. With their partnership, I hope to quickly provide renters some relief by reining in some of the most deceptive and abusive practices.

Landlords and developers are a part of this conversation, and my office is hearing from them as well. My team and I will be meeting with affordable housing providers as well as private market landlords to ensure that they have the tools they need to be successful here.

Seattle is a great city, and people and businesses want to come here and be a part of it. That's why we also need to build more housing of all shapes and sizes so more people can afford to live here. After last year's Comprehensive Plan update, I am committed to advancing additional legislation to allow more construction of more housing in more areas. I look forward to working with tenants, homeowners, developers, urbanists, neighborhood activists, our Office of Planning & Community Development, and City Council to move forward much bigger and bolder policy in this area in the months and years ahead.

We absolutely need to build a ton more housing.

But I'll be honest: this is not going to make home ownership affordable for lower and middle income families in any reasonable timeframe. So I'll also be working with the Office of Housing and other city departments to improve and expand on our existing programs that support affordable homeownership. That means making it easier and cheaper to build backyard cottages, providing downpayment assistance, partnering with community land trusts, and supporting legacy homeowners in neighborhoods like this one.

This has been an exciting month for another big part of my housing affordability agenda: social housing. I'm pleased to say that last week City Council adopted an Interlocal Agreement which will allow approximately \$115 million to begin flowing to the Social Housing Developer this spring. That's more than twice the revenue that was initially projected.

There's a lot of wealth in the city, and it's very gratifying to know that we're going to be able to use a very little bit of that wealth and put it to work building housing.

It has taken years to get here, and social housing shows what sustained community-led organizing looks like, and what it can achieve.

As housing costs continue to rise and displacement threatens so many of our neighbors, social housing gives us a powerful tool to expand our non-market housing sector and create true stability. With a robust revenue source, new leadership, and a mayor's office deeply committed to its success, the Seattle Social Housing Developer is now set up to fulfill its promise and deliver the mixed-income, permanently affordable, publicly-owned housing that Seattle voted for.

Let's turn to another huge expense for working families: childcare. It was kept pretty quiet, but a few of you may have heard that I myself have had trouble affording childcare. Not everyone has parents who are able to help, and not everyone gets to watch their childcare arrangements become national and international news.

Right now there are so many gaps where so many children and so many families don't have the support they need, and our whole society pays the price. Parents are stressed, kids struggle, and working families move out of the city because they can't afford to build a life here.

We've already been doing a lot right in this area, well before I became mayor. Thanks to the incredible work of the Department of Education and Early Learning and their award-winning Seattle Preschool Program, and their Child Care Assistance Program, Seattle is already a national leader in this area.

That's encouraging, but it's also a little unnerving that we are seen as leading. Because any parent would tell you there's so much more to be done. It just underscores how far the US lags behind many other countries in our support for families.

We need to bring down the cost of childcare, expand our pre-K program and summer enrichment opportunities, and make sure the people who are doing this work are paid enough to raise a family themselves. We also need to make it easier to site, start, and run childcare facilities in Seattle.

Public space and housing are big parts of this too. We need to build more family-sized apartments and homes, expand offerings at our community centers, and create more welcoming places for families to go and enjoy themselves without necessarily having to spend money.

There's a lot of pieces to this. But in the end, my job is to make Seattle a great place to live, work, and raise a family.

And part of that is making the whole arc of childhood an area of public concern. Everyone considers K-12 education a basic public responsibility, but for some reason there hasn't been that same broad consensus about preschool, or childcare, or even after-school and summer programs.

It's time we started treating childcare and early education as public goods, accessible and affordable to all -- just like our parks, schools and utilities. My administration will be pursuing this vision as we begin to implement the Families, Education, Preschool, and Promise levy voters passed last year, as well as identifying new resources and partnerships that can take us even further.

The high inflation of the past few years hit us all hard. The rising cost of food in particular has been a challenge for families that are already struggling.

When the Kroger Corporation decided to close the Lake City Fred Meyer last year, it further highlighted the importance of ensuring access to fresh, affordable food. The recent closure of the grocery store at 23rd & Jackson created a second new food desert in the Central District. Grocery stores are essential community assets—they support daily life, local jobs, access to healthy food, and neighborhood stability.

