

**The Future We Choose:
Transformation and Sustainability**

Proposed 2020 Budget

Tuesday, September 24, 2019

Thank you, Chair Ryan. I appreciate the partnership we have with you and the County Council.

I believe we are all committed to ensuring Snohomish County serves our residents with superior service and an eye toward achieving transformative goals.

Thank you also to Vice Chair Nehring and Councilmembers Sullivan, Wright, and Low. Together, we have done very important work for our residents.

I would also like to thank Assessor Hjelle, Auditor Weikel, Clerk Kraski, Prosecuting Attorney Cornell, Sheriff Trenary, Treasurer Sievers, and our elected judges. We have an extraordinary group of public servants in Snohomish County, and they don't often get the recognition they deserve. I appreciate their partnership.

Today, I present my proposed 2020 budget to the Snohomish County Council. Every year we take this opportunity to look anew at our priorities as a region and a government. While a budget may seem like just numbers on a page, it really is a reflection of our values. It is our mission statement for the year. This year's proposed budget, like the last three, focuses on transforming county government in order to meet the needs of our residents.

Of course, we don't do that alone. Rather, we rely on our partners working here on the county campus, as well as leaders across the county in business, non-profits, and other governments. It isn't the title we hold that matters, but instead the value we place on making our community stronger than it was last year. And we do this very aware that we must use resources wisely and with restraint.

This year, again, we have been completely transparent with the Council and our county partners in our budget deliberations. We kept the Council informed about our planning early and often. There are no surprises here, because by working together, we better serve the public and make better decisions.

The proposed 2020 budget works to improve public safety, reduces the damage being done by opioids and other drugs, enhances our ability to address housing affordability for all residents, strengthens our economic development capabilities, expands our efforts to improve public service and become more

efficient, and makes the county's operations more environmentally and fiscally sustainable over the long term. These are the priorities we share today and will work on for the next year.

Public Safety

In the last few years, Snohomish County has committed significant time and resources to addressing some of our most serious public safety needs. Chief among them is the opioid epidemic and the resulting impacts to individuals, families, and our neighborhoods. We have always believed that we need equal parts compassion for those suffering from addiction and resolve to ensure we are protecting public safety.

We have put in place a series of new tools to help some of our most vulnerable residents and give us an opportunity to start making headway on the opioid epidemic. We know how street crime has demoralized many of our residents. We are all tired of seeing the negative impacts of addiction in our community: theft, break-ins, needles in parks. It is not what any of us wants to experience. We also know that, like Sheriff Trenary says, we cannot arrest our way out of the opioid crisis.

Knowing these things, we came together as a community and acted. Two years ago, I partially activated our emergency response system and worked with Sheriff Trenary, the Health District, and cities to launch the Multi-Agency Coordination Group (MAC Group). This brings all of the relevant agencies and governments together to work on common objectives. It also gives us a forum for discussing priorities. In the 2020 budget, I have proposed a fund that will be distributed through the MAC Group to help cities and our non-governmental partners access resources for high-priority needs.

Over the last few years, with the partnership of Sheriff Trenary, the County Council and our cities, we have expanded the Office of Neighborhoods to bring more embedded social worker and law enforcement teams to some of the hardest hit parts of our community. Working together with the Council, State Legislators, and Governor Inslee, we also established the Diversion Center to ensure that when people want to get clean they have a place to go. Just last year, we opened the Carnegie Center to provide wrap-around services to those who need assistance from experts in substance abuse, mental health, job training, housing, and other vital areas. Also last year, Snohomish County filed a lawsuit against those companies and individuals most responsible for flooding our community with opioids.

In the proposed budget, we are creating the new treatment and recovery space at Denny, and with the strong leadership of Chair Ryan, we are also starting the process of building a new precinct for the Sheriff's Office to better serve our south county communities. All of these programs are public safety priorities in the proposed 2020 budget. All of these programs are in part a response to an epidemic that is ravaging our region and country. All of these programs, working together, in time can make a difference. We cannot quickly solve addiction and the problems that come with it, but we can make progress each year in how we respond as a community.

