

State of the City 2024: Persistent and Pioneering Progress

Good morning and welcome to the 2024 State of the City address.

Thank you, Leonard, and thank you to your entire team for being so accommodating at such a special place for our city. It's my honor to be with you today from the Museum of History and Industry.

Within these walls lives an excellent narrative of where we've been, and where we can go as we forge our future as a global hub for innovation.

Over the last several years, despite hardships and challenges, we've pushed forward. We've been eager for progress. We know that there is much more to achieve.

The state of our city is persistent, and it is pioneering.

MOHAI chronicles our region's past and the ideas that brought us to where we stand today. Winston Churchill famously said, "Those that fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it."

We must learn from our history.

Since Seattle was incorporated over 150 years ago, we've gone through change and crisis. Each time, responding with focus, ingenuity, and collaboration.

In my first State of the City two years ago, I stressed a back-to-basics approach – a dedication to core municipal responsibilities, like restoring public safety, getting people indoors, keeping parks accessible, fixing potholes, and making sure the water's clean and the power comes on with the flick of a switch.

But just because something is a basic – an essential – there is still room for innovation. We can make it work better. This requires us to be bold, and it's the reason that this mantra has allowed Seattle to time and again pick ourselves back up and change the course of our city and the world.

It's why our city punches way above its weight – with companies that have changed how the world does business, labor partners who have shaped nation-leading minimum wage increases and worker protections, and policymakers at the cutting edge of meaningful progressive change.

And in this former timber town, on the ancestral lands of the Duwamish and Coast Salish people, our history tells us that it's innovation and new ideas that break through logjams and cultivate hope.

Innovation means a new Community Assisted Response and Engagement – CARE – department to better help our neighbors in crisis. Resulting in an improved, holistic, diversified public safety system.

Innovation means updating our Industrial and Maritime zoning for the first time in decades. Resulting in a new path for thousands of housing units, tens of thousands of jobs, and Seattle's future as a port city.

Innovation means updating our City's tree ordinance for the first time since its creation over 15 years ago and issuing a tree Executive Order to guide our work. Resulting in protections for 150,000 additional trees, a requirement to replace three trees for every one tree removed, and plans to plant thousands more annually.

Innovation means making the most of our unique opportunity at Fort Lawton. Resulting in a better plan to build up to 500 units and transform 34 underutilized acres into a new community – and expanded parkland – that will last for generations.

Innovation means piloting new electric freight trucks – and replacing gas-powered leaf blowers with electric alternatives. Resulting in fewer emissions, less noise, and healthier communities.

To our returning City Council members, I'm grateful for the work we've done over the last two years. To our new members, I am thrilled for what's next. I'm proud of the ambition of our ideas and the **One Seattle** model that will allow us to solve our greatest challenges and move Seattle into the future together.

PUBLIC SAFETY

One of the areas where I'm most energized to work with our new City Council is public safety. Last year, overall crime fell 7%, major violent crime fell 6%, and property crime fell 10%.

However, homicides and the damage inflicted from gun violence have increased – we must change this. This will require supporting a comprehensive array of public safety solutions.

The state's leadership to ban assault weapons last year is a significant step and we are continuing to advocate for gun law changes in Olympia.

Last year, our officers recovered over 1,500 guns, a record for our city. I will repeat: There are too many guns in this country, on our streets, and in the wrong hands.

We need to embrace new technologies funded in this year's budget to enhance the fair, effective, and constitutional policing of our officers.

Last year, we achieved sustained compliance with most requirements of the federal consent decree that began over a decade ago. United States Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke came to Seattle to recognize our progress and the reforms we have achieved, including the fact that use of force occurs now in less than one-quarter of one percent of all police encounters.

I am proud of the work our police officers do every day and grateful for their dedication. We will continue to build the trust and confidence that the people of Seattle rightfully demand of our police department.

We are urgently recruiting more police officers who share our values. Our monthly applications are the highest they've been in over three years. We have comprehensively reviewed our recruiting system, and we're continuing to make changes to processes that haven't been touched in decades.