We have to start treating food access as core community infrastructure. One important step in that direction that long pre-dates my administration is the Fresh Bucks program, which helps low-income Seattle residents afford fruits and vegetables at participating farmers markets, independent grocers, and supermarkets. As of this year, we have increased monthly benefits and cleared the waitlist, and Fresh Bucks is now supporting more than 17,000 households.

Our Office of Planning and Community Development, the Office of Economic Development, and Office of Sustainability and Environment are exploring a variety of approaches around how the city can work with private partners and the grocery workers union to help protect good jobs and expand access to affordable food. We are also looking at new and alternative grocery models that better fit different community needs. That's all a long-winded way of saying we're looking at a public grocery store, and other ideas as well.

Everyone deserves reliable, affordable access to fresh food in their own neighborhoods, and we'll be working to make that vision a reality.

Our small businesses are facing an affordability crisis too.

I recently joined a lunch with small business and community leaders in the Chinatown International District, where one woman described how it took 2 years before her friend's business could get the permits they needed to open. That's two years of waiting until they were able to hire people and turn a vacant storefront into something more alive and welcoming.

I heard many similar stories last year during the campaign, and I know that some businesses never end up opening because long delays like this are so expensive.

While rules and regulations are important, some are unnecessarily costly to comply with. Commercial rent is too high. And the high cost of living can make it harder to attract employees.

I've talked to a lot of different business leaders since the election.

And yes, there are some places where we disagree.

But when I hear business leaders talk about their challenges, they don't start by talking taxes, or minimum wage, or my opinions about the history of social movements.

When I hear them talk about their challenges, what I most often hear about are the same as the challenges all of us face: affordability, public safety, and homelessness.

That's because a welcoming city with thriving neighborhoods and lively public spaces is a great place to do business too.

We have made progress in this area, and I'm committed to going further. The Office of Economic Development's Small Business Expediting Program is working to help cut red tape for small businesses across the city, and we will step up those efforts.

Our Seattle Restored program continues to grow, partnering with property owners to transform vacant commercial spaces into pop-up shops.

And we are offering more support for small businesses to address property damage and security issues through the Back to Business Fund. Applications are open now and I want small businesses across the city to apply. Visit seattle.gov/OED for more information.

I want to take a moment now to speak directly to Seattle's business leaders: your success matters deeply to this city.

You attract talent from around the world that helps make our city great. The taxes you pay help fund the public services we all depend on. And you contribute to the civic fabric of Seattle with your philanthropy, volunteerism, and leadership.

Affordability is at the heart of my agenda. I know it's a critical issue for you as well.

But affordability is not government's responsibility alone. It is a shared economic imperative. We cannot remain competitive if line cooks can't afford to go to restaurants here, social workers need public support themselves, and young professionals cannot afford to build their dreams here. We cannot be a great place to grow if families are priced out of the city.

So my message to Seattle's employer community is that we want you at the table. We value your ideas, your investment, your partnership, and your willingness to stay engaged with us, as many of you are already doing — even if the work can be difficult.

Because Seattle has always been a city of builders.

We build companies that change the world. We build research institutions that save lives. We build neighborhoods that reflect our values. And we build partnerships that make progress possible.

And together, we can build a city that is more affordable, and safer. Where City Hall is known for good governance and delivering results that everyone can see and feel. A world-class city that we can all be proud of.

You may have noticed I didn't put budgetary price tags on a lot of the items I mentioned today. And I appreciate that this year's budget is going to be challenging. My team is hard at work on that already.

So you can expect to hear a lot more about budgets and revenue in the months ahead. But I think there's a lot more to be gained by starting that conversation by looking at what we need, and where we want to be, and then figuring out how to get there.

I came to the job of mayor as an organizer and a coalition builder. And when you build a campaign to make progress on an issue, you start by bringing people together around the biggest vision possible. You find consensus where you can. You attract more people. You move forward. You make some gains. Maybe you don't get everything you wanted, but when you accomplish things, you raise expectations, and you set the stage to achieve even more.

That's how I think about governance too.

And so let's start from a place where we all agree: We all want to have a great city with welcoming public spaces, vibrant local businesses, incredible things to do, and great ways to get around.

Here's a taste of what that's going to look like in 2026:

This Saturday, we're reopening the Hiawatha Community Center in West Seattle after a 6-year closure. The new South Park Community Center will be opening this year too, and there's going to be a spray park there, which is pretty great, because my daughter and I always have fun at a spray park. Who doesn't?

