

Address

Snohomish County Executive Dave Somers'

Proposed 2022 Budget

September 28, 2021

Thank you for joining me today.

I would like to start by thanking the County Council for their partnership. Chair Wright, Vice Chair Dunn, Councilmembers Nehring, Low, and Mead: I appreciate your leadership and your willingness to work with us to do what is best for our residents.

I want to thank Auditor Fell, Treasurer Sullivan, Assessor Hjelle, Sheriff Fortney, Clerk Percy, and Prosecuting Attorney Cornell. You are each an important part of the services we deliver and together you improve lives every day.

I want to thank Judge Weiss, Judge Fair, and their colleagues on the Superior and District Courts. Serving the law and justice needs of our community is a weighty job that requires compassion in the exercise of power.

I also want to thank the hard-working employees of Snohomish County. They have persevered through the tough days and the hardships. I'm grateful for their continued commitment to making our community a better place to live.

Snohomish County is built on a foundation inspired by grit, determination, partnerships, and innovation. As a community, we have shown time and time again that when adversity strikes, we come together to successfully meet challenges head on.

Of course, we have all been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the pain this has caused across the county and the globe.

We have relied on partnerships and the hard work of thousands across the county to ease the suffering and hardships caused by the pandemic. I appreciate the great work of the County Council and the Snohomish Health District as we have tackled these many challenges together.

You can be confident: Snohomish County will recover. I know that—together—we will create a future that is better than the past. Because that's what we do. That is who we are.

From my office, I can see Puget Sound and the Cascade Mountains. I can also see Hat Island, busy city streets, a freeway, and beyond that, there are pristine farm and forest lands. Snohomish County is the beautiful, diverse,

and vibrant heart of the Pacific Northwest. But it didn't get this way by chance. People making decisions about what we value allow us to live in such a great place.

I have often used the phrase "The Future We Choose" because it's important for us to imagine the future we want to create.

When I think of our future, I think about how we need to preserve this beautiful natural environment and ensure we grow in ways that allow us to maintain that quintessential Snohomish County charm we hold dear: a healthy and thriving economy, and our exceptional quality of life. And we must provide opportunity to everyone in our county, fairly, equitably, and with a welcoming spirit.

Snohomish County has an important role to play in achieving these goals. And even in these trying times, we are presented with unique opportunities. Through this budget and the federal relief and recovery dollars provided to Snohomish County and our city partners, we have an opportunity to invest in our communities so that we come back stronger than ever before.

Amid all these changes, we need to adapt and adjust. That is what my proposed 2022 budget does. It adapts to the present reality and ensures we can adjust for the future we want to create.

Public Safety

The Snohomish County courthouse represents our system of justice and our responsibility to keep our communities safe. Earlier this year, we officially opened the new addition to the courthouse, and we saved nearly \$80 million from the project that had been initially proposed. These types of decisions help us maintain the flexibility we need with available resources to overcome challenges and maximize opportunities.

Public safety remains the number one priority for county government. The public safety system accounts for more than 75% of our general fund budget. Our quality of life, economic vitality, and social health all rely upon the safety of communities.

In the 2022 budget, I am proposing that we make some significant investments in our law and justice system.

To advance our efforts, I am proposing that Snohomish County fully fund a body camera program for every deputy on the street. I made this commitment last summer, because this is one of the best ways to ensure transparency for both law enforcement and the public. I appreciate the partnership with Sheriff Fortney and our county councilmembers to make this investment a reality. The pilot program was rolled out earlier this month, and we look forward to seeing the results.

I am also proposing that we add two new detective positions: one to combat a rise in domestic violence and another for the special investigations unit that pursues crimes against children. These positions will help to bring more resources to bear on some of the most heinous crimes in our community.

I also am proposing that we fund the Prosecuting Attorney's Data Collection Initiative. This will give us new, actionable information and help ensure that our justice system is working for every community and person in Snohomish County.