I don't know if moving from paper to online applications counts as innovation or just plain common sense, but either way, it's an example of the kinds of steps needed to bring forward a new generation of officers who want to serve our neighbors, represent our communities, and keep us safe.

I appreciate that Councilmember Bob Kettle is rightly prioritizing this essential issue as the Council's new Public Safety committee chair.

Our administration has regularly met with other branches of government to design public safety solutions, but just as important are the ideas and experiences of the public. Next month, I will hold a Public Safety Forum to hear ideas and perspectives directly from the people of Seattle and give them a seat at the table in making Seattle a safer place.

Last year, we worked with our Seattle Firefighters on a new contract that reflects the service they provide to everyone in Seattle. And I want to recognize the members of the International Association of Firefighters Local 27 and its president Kenny Stuart, Chief Scoggins, and the entire Seattle Fire Department for your partnership for a safer city.

As the son of two City employees, I look forward to further building on our commitment to our workers and to being a great employer, as we deliver strong, essential services for our residents

and work toward agreements with our labor partners, including the Coalition of City employees, police officers, and many others.

At last year's State of the City, I announced a newly envisioned CARE department.

Today, our CARE Department responders are redefining what public safety looks like.

The CARE Department is delivering new kinds of help and support to residents who are experiencing a behavioral health crisis. This work frees up our police officers to address emergencies and situations where they are needed most.

When I was a kid growing up in Seattle, there was no such thing as a 9-1-1 call in this country. Today, our 9-1-1 dispatchers are swiftly and efficiently sending CARE Department responders to emergencies where they are needed. And the feedback we're receiving is very positive. While handling over 250 incidents, only three times have our CARE teams had to ask police to return to the scene.

This is a good start. However, the data shows that in 2023 there were more than 8,000 9-1-1 calls where a CARE response may have been the best response.

That's why we will expand the CARE Department to increase capacity and help more people in their time of need. We'll continue to improve collaboration across the City's public safety programs, connecting previously siloed efforts and ensuring that our resources are used efficiently and effectively.

But CARE isn't the only area where we're redefining and diversifying our public safety response. As we work to keep parks open, clean, safe, and welcoming for everyone, we've bolstered our Park Ranger program.

Park Rangers had thousands of interactions with the public last year and de-escalated over 400 potential 9-1-1 calls – just in Downtown parks. In 2023, we increased our number of rangers by 600%, and this year we will almost double that number again as Rangers begin to serve in parks citywide.

Parks and community centers are foundational for growing young people and difference makers for kids through healthy physical activity and exposure to the natural world.

Councilmember Joy Hollingsworth understands this better than most and shares my passion for public safety. And after nearly a decade, it's wonderful for the LGBTQ community to have representation on the City Council, especially in District 3, at a time when too many residents are feeling unsafe because of who they are.

Let me be clear: No matter your sexual orientation, your gender identity, your religious, racial, or ethnic background: **You are welcome in Seattle**. You are Seattle. You belong. That is my priority as your mayor. I grew up in a Seattle where I was not always welcome as a little biracial kid from the Central District. I get it.

I see you. And I'm proud to be your mayor and have you as a part of our great city.

This is also true for people who are sick, struggling, and in need of help.

Whenever I see someone needing help, I want to see them getting it. Seattle streets cannot be paved with good intentions or with lives of despair or crime. They must be filled with help and support. And the change we push must be sustainable.

Since last year, we have taken strong action to address the deadly impacts of fentanyl and synthetic opioids on our city. The Executive Order I issued set out a roadmap for a diversified approach, balancing enforcement with expanded systems of care and treatment. We have created new programs to address the harms caused by addiction and have increased the tools available to our first responders.

This is why we developed a public drug use ordinance rooted in both accountability and a connection to services to get well.

The ordinance was crafted under our **One Seattle** approach. We did the hard work to bring together law enforcement, service providers, outreach workers, and experts. And we built the most comprehensive and progressive ordinance of its kind in the state.

With our dual public safety and public health approach, SPD seized an estimated 2 million deadly fentanyl pills and is arresting dealers, traffickers, and those causing the most harm. We have also diverted nearly 150 people to case workers and service providers, giving people a chance to get the help they need outside of the criminal legal system.