Community centers are such an important part of our neighborhoods – they're places where people can gather, families can enjoy themselves, and you can connect across generations and cultures, without having to spend any money if you don't want to.

In March, the Crosslake Connection is going to open, bringing light rail across the lake and weaving communities together like never before. And I'll be representing our great city on the board of Sound Transit as we continue to build out the public transit system of the future, including light rail to West Seattle and Ballard.

We're going to partner with the Seattle Department of Transportation to finally paint that bus lane on Denny Way, speed up the crosstown Route #60, and advance a transformative Seattle Transportation Measure that gets us on track to restore and surpass the levels of transit service we had reached before the pandemic.

In June, we're going to welcome people from around the world to an incredible FIFA World Cup. We're going to host celebrations and watch parties that make the whole city part of the event, and encourage our guests to experience all the amazing things our neighborhoods have to offer.

We're also going to create more opportunities for more people to play soccer. I'm thinking about organizing a friendly match between elected officials, so if anyone on the City Council is up for that, let me know.

And there's so much more incredible stuff going on.

Decades in the making, our amazing new waterfront continues to come alive. There's a great public bathroom there too, and we're going to see if we can do a lot more of that, soon.

The zoo is opening their new Forest Trailhead exhibit, which will support global conservation work, protect endangered species, and provide lovely new homes for their irresistibly adorable red pandas and other creatures.

Seattle Parks & Recreation is opening a new Rainier Beach Skatepark, the Garfield Super Block, the Northwest Native Canoe Center, and more.

And our Department of Neighborhoods this year is celebrating 35 years of doing the quiet but critical work of helping neighbors come together to strengthen connections, build trust, and shape the future of Seattle together.

I'm not naïve. I know there will be disagreements.

There will be editorials, and outrages of the week on social media. Maybe there will even be more quote-tweets from Elon Musk.

And there will be more challenges too. (We've already had some challenges!)

But I've never been more hopeful, or more excited about what we can accomplish. I've never had such a strong sense that we're at the beginning of something great.

And I feel that across the city. A growing sense that maybe, yes, we can do big things.

A lot of that hope comes from the thousands of people who work for the city every day. I've met a lot of incredible public servants already, who are so excited to talk about their work and what it means. A couple weeks ago I got to meet with members of Seattle Public Utilities' South Park Emergency Response Team who do essential work to protect South Park from Duwamish River flooding during king tide season. What I saw in them, and what they share with thousands of other city employees, is that they have an extraordinary dedication to Seattle, to all the people who live and work here, and to our collective future. We have so many great people at the city, and we accomplish so many wonderful things.

To all the people who make city government run: your work is a place where I find hope.

As I said up top, hope is a discipline. And each thing we accomplish lets us build that sense of hope, which lets us do more.

We've already taken the first steps. I'm not glossing over the challenges. They're real.

But a lot of incredible things are ahead this year.

You may know that I'm a new football fan, and I attended my first live game in-person at Lumen Field for the NFC Championship. Like everyone else in the city, I watched the Super Bowl too. We did in fact dominate from the first snap, and I look forward to collecting on my wager with Mayor Wu and getting those World Cup tickets for 12 young people from Seattle.

The parade last week was an amazing experience, just seeing that spirit where everyone was united, joyfully celebrating our city. And that feeling of unity, and pride, and celebration – that's what I want to cultivate all year round. And it's how I want my term to be judged.

I want to be judged on whether people are feeling excited to live here, whether they love their neighborhoods, enjoy our parks and public spaces, and feel free to live their lives and pursue their dreams.

I want to be judged on whether we are living our values as a welcoming city.

Whether people are excited to start a business. To have a family. To retire. To celebrate. To just be who they are in all of their beautiful complexity.

So when I talk about cultivating the discipline of hope, that's what I'm talking about. I want to see people open up to the idea that another world is possible.

And by the time I'm giving the 2027 version of this address, I hope you're all feeling that basic truth, and know and believe that yes, this *is* your city.

Because Seattle is the best city in the world.

At the Super Bowl celebration before the parade last week, Ernest Jones had a good message for all the haters. He said, "We're here to stay and we ain't going nowhere."

That's how I feel about Team Seattle too.