Additionally, we are also adding three Crime Prevention Officers—one per precinct—to handle lower priority, non-emergency calls that don't require response from a fully equipped sheriff's deputy with a badge and gun. This will free up our deputies to respond to higher priority calls and is an effective measure we can take to meet the needs of our community, while ultimately saving money.

Also, because of the significant backlog of cases in our justice system, incredible strain has been placed on our courts, prosecutors, public defenders, and others. We are all united in wanting to eliminate the backlog and do it responsibly. We have proposed nearly \$12 million for mostly three-year project positions to help with these urgent needs across the system.

We also need to add an additional Superior Court judge and related staff. This continues the process of building our justice system to meet the needs we have today and prepare for the future.

We will finally begin the process of replacing the aging Sheriff's Office South Precinct which will provide for adequate space and appropriate facilities for our law enforcement officers working one of the busiest beats. I appreciate Chair Wright's support for this project and the impacts it will have on public safety in south County.

To help with both crime fighting and Search and Rescue, I am proposing that we replace and upgrade the county's helicopters, since the current ones are old and unreliable. This gives the Sheriff's Office reach and speed that can save lives now and far into the future.

Our Department of Emergency Management has been the center for our COVID-19 response and recovery. And as we marked the twentieth anniversary of 9/11 earlier this month, we know significant threats remain to our homeland. DEM has identified the need for a Homeland Security Manager to lead our coordination efforts and for someone to take the lead on our Multi-Agency Coordination Group efforts to reduce overdose deaths and addiction. These hires will position us to be prepared.

With these investments and others, our public safety system will be better equipped to keep our community secure, ensure justice is available for all, and help us build the system our residents deserve.

Justice for All

I established Snohomish County's Office of Social Justice in the summer of 2020 because the county's leadership recognized that we had to do more. Too many in our community know that the justice system and our government institutions have not always been fair to them, and that we can do more to make our systems equitably work for everyone.

Since being established, the team has been hard at work expanding and developing strong and meaningful relationships with historically underserved communities in every part of Snohomish County. They have provided navigation services to BIPOC county residents to assist them in accessing critical resources and worked to ensure that federal CARES Act and the American Rescue Plan Act funds have supported our community's BIPOC led organizations and communities.

OSJ has provided training, guidance, and support for county departments and community partners, developed training for the Executive Cabinet, and are working with county departments and offices to review policies, surveys, and projects with an equity and inclusion lens. They have provided important insights into the development of the 2022 county budget, as well. We continue to make strides but still have a way to go to become Snohomish County's model of an anti-racist organization.

OSJ provided great leadership and saved lives by ensuring there was equitable access to COVID-19 vaccinations for BIPOC community members. And they provided guidance, support, and comfort in the aftermath of local acts of hate and intolerance.

In 2021, youth attending school in Marysville had their lives threatened merely for being Black. There have been multiple incidents of hate symbols on display in communities across Snohomish County. The Tulalip Tribe's

reservation was littered with a hate group's propaganda, and members of the Asian American and Pacific Islander community have seen sharp increases in targeted hate since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Several community members have engaged with my office, County Councilmembers, and state lawmakers to request support in launching a "Hate Has No Home Here" campaign. My recommended budget includes funding for this campaign and will serve to communicate a strong message that Snohomish County is a safe, welcoming, and inclusive place where all people can reach their full potential and thrive. Through an organized effort, we will work in collaboration with community members to build stronger relationships and lead a cultural shift throughout our county.

And this recommended budget includes funding for effective diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training to help supervisors and employees become more culturally competent, empathetic, and self-aware. Through awareness, behavioral change, and a cultural shift, our organization will be better positioned to provide equitable and quality service to all residents, businesses, and visitors in Snohomish County. I am asking for funding to create a dynamic, in-person training program to counteract bias, whether explicit or implicit, within county government. Many of our employees have requested just such training, and we should be providing it. As we move our DEI efforts forward, we must develop a strategic plan that can serve as a roadmap to accomplish our goals. In 2022, we will conduct needs assessments to inform our strategic plan, and this will help us better serve our communities and ensure we are not leaving anyone behind in our recovery.