PUBLIC HEALTH

The needs we are seeing on our streets have resulted in action. We have developed new and innovative public health programs and services in an area where the City has not historically had a leading role.

Our public health focus includes the new Health 99 post-overdose response team, an expanded mobile medication delivery for opioid use disorders, and a new contingency management drug abatement program.

And, next month, we will share details of our \$7 million investment funding a post-overdose center and health facilities that will offer new ways to help people recover in their time of need.

These programs will save lives.

I want to thank Council President Sara Nelson for her leadership to address this synthetic drug crisis that is killing hundreds. She has been a strong advocate for investing in proven treatment solutions. I applaud that she's bringing this focus to the King County Board of Health – a body I am also joining to underscore the critical importance of these issues.

I am grateful for our partnership with King County Executive Dow Constantine and the King County Council, and I look forward to continuing our work together to innovate and adapt programs to meet the moment.

Just as the City, County, and State came together to save lives during the COVID pandemic, we must bring the same resolve to this crisis playing out on our streets.

ECONOMY

We know we have an opportunity to address the root causes of safety issues and build a city where opportunity is within reach for every resident.

That's why in 2023 we put into action our Future of Seattle Economy agenda – a strategy to promote inclusive economic growth, ensuring Seattle is a place for entrepreneurs and workers, where any person can start and scale a business or find a good job.

Our Office of Economic Development expanded access to capital for nearly 300 businesses, launched a first-in-the-nation program for a model of small business ownership, and increased access to middle-wage jobs in growing industries like healthcare.

And, under an Executive Order I issued last year, our government has taken tangible steps to expand contracting equity and to support small businesses run by women and people of color. Another example being the Liberty Project, a coordinated effort to support BIPOC businesses in collaboration with the University of Washington, Seattle University, and Tabor 100.

We've made improvements in how small businesses navigate the City, like shaving 105 days off the average time it takes a business to have their first permit review.

And our Seattle Restored program continues to fill formerly vacant storefronts with small businesses, artists, and popups – some of which have turned into long-term leases.

Just last week, we announced a \$200,000 investment from JP Morgan Chase to help turn more of the over 30 locations currently open into long-term leases.

Our Downtown Activation Plan doesn't fixate on trying to revive the old Downtown – instead, we aimed to reimagine what a Downtown could be. Our plan centers forty-six short- and medium-term initiatives, and in less than a year, we've made headway on 83% of them.

Our Downtown Activation Plan is gaining momentum: Downtown *is* activated.

- More than 106,000 residents now living Downtown.
- Over 80,000 workers come to their offices Monday to Friday.
- The highest number of hotel rooms sold in a summer since 2019.
- And a record-shattering 2023 summer with over 11 million visitors downtown, 3 million of which came in July for the MLB All-Star game and major concerts.

And if you think that was fun – wait until the 2026 FIFA World Cup gets here. The equivalent of six super bowls will be played in our city over the course of three weeks. Seattle will welcome hundreds of thousands of visitors from around the world with over a billion more watching on TV.

Speaking of sports, I'm ready to add another point to our Downtown Activation Plan: Bringing back the Sonics. NBA teams are already choosing to play pre-season games here, and that's a clear sign that Seattle Center and Climate Pledge Arena are ready for NBA action. We stand ready to do whatever it takes to bring back the green and gold.

2024 is a huge year for Seattle's new Waterfront Park, a prime example of "Space Needle Thinking." Half-a-million visitors came to the waterfront last year.

After more than two decades of collaboration between civic, business, and community leaders, we are well on our way to completing our world-class waterfront. A waterfront that is reimaged, open, green, and activated! Next year, we get to celebrate its historic completion together.

Arts and culture are an important part of Downtown Activation and our identity as a city. We rely on artists and arts organizations to energize and bring life to our public spaces and support surrounding businesses.

The arts draw people in, making Seattle a place people want to visit, linger, and live. King County's new arts measure will invest \$90 million to revive the Creative Economy, as our Office of Arts and Culture works to beautify spaces and support lively activities downtown.

My vision for Seattle is one where our walls are filled with beautiful murals and public art. This is also a pillar of our holistic strategy to address the impacts of unwanted graffiti tagging and vandalism.