We have been fortunate to hear over the last year from many of our law and justice leaders about programs they would like to bring to Snohomish County. The budget process this year brought new and promising innovations to the table. I share their excitement about possible new policy tools we might use, while being sensitive to potential costs across the system.

Though we've had modest success, judging by some evidence of downward crime trends, there's still much more to do. That's why, in the 2020 budget, I have proposed a study that will take a holistic look at our entire justice system and determine both where opportunities might exist for innovative new programs and where reforms may be needed. Everyone has really good ideas, and the study will give us the tools to analyze each within the context of our system. It will help us determine how we can restrain costs while improving public safety for our residents. This study, in conjunction with our STEP Initiative, will help us find a practical path forward, identify any efficiencies, and improve our processes.

I know Councilmembers share my interest in doing all we can to protect the safety of our residents and ensure our law and justice system is incorporating best practices. By supporting the Law and Justice Study, we will be able to work together on reforms and develop a comprehensive strategy to improve our entire system.

Housing Affordability

Another area of urgent need in the county is housing affordability. Too many of our residents are struggling to pay for housing or buy their first home. Everyone has seen the headlines about the cost of housing continuing to rise, making our region one of the most expensive markets in the country.

Our strong economy has brought job growth, but our housing market has not necessarily kept pace. We are seeing some lose their quality of life because of rising housing costs and some lose their housing. For the working poor, the lack of affordable housing can force them into homelessness. For middle class families, the cost of housing is taking an ever bigger slice of the pay check, cutting into what could be spent on other necessities.

Earlier this year—in partnership with our cities and the housing community—we launched the Housing Affordability Regional Taskforce (HART). By bringing everyone to the same table, we can look at the problem as a region and determine if there are policies that might help us make an impact. HART is focused on the full spectrum, from housing for those on the lower end of the income spectrum to the middle class.

The HART Taskforce will be issuing a report by the end of the year laying out what's possible and what ideas we should adopt. I appreciate the hundreds of hours that people are committing to the work of HART and am confident that we will identify how we can move forward as a region. I will continue to find innovative ways to use our regional leadership to help residents who are struggling.

Another item in my proposed budget for 2020 is funding for a seasonal shelter. As we learned this past winter, we don't have shelter capacity when the weather turns frigid and we are hit with significant snowfall. This gap was glaringly obvious. Thanks to the hard work of a number of our county departments and many volunteers, we quickly opened a shelter just up those steps on the first floor of this building. However, that is not a long-term solution. Therefore, I have proposed dedicated funding to identify a space that can be a seasonal shelter when we have extended days of severe weather. Those in need will now have somewhere to go when we have life-threatening weather events.

Considering our public safety needs, the opioid epidemic, and the challenge of affordable housing, it is vital that we work together as a region. That is one reason why I have proposed a broader mandate for a reformed Snohomish County Tomorrow. By bringing together decision-makers from across the county on a wide range of pressing issues, we can better work on our shared priorities and challenges. Over the next year, we, in partnership with Councilmember Nehring, will be formalizing these ideas and helping to institutionalize these reforms within SCT.

Economic Development

We place great value on protecting those most in need. We also value our region's continuing economic health. This last year has been important for our economic development efforts. We have higher regional and global visibility. We continue to see significant interest in Snohomish County from businesses and investors wanting to tap into the great assets we have here.

Back in March, I was incredibly proud to help launch commercial air service out of Paine Field. For those who have flown out of Paine Field, you now understand that we really do have the nicest terminal in the United States. And that's not hyperbole. We have already won national awards for our Public Private Partnership and accolades for the terminal design.

But it's not just our new commercial terminal that is thriving. Businesses on or near Paine Field account for over \$20 billion in economic activity every year and tens of thousands of jobs. We should not take that economic engine for granted. But, instead, we should support the continuing development of Paine Field to ensure opportunities are not missed.

