

## **Snohomish County Executive**

### **2019 Budget Address**

**September 25, 2018**

### ***The Future We Choose: Partnerships and Service***

Good morning! Thank you all for joining me here today.

Before we get started, I'd like to recognize the county's hard-working finance and budget staff. Please stand up. Thank you for putting up with our many requests for information and your great analysis. We're fortunate to have each of you.

#### **Change**

We're living in a moment of significant change across Snohomish County and the Puget Sound region. Change is evident in our climate, our economy, and our landscapes. In our daily lives we see it everywhere: From technological changes shaping how we shop and drive and learn, to our growing population putting pressure on our housing costs and transportation system.

Each of us knows that Snohomish County is a wonderful place to live, work, and play. Our mountains, our farms, our forests, our neighborhoods, and our bustling urban streets give life to world-class communities and opportunities.

As we address challenges and take advantage of opportunities, it's essential that we pause for a moment and ask ourselves: What is the future we choose to create? Not only the future we choose for ourselves, but also the future we choose for future generations.

Change is never easy, and it demands much of those in positions of responsibility. Change can be difficult, but it also comes with great potential. In a dynamic and changing world, I believe we must keep our focus on two core values: partnership and service.

We all know that our costs of doing business are rising faster than our revenues. This reality, which we have been living with for years, requires us to reimagine how we do business and how we provide the services our residents need and expect. The answer is to become more efficient and more effective. In 2019, the emphasis for Snohomish County will be to continue to expand our efforts to achieve this

efficiency and effectiveness. I truly believe there are many things we can do to improve our service to the public, improve the working conditions of our employees, and do so even in the face of limited resources.

### **Partnerships and Collaboration**

Partnerships and collaboration are critical to our continued success as a community, because they help us identify and implement the most sensible solutions for our most stubborn challenges. Of course, no one individual has all the answers. Our collaborations make us stronger and more knowledgeable precisely because we are working with others, tapping into their expertise and perspectives. That's why I'm very proud to say that this year's budget has been marked by the most bipartisan and collaborative process in the county's history.

We took a new approach this year with the council. I'd like to offer particular thanks to Council Chair Wright and Councilmember Nehring for their willingness to meet frequently and sometimes at length. In addition, Terry Ryan, Brian Sullivan and Sam Low were helpful partners throughout. We appreciate the constructive and bipartisan manner in which those discussions occurred. Council members were invited into the budget making process early and often, and I thank each of them for their participation and engagement throughout. We shared with them insights about our decision-making. We wanted to open and extend ourselves to ensure there would be no surprises and to ensure that we could put forward a balanced budget that reflects the values of our community.

Other elected officials in the county—Assessor Hjelle, Auditor Weikel, Sheriff Trenary, Prosecutor Roe, Clerk Kraski, and Treasurer Sievers, as well as our judges—all helped us get to where we are today.

We also spent considerable time listening to our residents. The values of our community guide our strategic decisions. And we appreciate all those who shared their thoughts. We know that public safety is the top priority. We know that taxpayers feel the burden of paying for federal, state, and local needs. We know that many—but not all—are benefitting from our growing economy. We have heard about housing affordability, education, the needs of our seniors, transportation, our beautiful parks, opioids, and all the other issues that the public most cares about. These priorities from our community are reflected in the budget I present today.

I'm proud to say that we have built a strong partnership with the Council. We are committed to continuing this open, collaborative process and look forward to completing the 2019 budget process in the same spirit. We will build on this collaborative process for other areas of county governance.

With change all around us, we continue to nurture existing relationships with our cities. Together, we face our shared challenges and opportunities: such as preserving our natural resources; developing tourism; addressing the opioid epidemic; expanding workforce training; improving local and regional disaster preparedness; as well as planning for the continued growth of our community and economy.

We must acknowledge that we are all facing challenges that don't respect city or county borders. From Stanwood to Index, Edmonds to Everett, and Mill Creek to Granite Falls, we are all in this together.

We are partnering with our cities to prepare for the growth that we know is coming. Earlier this year I hosted the Vision 2050 Summit in order to bring all of us together to begin planning for our shared

future. That shared future includes an additional 400,000 people expected in Snohomish County by 2050. By then, we will have 1.2 million residents and be the second largest county in the state. Planning is underway for additional opportunities to engage our elected leaders and local communities in these critical conversations. I am excited about these opportunities in 2019 to shape our future for the better.