Thank you to City Attorney Davison for your work on this issue, including your work to ensure accountability for those causing harm to our residents and neighbors.

I'm proud of the positive change neighbors are seeing from our efforts and partnership with Uplift NW, which employs formerly homeless people to learn new work skills and clean graffiti across Downtown.

City Staff worked on 27,000 graffiti removals at 23,000 locations in 2023. The Uplift Northwest partnership yielded an additional 385 private property locations. In total, we have cleaned over 100,000 square feet of graffiti.

From SODO to the Chinatown International District, our downtown is special because it is diverse – in places, in people, in industries, and in jobs. Making these neighborhoods safe and activated for small businesses and community members is a priority.

Councilmember Tanya Woo, congratulations and welcome to the City Council. I so look forward to working together to advance initiatives citywide, including lasting improvements for our cherished Chinatown International District.

From South Lake Union where we are today to South Downtown, where now is the time to create an urban development vision for a new kind of neighborhood running South of Columbia, North of Holgate, East to Little Saigon, West to Pier 48. We will advance a coordinated, targeted growth strategy within this footprint.

With several major projects on the way, it's a rare alignment that gives us an opportunity we haven't had in decades to design and foster a new neighborhood that demonstrates Downtown is for everyone.

When I talk about big ball – this is it: a chance to significantly increase people living Downtown – with affordable housing, grocery stores, childcare, high quality jobs, and diverse and vibrant small businesses and cultural spaces.

All of this action calls for a cohesive approach to align outcomes and make sure that decisions are made in sync across projects.

HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

Our Downtown Activation Plan also includes innovative efforts to transform underutilized office space into residential and other uses – optimizing our built environment for the current needs of a modern city.

Next month, my office will deliver legislation to the City Council to turn this big idea into a reality through permitting improvements and incentives based on insight from architects, building owners, and housing leaders.

And even as we change building uses, encourage more residential skyscrapers, and support significant growth Downtown, we know that growth can't *only* occur Downtown.

Seattle must be a city for students and teachers, workers and families, for people of all income levels. And, as I've said before, we know the answer to homelessness starts with more housing and places for people to come inside.

That's why in the next two weeks, we'll release the details of our One Seattle Comprehensive Plan Update.

A master plan for growth – it's just one part of a bold One Seattle Housing Agenda that allows new kinds of housing across the city, brings missing middle housing to every neighborhood, and expands density citywide, with a focus on areas with strong transit access, close to shopping and services, and other amenities.

My Housing Agenda will create opportunities for new generational wealth, simplify our nearly 300 separate zoning categories, create complete neighborhoods, and reduce permitting timelines and other barriers to development.

The State of Washington took an important step in asking EVERY city to do its part and make it easier to build affordable, family-friendly housing. Seattle is already leading the way. This Housing Agenda will not only adopt the spirit of these changes but continue to point the way forward for our region.

I look forward to working with Councilmember Tammy Morales – a former planner herself I might add – on the Comprehensive Plan Update as we work to create this needed housing.

We are making the largest investments in affordable housing in our city's history – 1,400 units opened last year and another 7,600 are in the pipeline. And, thanks to the voters who approved a significant renewal of our proven Housing Levy, we will build at least 3,100 more affordable homes.

In my first year in office, I set a goal of ensuring permit approval in less than one year for all affordable housing projects. In 2023, we overwhelmingly met that goal.

More housing, more quickly.

Our approach to the homelessness crisis reflects a back-to-basics approach too – a belief rooted in compassion – that those suffering deserve better than living outdoors and that public spaces like parks and sidewalks should be safe and accessible to all.

Our innovation was the creation of the Unified Care Team – proof positive that we can achieve progress on each of these ideals without sacrificing the other.

We created a state-of-the-art system that informs a data-driven, objective, equitable approach to resolving encampments – for the people living in them and for the neighborhoods where they're located.

The results are significant – since the foundation of the Unified Care Team, we've increased shelter referrals by 83%, over one thousand people have come indoors, and tents on our sidewalks and in our parks have been reduced by half from over 1,000 when I took office.