As we strive to meet our commitments of being an inclusive, welcoming, and equitable organization, it is important that we work to ensure that our communications and web-based tools are accessible to all employees and community members. Funding provided in this budget will provide OSJ with the necessary resources to ensure the County's website, social media accounts, and applications are accessible to people living with disabilities and with limited English proficiency. As Snohomish County grows and diversifies, the communication needs of the people we serve are changing. We should meet those needs.

Interpreters in our courts are often the difference between justice being served or not. People who are the victim of a crime or are accused of a crime, but who don't speak English or have communication challenges, are at a significant disadvantage and have a tougher time securing justice. I am proposing that we increase interpreter pay for both District and Superior Courts.

Finally, our Human Resources Department must have the staffing to help lead our internal Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion efforts, and this has been included in the 2022 budget.

Together, we will make progress and ensure Snohomish County government is changing to meet the needs of every resident.

Improving Community Health

We know that the pandemic has not only made some of our social ills more visible but has also aggravated them. From addiction to mental health challenges and homelessness, there are significant numbers of people in Snohomish County who are suffering and need professional help.

Just a few years ago, we didn't have some of the key tools to assist. Now, with support from partners across the region and state, we can do more to help those who have addiction and mental health challenges.

We established embedded social worker programs across the county, where we partner with law enforcement to ensure they have skilled professionals to help them when interacting with those experiencing homelessness or mental health challenges.

And when someone is ready to get help, they can immediately be taken to our Diversion Center, where people who are living on the streets or in the woods can get shelter and professional help.

Next to the Diversion Center is the Carnegie Resource Center. This building had been sitting unused for years and has now been repurposed to provide one-stop services for people needing assistance. The Carnegie Center provides access to a wide range of services, including help finding a job, identifying more permanent housing, receiving treatment referrals, accessing veterans benefits, and many other options for getting healthy.

I am proposing a new Carnegie Employment Support Services program to help improve access to jobs. If approved, community partners will provide one-stop services and a family-friendly approach to assist low-income households with job opportunities. We know from experience that getting people back into jobs helps with increased economic and housing stability.

We have never had enough behavioral health facilities in the county. But we are finally making progress. This summer we opened 32 beds for substance abuse and mental health treatment at the Denney Justice Center. Providence has also opened a new facility providing additional capacity. And the City of Lynnwood is proposing another. I want the county to partner with Lynnwood to build this facility by providing \$3 million. I am proud to have worked with County Council Chair Stephanie Wright in helping to make this a reality.

These added beds will provide a lifeline to those who are suffering now, giving them a way out of their pain, and give our community an option beyond the very expensive and ineffective method of just putting a revolving door on the jail.

Housing is a critical need across all income levels in the County. The housing crisis is another one of our challenges that has only gotten worse during the pandemic. Prices continue to go up and many more people are on the verge of losing their home.

I am proposing \$10 million for creating long-term shelter and housing options in Everett, and North, South and East County. This is an opportunity for us to partner with the state and cities to leverage available federal funding to provide a significant increase in shelter and housing space. We should not allow people to suffer with homelessness when we can do something about it. These facilities could also be used for cold weather, heat, smoke and other similar emergencies.

I believe it is important that we also expand our Designated Crisis Responder program and have included funding for two more. Designated Crisis Responders are partnered with law enforcement and can help de-escalate situations involving those with behavioral health issues.

Snohomish County will also continue to invest in early childhood learning because everyone deserves a decent start in life. Studies have shown that giving kids a jump start on their education increases their educational attainment and success in life. I am grateful that Councilmember Mead has been a strong advocate for early learning both in the legislature and now on the County Council.

We still have more work to do, but we have made significant progress in building the infrastructure and programs to relieve suffering, reduce homelessness, and protect the livability of our community.