As most of you know, Snohomish County Tomorrow, or SCT, has existed since 1990 and has served as a very useful venue for developing local and regional growth-related policy. It also makes sense that with so many far-reaching issues affecting our entire county, we need to consider institutionalizing a countywide platform to help us all address our most complex challenges.

Collaboration and partnership are key if we are to successfully address economic development, population growth, the opioid epidemic, transportation, housing, and emergency management to name a few. We must continue to approach them as one county and one region. We have begun the conversations about what that might look like either within SCT or elsewhere. I am proposing to create in 2019 a council of governments, giving us a better forum for quickly coordinating on issues of mutual concern.

We've also partnered with leaders and agencies across the county with our innovative approach to the opioid epidemic. Late last year, I partially activated our emergency management system in order to take on the complicated challenges of opioids. The human toll of this crisis is devastating for our families and our community. Those personally affected and our broader community struggle to balance public safety concerns with individual personal compassion. I want to use all of our available tools while ensuring we're not duplicating efforts. Again, our collaboration will help ensure that we're using our limited resources effectively and wisely in 2019.

With our many partners, we established the Multi-Agency Coordination Group, or MAC Group, to take the unprecedented step of bringing all local jurisdictions and agencies to the table to face this challenge cooperatively. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Sheriff Trenary and his staff, as well as Jeff Ketchel and his colleagues at the Health District, for their leadership and insights. Admittedly, the opioid crisis is currently bigger than any one county can tackle, but by working together we're doing everything in our collective power to improve public safety, as well as compassionately care for those who suffer from substance abuse.

In the last two weeks, we have met with Mayors and Tribal leaders to talk about how to better integrate their needs into our broader MAC Group efforts. We all see the suffering and the cost. Together we are starting to see glimmers of hope.

In just the last few months, we opened the Diversion Center, an effort to move people out of the revolving door of the jail to long term—and cheaper—recovery. At the urging of our presumptive next Prosecuting Attorney, Adam Cornell, we have proposed in the 2019 budget a Diversion Counselor to help us imagine a new way to address opioid impacts on the justice system. The Office of Neighborhoods—a collaboration between the Sheriff's Office and the Department of Human Services—has expanded and is providing more hope for those suffering from addiction. None of these can be done alone but only with the help of our partners.

I have determined that it is in our best interests to continue to grow our collaborative opioid response and will keep our emergency management system partially activated in 2019.

We are grateful for the outstanding work accomplished with our state and federal partners. We are fortunate to have such effective advocates for Snohomish County in both Olympia and Washington, DC. They have been instrumental in helping us bring more state and federal funds to the county to address pressing needs in job training, housing, transportation, the opioid epidemic, and more.

We are very thankful for our strong partnership with the Navy and veteran community. We are continually looking for ways to provide additional support to Snohomish County's service members, veterans, and their families.

We are working hard to make our case for Boeing's New Midmarket Airline, the NMA, to be built right here. We want Boeing to thrive in our community now and for the next 100 years. I established the county's NMA Task Force to ensure we are working with the county council, cities, ports, educational institutions, and others to put our best foot forward to further grow this partnership that has lasted for decades. In the 2019 budget, we are investing to make sure we will have an aggressive recruitment effort. We are ready to compete and succeed in landing the NMA.

We have a strong partnership with Forterra and other partners to keep our urban forests healthy and preserve green space. Through the Sustainable Lands Strategy we are bringing diverse interests together to solve longstanding challenges. The regional climate collaborative, our partnership with governments and agencies across the region, will allow us to be more resilient and prepared for the effects of climate change.

We have partnered with labor to ensure we are extending contracts as quickly as possible and not letting them lapse, providing more stability for county workers. Unions have been leaders in the movement for economic justice and have an important role to play in protecting family-wage jobs and ensuring safe workplaces. We will continue to work with our allies in labor in 2019.

In 2019, we are developing a new partnership with the business community and labor to establish a new trade school with proposed seed money in the 2019 budget. This will be helpful in meeting our workforce needs, particularly as we look for better pathways from high school into the trades. This is an area of undeniable need.

We are building relationships and coalitions with historically under represented and marginalized communities. We must have a government that serves all equitably and itself represents the whole community.

We have established a Faith Leaders Roundtable to ensure we have open lines of communications on issues of mutual concern. We have partnered with them on para-navigator training and emergency preparedness, two areas of need across the county.