This is an approach that's safer for everyone – it's delivered a 41% decrease in gun violence incidents related to homelessness and 16% decrease in fires at encampments or lived-in RVs.

Again, we seek to learn from our history. The latest example is the launch of dedicated neighborhood teams for each region of the city – allowing them to build personalized relationships with the communities in our neighborhoods and with people housed and unhoused to help them come inside.

Councilmember Maritza Rivera recognizes that this level of neighborhood-based constituent service makes a big difference for our Seattle neighbors. She's made school safety and constituent service top priorities since taking office.

But just as our departments can't work in silos to make progress on the homelessness crisis, neither can the cities that make up King County.

As with any new organization or innovation, the King County Regional Homelessness Authority has taken steps forward, but there have also been bumps along the road. This year, we will drive needed changes to improve oversight and accountability and foster stronger regional collaboration and solutions.

A regional approach means that there is permanent supportive housing and services in every community in our region – not just in Seattle.

Councilmember Cathy Moore dove in headfirst to her role as the Housing and Human Services Committee Chair and as a member of the KCRHA Governing Committee. I know she will be a strong partner in this effort.

TRANSPORTATION

I'm similarly looking forward to working with Councilmember and Transportation Committee Chair Rob Saka as we work to build a transportation system that meets the needs of our residents no matter how they get around.

Part of our commitment to making Seattle safer, and Seattle government more responsive to neighbors, will be our investments in our roads, bridges, sidewalks, and transit infrastructure.

In the coming weeks, I will share the set of plans that will form the foundation of our transportation levy renewal package, in which we'll ask the people of Seattle to help address infrastructure needs in our city.

As with every levy ask, we want to balance the critical needs in our neighborhoods with the financial concerns of our neighbors. This means we are taking a hard look at the priorities people are sharing with us from across Seattle, our ability to deliver on those priorities, and the timelines to get them done.

Here is what I'll be presenting:

A focus on the basics: repaving and reconstructing arterials and neighborhood roadways in poor condition, replacing signage and striping, and filling even more potholes.

Fixing bridges: Upgrading safety and functionality in ship canal crossings, as well as safety upgrades and improvements to other aging structures.

Taking climate action: Planting more roadway trees, expanding electrification, and improving connectivity to and within our city to reduce reliance on fossil fuels.

Improving safety: taking an equity and safety approach to sidewalk construction and improvements – making sure kids get to school and activities, seniors get to care and services, and people of all ages get to shopping, transit, and other amenities. Pedestrians, cyclists, and transit riders are all examples of those who demand – and deserve – safety.

This is our opportunity for a dialogue with the people of Seattle to help refine and align these investments and programs, and then present a final package to Council this spring for referral to voters.

No levy can solve every problem – but this transportation measure will make great strides toward meeting current safety and maintenance needs with the aspirations we have for a Seattle that is safer, greener, and more connected.

As we make generational investments in light rail to Ballard and West Seattle, we must meet the mobility needs of current residents – and prepare for future growth and change. We can do this by improving on the basics today and laying a strong foundation for the future.

CLIMATE

And, as we continue to fight the climate crisis, we recognize transportation isn't the only source of carbon emissions in our city. Buildings contribute nearly 40% of Seattle's greenhouse gas emissions.

Last year, we advanced nation-leading climate policy through our Building Emissions Performance Standard. This is a pathway to eliminating fossil fuel use in hundreds of large buildings citywide, reducing building emissions by 27%, cutting overall greenhouse gas emissions by 10%, and creating thousands of new green union jobs.

I am already hearing from mayors in other cities who are looking to that legislation as they build their own models to tackle this crisis. One of many ways Seattle continues to be a national and global climate leader.

This year, we're bringing a renewed focus to decarbonizing residential homes across the city – creating a healthier living space and a healthier environment for all of us.

When I took office, Director Farrell and the Office of Sustainability and Environment identified climate pollution in residential homes as a top issue and set an ambitious 2030 goal of transitioning homes off dirty and expensive heating oil.

We are accelerating efforts to help even more low- and moderate-income households transition from oil heating to clean and energy efficient heat pumps.