Now I want to take the next step to maintain and grow the economic engine that is Paine Field. In the 2020 budget, I am proposing to hire an economic development professional at the airport. By expanding our economic development team and focusing on the airport, we will be better positioned to support existing businesses and expand our economic base. I appreciate the partnership of Councilmember Low as we work to maximize economic opportunity at the airport.

Our regional economy relies on a well-trained, highly skilled workforce, and if our workers can't find affordable housing or good training opportunities, they will go elsewhere. We must ensure we are doing everything to support our existing businesses, to attract good, new jobs, and to maintain a thriving workforce. We must do it all, including creating high-road economic strategies to serve all parts of our economy.

We have many exciting opportunities in Snohomish County to diversify and expand our economy. We want to be in the best position possible to take advantage of those opportunities.

Public Service

One of my top priorities has always been improving our service to the public. One way we accomplish that is by being good stewards of resources. People work very hard for their money, and we must ensure that every dollar spent to serve the public is spent wisely.

The 2020 proposed budget sets aside additional resources for our revenue stabilization fund. This was an idea of Councilmember Sullivan and thanks to our work with the Council was included in the budget last year. As we hear about potential negative economic signals, it is vital we have flexibility should the economy soften. It is because of good fiscal management and a strong economy that we were finally able to put money into the budget stabilization fund. By making these tough and necessary decisions now, we will be better positioned to respond to the next economic downturn.

Part of being a wise steward of resources is ensuring Snohomish County maximizes grant opportunities from federal and state governments. We have been fortunate in getting a significant portion of our revenue from such grants. In fact, our Department of Emergency Management was recently notified that they will be receiving a major grant from FEMA for disaster preparedness. They are leading the region in being prepared, and we will carefully use the federal dollars to ensure we are as resilient as possible.

Often, grants, particularly in human services, are based on population. Next year will bring with it the 2020 census and our opportunity to count our residents. Snohomish County is responsible for organizing a Complete Count Committee to maximize participation in our census. Our Complete Count Committee has met and is ready for the important work ahead.

In my proposed budget, I have set aside a modest but important investment for ensuring we are doing everything within our power to spread the word about the census. For every person who is counted, the county receives approximately \$2,000 in various grant funds. I don't want us to miss out on funding opportunities because we couldn't reach everyone and get them counted.

As you know, our county is diverse and is becoming more diverse. We have residents whose families come from literally every corner of the world, and they call Snohomish County home. However, county government does not always mirror the communities we serve. That is why I launched the Equity and Inclusion Initiative and set up an Equity and Inclusion Task Force. I want the county to serve everyone equitably and be composed of people that reflect the diversity of the communities we serve. I have just received the first report from the Equity and Inclusion Task Force and over the next year we expect to increase our activities to make county government more inclusive and welcoming for all.

One area of great importance to the public is improving our transportation infrastructure. Our county has some of the worst traffic in the country. Since I commute every day from outside Monroe, I know all too well the frustrations of being stuck in traffic and not having good alternatives for getting to work. Bad traffic isn't just a hit on our quality of life, it also hurts our economy and the environment. That is why I've championed mass transit for the region. By giving more options to commuters, we can improve quality of life, take traffic off our roads, speed commerce, and help the environment.

Earlier this month, I was honored to attend the groundbreaking for Lynnwood Link Light Rail. In just a few years, light rail will finally be making it into Snohomish County. The line that will stretch from north Seattle through Mountlake Terrace and into Lynnwood is projected to be the busiest in the entire system. For those stuck in I-5 or I-405 traffic, help is on the way.

We will continue to make maximum use of the opportunities that will come with light rail. Working with our city partners, we will ensure light rail works to benefit economic development, housing, and transportation along the entire corridor.