Economic Development

Snohomish County's Paine Field Airport and the Port of Everett are two of the major drivers of our region and state's economy. Their infrastructure makes our region the aerospace capital of the world. But the pandemic has been hard on the aerospace industry and our ports.

In my budget, I have proposed \$1.25 million for the county's ports to help replace lost funds due to COVID-19. Our ports are essential elements of our local economy, and I want them to be as healthy as possible for our recovery.

Paine Field has a nearly \$60 billion dollar yearly economic impact, more than any other airport in the state, and we must continue to upgrade and maintain those facilities. I am proposing that we make capital investments in airport infrastructure to further strengthen this job creating asset.

Our Public Facilities Districts are also important drivers of our economic recovery. I am proposing \$1.25 million for our Public Facilities Districts to help them recover from the pandemic.

Our Public Works efforts ensure we live in a county where our roads are safe, our solid waste is appropriately disposed, and our people and goods can remain mobile. We will continue to prioritize these responsibilities.

Agriculture remains an important part of our local economy and a critical piece of our local strategic infrastructure, as we have all witnessed during the pandemic. If we are forced to rely on food grown thousands of miles away, many may go hungry. Having thriving local farms means we can feed ourselves and not rely on distant farms and a vast transportation network.

Our Nourishing Neighborhoods program used locally produced food to feed thousands of families since the start of the pandemic. This was good for our farmers and good for those families who were struggling to put food on the table.

That is why I want to invest in our proposed Food and Farming Center at McCollum Park. This will provide another market for our agricultural products and give people access to another source of locally produced food.

We have also seen significant investment in using high tech tools to improve legacy industries. Snohomish County joined with multiple innovation companies to pilot the first 5G farms in the country. By using technology, farms can use less resources, both natural and human, while expanding yields.

My proposed Innovation for Advanced Manufacturing project creates a "best in class" business model that incorporates new technologies to support innovation in advanced manufacturing and leverage previous work on the 5G agriculture resiliency project. The program will aim to expand the current field labs and develop additional 5G labs that support the growth and expansion of advanced manufacturing facilities in all parts of Snohomish County. This program will spur job creation via 5G technologies for manufacturing. Startups and corporate partners will activate this investment and enable our manufacturers, farmers, and business owners to discover, build, test and validate applications that solve real-life problems.

Obviously, we live in a highly wired world, and people's livelihoods and lives sometimes depend on having reliable access to the internet. My budget includes \$5 million for expanding broadband efforts across the county. Our economy, health care, and education need to reach everyone, regardless of where they live, and the presence of broadband deserts is unacceptable, particularly after our experience of the last twenty months. Our investments will ensure more parts of the county are wired. I want to thank both Councilmembers Nehring and Low for their advocacy to expand broadband access in Snohomish County.

The proposed economic and workforce development projects complement and build upon the programs implemented in 2020 with federal CARES Act funds to support businesses and workers across Snohomish County. This package sets the course for the economic future of the County. It will help small businesses weather any future storms; workers who have been laid off will find a new way to provide for their families; and we'll help bring new businesses, talent, and opportunity to our community.

I am proposing that in 2022 we launch a “Grow SnoCo” campaign. This effort will create a county-wide promotional campaign with economic, workforce, and tourism development community partners; we will focus on bringing new businesses, investments, and visitors to the County. Special attention will be paid to encouraging visitors to spend money on leisure and hospitality businesses, particularly those owned by people of color and women. Grow SnoCo will also get new businesses to expand and relocate into the County, by targeting industries such as aerospace, advanced manufacturing, and life sciences. The initiative would include working closely with businesses, educational institutions, and skill providers to foster the development of new talent to support growing enterprises across Snohomish County. We hope this program helps to create up to 1,500 new jobs.

We are also planning to create a Business Resiliency Partnership that will assist with the expansion and retention of businesses in high priority industries such as aerospace, advanced manufacturing, and life sciences. This would include providing customized technical assistance to build long-term economic growth. The focus of the initiative will be to support employers with a workforce of over 100 employees.