We'll also launch new rebates and no-cost conversions for households to transition from fossil fuels to efficient electric appliances, heat pump water heaters, and electric induction stoves.

These innovations will help households save on utility costs, support better indoor air-quality, and reduce climate pollution.

In the coming months, you will hear more about partnerships made possible by the state of Washington's Climate Commitment Act to boost our work and speed up timelines, and I want to thank Governor Jay Inslee for his stalwart climate leadership.

GOOD GOVERNANCE

Our approach to innovation extends to even the most basic of City functions – how residents access our services.

In 2023, we officially launched CiviForm – a tool focused on removing barriers and making it easier for low-income families to apply for City programs and savings.

We launched with 8 programs offering qualified Seattleites over \$23,000 in savings on living expenses such as childcare, transit, and groceries.

Instead of needing to fill out multiple applications for different programs, we created a single application. A one site, one stop shop.

And it's working: So far, nearly 5,000 residents have applied to City programs in their preferred language in under 5 minutes, some qualifying for multiple discounts. CiviForm is making it easier and faster for Seattle residents to get benefits that they already qualified for.

This year, we're accelerating the work of my Affordable Seattle Executive Order to bring online an additional 15 City programs offering up to \$63,000 in savings for families that need it most.

This innovation was made possible because of our public, private, philanthropic partnerships with Google.org and Exygy. And our collaborative work on this software is now scaling to other cities and states around the country.

And, just last month, CiviForm was honored with a Silver Anthem award. This award recognizes excellence in a product dedicated to advancing humanitarian action and services.

The last serious challenge I will highlight requires both commitment and new thinking. That is our budget, with a deficit forecasted near \$250 million.

The size of this deficit means we have difficult financial decisions ahead. And while there are some who would suggest that the answer lies simply in new revenue, the fact is that passing a new or expanded tax will not address the fundamental issues needed to close this gap in the long-run.

Without changes to how we budget, this problem will occur again and again for the City for years to come. Delivering a sustainable, balanced budget is a basic responsibility of City government.

However, now is not a time for despair. I reject notions of austerity. Instead, this is a chance to hit reset, to revise our budgeting practices, and to double down on the programs, projects, and policies that are effective and making the most difference for the people of Seattle.

It will be data-driven guided by the City's first One Seattle Data Strategy and Executive Order I issued last year to optimize the use of data to make better decisions.

Our pace of spending requires a systemwide analysis of every expense stream and line of business, as well as a granular analysis of dollars spent. We do this from the bottom-up with our employees, labor partners, and community, and from the top-down with our Cabinet and City Council.

This work is hard – but it's work that must be done, and it's an approach that will ensure we have a well-run, efficient and effective city government in the future. By being more deliberate in how we spend, our investments go further and make a greater impact for our residents. That's the opportunity in front of us.

This won't be possible without the work of Councilmember and Budget Chair Dan Strauss. Councilmember Strauss has been a strong partner for our administration since Day One, and it's because of his collaborative style that I know we can make headway on this challenge together.

With a new City Council, there is a new level of expectation for the City. We don't run away from high expectations, in fact, we draw energy from them.

As a newly elected body, each City Councilmember will push their own agenda. Powerful rivers are formed by many streams. That is how we will overcome our obstacles.

One Seattle has never meant that we go along to get along. Since the very first days of my administration, we've never stopped working with someone just because they may disagree or see things differently.

Instead, we are relentless in our efforts to find common ground and to turn that into common cause.

We brought this principle to life by uniting over 4,000 Seattleites through the One Seattle Day of Service. Yet another example of how we can bring creativity to execute on one of our community's core values – giving back. I hope to see you there this year for our third annual event on Saturday, May 18.

Let me close with a final thought.

"I'm proud of the work that we have done together. I wish 2024 will be the best year in Seattle's history, but "wishing" is not a plan. It has been said, "The best way to predict the future is to create it."

Let's create new approaches and new ideas. In a learning environment, one's goal should not be to be seen as the smartest in the room, but the one who learns the most. And from learning comes leading.

Seattle's pioneering spirit will elevate us to a better tomorrow. Our goal of building ***One Seattle*** is rooted in everything we will create. Thank you for being part of it.