But light rail is just one part of an entire system. Bus Rapid Transit routes will help connect north and south, east and west. The Sounder Train will continue to take passengers to work and home. We are also working hard to advocate with the state and our legislators to create a more integrated transportation system. Our 2020 budget continues to invest in bridges and culverts, ensuring we are maintaining the safety of infrastructure and the health of our water.

In some of the less glamorous but necessary parts of the budget, we continue to make steady progress. Investment in our information technology infrastructure had been deferred for years. We are beginning to catch up. In order to best serve the public, we must have modern information systems and software. We must invest in cyber security and training. The public expects us to be a modern government without requiring that every transaction be done in person. We are moving in the right direction, and I appreciate everyone's partnership as we adapt and develop.

Environmental Sustainability

As a fisheries biologist by training, I understand how our natural systems are impacted by development, growth and climate change. We all value this beautiful place that we call home. Without clean water, clean air and clean land, our way of life would be very different and not for the better. It is our responsibility to ensure we are doing everything to make county operations as environmentally sustainable as possible. Improving our economic health, while protecting orca and salmon populations, are not mutually exclusive goals. We can and must do both.

In partnership with the County Council, we have established ambitious clean energy goals. To further those goals, I have proposed in the 2020 budget the creation of a roadmap to help us appropriately plan for our clean energy future. This isn't just a good thing to do for the environment, but also will help us save resources in the long term.

We have a number of other environmental initiatives that are supported within the 2020 proposed budget. When I launched the Puget Sound Initiative, I had a vision for making consistent progress every year on improving the quality of water that flows into the Sound. The Smith Island project had probably the biggest impact but others will, too.

For example, I have proposed improvements to Meadowdale Beach Park. Councilmember Wright has been a strong champion for this project that has widespread regional impacts. Improving Meadowdale will allow us to restore significant salmon habitat and improve water quality before it heads into Puget Sound. It will also improve public access to the park, make safety upgrades, and improve what is already a popular destination in south county.

We have included funding to continue our Healthy Forests Initiative, ensuring we are being good stewards of our forests. Our goal is to plant one million trees in the next 20 years. I appreciate Forterra partnering with us to create the forest stewards program.

Just this month Paine Field was awarded Salmon Safe designation because of a significant effort to make the airport green. We will continue to make steady progress to ensure we minimize impacts to the waters flowing from the airport into Puget Sound.

Another important environmental initiative is our Vision 2050 effort. As a growing county, we must plan wisely for the growth we know is coming. Effective planning means that we can better protect the environment and our quality of life. As we work through the comprehensive planning process, I will be engaging with all of our partners to ensure environmental goals are protected alongside growth goals.

As a scientist, I have no doubt that climate change is happening and that we are probably seeing some of the effects of that change. Because of our location, we will have significant impacts from climate change, including rising waters on the Salish Sea, increased risk of wildfires and floods, warming weather, and negative impacts on species such as orca and salmon. Our Department of Emergency Management is working with a regional climate collaborative to ensure we are prepared.

I'd like to announce today that I will be establishing a Climate Change Advisory Committee to provide expert advice on potential impacts to Snohomish County and ways that we can become more resilient. We must be prepared for the reality of climate change while also doing our part to prevent the worst scenarios. We all value our beautiful natural resources, and I am confident we will continue to advance our vision of an environmentally sustainable and prepared Snohomish County.

Conclusion

Snohomish County is doing enormously important work for our community. Over 3/4ths of our general fund budget goes to our law and justice system. Our public safety priorities must always be paramount. Of course, we also have other core responsibilities that we must support. One thing I have always loved about Snohomish County is that we don't just talk about our goals, we work together to achieve them. It may not happen as quickly as some would like, but we make steady progress.

I offer my proposed 2020 budget as the best way for us to reach our goals together and reinforce our values as a community. We have advanced a vision of partnership to serve the public and a means for achieving our goals.

I believe this proposed budget allows us to plan for the future we choose.

Thank you.