I am proposing a \$1 million program to help Snohomish County’s micro and small businesses, many of which are owned by BIPOC residents. Through a collaboration with a non-profit, funding will be allocated to ensure that BIPOC owned businesses in Snohomish County have access to resources to help them maintain their enterprises and recover with more opportunities to succeed than before the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted large and small enterprises across the county. To respond, we instituted three different grant programs: the Relief, Recovery, Resiliency Program for small businesses; the First in Flight Fund for aerospace companies; and the Non-Profit Stabilization and Capacity-Building Program for non-governmental organizations. These programs, funded by federal CARES Act grants, supported thousands of businesses and their workers, providing a lifeline during the greatest economic dislocation of the last 100 years. We were the first to set up a Recovery Task Force and now we have established our Office of Recovery and Resilience. We are ready for our next steps in responding to and recovering from the pandemic.

The pandemic had a devastating impact on many in our workforce. In fact, in April of 2020, we had the highest unemployment in the state, an astounding 20%. We have a significant need to boost our workforce training and placement programs. People need an opportunity to get back to work, and sometimes that means helping them switch industries.

I am proposing that we create a “Take Flight Snohomish County” program to provide a one-stop resource for aerospace training programs. This will help our dislocated aerospace workers as well as our aerospace companies looking to hire well-trained staff.

We have much work ahead of us to ensure our recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic is lasting and shared by all who have been impacted.

Environmental Stewardship

Our two major river systems, the Snohomish and the Stillaguamish Rivers, shaped who we are as a community and have helped fuel our economic prosperity. They have provided food, transportation, and recreation, and are key components of life in Snohomish County. If we don’t take care of our waterways, our land, and our air, our economy and quality of life will suffer.

As a biologist, I know that living systems adapt to the changes happening around them.

When we consolidated County functions into the new Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, we brought together our farming, fish, forest, water, parks, and recreation efforts under one umbrella organization.

We are now much more prepared to fulfill our environmental responsibilities by having an entire organization dedicated to working on them in collaboration with our many community partners. I am grateful to County Councilmember Megan Dunn who has provided great ideas and energy for achieving our environmental sustainability goals.

We now need to take the next important strategic step in our efforts. Today, I'd like to announce the Snohomish County Environmental Stewardship Strategy. This will be a broad-based effort, combining our many environmental initiatives and programs within one strategic framework. This will include the launch of our Land Conservation Initiative which sets aside green space for protection. It includes the Puget Sound Initiative, our effort to maintain and improve water quality in Puget Sound, and historic investments to enhance fish passages and expand habitat restoration. We will also include our Healthy Forests Initiative, ensuring we are planting trees and stewarding our forests for the health of our entire county. And it encompasses our Sustainable Lands Strategy, a recognized model for bringing farming and fish interests together to find common sense solutions. Of course, our Strategy would not be complete without including our Community Climate Action Plan. I look forward to working with members of our County Council to fully develop this strategy.

I am proposing approximately \$36 million in investments across these programs. This is an important step in our continuing efforts to protect our quality of life, economic vitality, and the environment.

We also must ensure that our once every decade comprehensive plan update provides the direction for our future growth so that these powerful parts of our natural world will remain healthy and vibrant for generations to come.

We will need to continue to face the reality that leadership and bold action are needed if we hope to keep Snohomish County a beautiful and vibrant place to live. Anything less would be a disservice to our residents.

Conclusion

Thank you for joining me to talk about the proposed budget for 2022. It has now been delivered to the Snohomish County Council for their deliberations, and my team and I look forward to working collaboratively with them on making these important strategic investments. I want to thank the Finance and Budget team for their work in helping us bring this budget to you.

Our partnership with the County Council over the last 20 months of pandemic response and recovery has been constructive and marked by a spirit of true collaboration. I very much appreciate all that the Council has done to make Snohomish County ready for today's complexities and tomorrow's opportunities.

While we continue to face significant challenges, I know that Snohomish County's best years are still ahead of us.