All of these activities will continue under the 2019 budget we are proposing today.

## **Service**

I want Snohomish County to be a great place to work. I want to recruit and retain the best workforce possible. I want there to be pride in a job well done. This is the future we choose. We can only do this with the help of everyone who works at Snohomish County.

Two years ago, I launched the Service, Technology and Excellence Program, also known as STEP. This is our effort to transform county government into a modern efficient organization, continuously seeking ways to improve our processes and the quality of our work in order to better serve the public. I want every employee to feel valued. I want the public to have positive experiences with us.

Today, I am launching STEP 2.0 to bring a new burst of energy to our effort. In STEP 1.0, we launched the initiative, established our continuous improvement office to lead our efforts, and started down the path of organizational transformation. We want to guide the people who do the work so that they can better serve our customers. These were great first steps and started the process of culture change and improved service.

With STEP 2.0, we will be expanding our efforts by adding to our leadership development program. We will work on multiple fronts, with diverse tools, and bring greater efficiency and effectiveness to everything we do.

Our Continuous Improvement team has been busy engaging across the county, and I want to ensure that everyone knows that this effort is a priority for me because I believe that government can have a positive impact on those we serve.

In the past couple of years, we have successfully consolidated our enhanced Emergency Communications Office into DEM, enabling significant advances in our emergency preparedness. Our PSAPs have joined together and now SERS is looking to do the same. We have also consolidated elsewhere and will continue to look for efficiencies in how we are structured. This work will continue in 2019. If there are efficiencies to be found, we will pursue them.

STEP allows us to take a bottom-up and top-down look at how we do business and gives us the tools to eliminate waste. In reality the county is faced with financial challenges, since our expenses continue to rise faster than our revenues. By collaborating with our employees we can find innovative ways to surmount those challenges.

In 2019, we are also implementing a new customer service system to allow the county to better manage requests from the public. We want the ability to track specific requests and a new process to quickly connect people with what they need. We want to prevent anyone from falling through the cracks and to provide the fastest and most reliable service we can to our taxpayers.

Let me give you an example of our successful efforts at improved efficiency and service. On September 1<sup>st</sup>, just a little over three weeks ago, our Planning and Development Services Department went paperless. Now, when someone wants to submit plans for approval, there is no need for paper to change hands. It can all be done on-line without a trip downtown. This saves time and money for the county, and it saves time and money for those who are seeking permits. PDS employees were instrumental in making this happen. They embraced the methodology of STEP and brought about this change faster than many thought possible. Congratulations, PDS!

In the Medical Examiner's Office, employees have streamlined many processes. One of their efforts was to give our law enforcement partners actionable knowledge more quickly. This can save lives and prevent months of pain for families as they await test results.

The Auditor's Office, Public Works, the Assessor, Information Technology and many more departments across the county has been very aggressive about finding efficiencies and savings in their operations through STEP.

Departments have begun to make the changes that will improve how we serve the public and also make Snohomish County a better place to work. I would like to acknowledge all the hard work and the trust in the process. Culture change is not easy, and because of you we are well on our way. In 2019, we will continue down this path.

## **Conclusion**

For me, the budget is not just about dollars and cents. It's about our priorities. Our values. How we want to improve life in our community. Yes, we balanced our budget for 2019. Yes, we avoided significant cuts and any lay-offs because of the strong economy. We once again made public safety our number one priority. We have started the courthouse renovation project, saving upwards of \$86 million. If all goes as planned, in 2019 our residents will be able to fly out of Paine Field, the airport of choice, to destinations across the country. While our infrastructure in the county is aging, we have a plan to address it. We have improved the fund balance to better handle the next economic downturn. These are the facts you'll see in the budget book we hand to Council today.

When you look at all of the budget numbers and the policies we have highlighted, it comes down to the people we serve and their needs. We can never lose sight of the veteran, or senior, or student, or farmer, or builder, or family who is served by the county. They are why we are here.

We have a lot to accomplish in 2019, and the public has appropriately high expectations. Our budget and accompanying initiatives will allow us to serve many needs.

None of what I lay out today to create the future we choose can happen without the heart and dedication of those in this room and throughout the county. I can say with great confidence: we are uniquely fortunate for having such great folks that work with us every day.

Change is here, and we are ready for it. With our partnerships and a dedication to service, we will be able to create the future we choose for Snohomish County.

Thank you.