CITY OF SEATTLE

ORDINANCE 127419

COUNCIL BILL 121181

AN ORDINANCE relating to regular property taxes; providing for the submission to the qualified electors of the City at an election to be held on August 4, 2026, of a proposition authorizing the City to levy regular property taxes for up to seven years in excess of the limitation on levies in chapter 84.55 RCW for the purpose of sustaining investments in Library operating hours, collections, technology, programming, and maintenance while expanding access to opportunity through Library materials, technology, and undertaking a seismic retrofit of one Library facility; and ratifying and confirming certain prior acts.

WHEREAS, The Seattle Public Library (Library) was established in 1890 and, since that time, has served as a free and trusted source of information and a community gathering place for residents of Seattle and the region; and

WHEREAS, in 1998, Seattle voters overwhelmingly approved the Libraries for All bond measure, which made Library services more accessible by supporting the construction of four branch libraries in communities without library service, the replacement or renovation of 22 existing branches, and the development of a new downtown Central Library; and

WHEREAS, the Library provides residents, including children and seniors, with access to an array of free services and programming, including access to physical and digital books and other materials for all ages and viewpoints, computer and job search classes, adult tutoring, English language learning resources, tax preparation help, and readings by world-renowned authors; and

WHEREAS, the Library provides important educational support to Seattle's youth through literacy programs, including story times for children and families, homework help for

students, summer learning activities, teen spaces and activities, partnerships with teachers and schools, and other important educational resources and services; and

WHEREAS, the Library serves as a vital community resource that helps bridge the digital divide by providing free access to computers and the internet, affordable printing services, and knowledgeable staff who assist patrons in using new and emerging technologies; and

WHEREAS, the Library's Mobile Services bring books and other materials to children, seniors, and other residents who may lack the mobility to access their neighborhood library; and

WHEREAS, the Library's staff provides resource navigation to help connect patrons with external agencies for medical care, transportation services, mental health services, job resources, and more; and

WHEREAS, in November 2024, the Library Board of Trustees adopted a ten-year Strategic Plan to guide investments in Library services over the next decade to bring people, information, and ideas together to enrich lives and empower community through the values of care, connection, and learning; and

WHEREAS, the Library is guided by the principles of equity and intellectual freedom as it expands access and opportunities for everyone in Seattle; and

WHEREAS, the Library is committed to strengthening a sense of belonging for community members by providing safe and welcoming physical spaces, diverse collections and programs, and other services that support literacy, enrichment, and empowerment for all; and

WHEREAS, the Library acts as a good steward of public funding and strives to be a resilient and fiscally responsible organization; and

WHEREAS, the Library works diligently to maintain and improve buildings, technology, and sustainability practices for its 27 buildings, many of which were constructed or renovated through the 1998 Libraries for All bond measure; and

WHEREAS, in 2012, the Library, Seattle City Council, and Mayor of Seattle identified a property tax levy lid lift as the revenue source that could most feasibly be used in combination with the City's General Fund and Real Estate Excise Tax (REET) support; and

WHEREAS, in August 2012, 62 percent of Seattle voters approved a $123 million, seven-year property tax levy to allocate direct funding to Library services and programs; and

WHEREAS, in August 2019, 76 percent of Seattle voters approved a $219.1 million, seven-year property tax levy to fund Library services and programs; and

WHEREAS, the 2019 Library Levy provides approximately 33 percent of the Library's overall 2026 budget; and

WHEREAS, the Library's capital budget is primarily supported by the 2019 Library Levy, supplemented by REET revenues; and

WHEREAS, the 2019 Library Levy ends December 31, 2026, and the loss of this funding source would have a significantly detrimental impact on core Library services and programs, as well as the Library's ability to maintain capital investments made during the Libraries for All program; and

WHEREAS, the Library is committed to engaging key stakeholders and the community in the development of a levy renewal package; and

WHEREAS, in May and June 2025, the Library held service design workshops with community members and programming partners to hear directly about their needs for Library services; and

WHEREAS, in Spring 2025, the Library also gathered public input about the importance of Library programs, spaces, and services through onsite feedback opportunities at 14 Library locations and four outreach events, with multiple engagements in English and Spanish; and

WHEREAS, the Library used these findings to develop a public survey, available in English and translated into six other languages, to understand Seattle residents' current and future needs and interests for library services through the life of the 2024-2033 Strategic Plan; and

WHEREAS, in August 2025, the Library launched a public survey, learning that 98 percent of respondents believe the Library improves the overall quality of life in the city and 97 percent of respondents think it is worth the money invested in it, and used the results of the survey to inform the development of a 2026 levy package; and

WHEREAS, the Revised Code of Washington grants exclusive control of the finances of the Library to the Board of Trustees and authorizes the Library Board to oversee the Library's annual operating and capital budgets; and

WHEREAS, the Library Board recognizes the need for sustained revenue to support, maintain, and improve core Library services, understands the current constraints on the City's General Fund and REET revenues, and therefore supports replacing the expiring property tax levy lid lift to continue providing the Library with a revenue source that could be used in combination with General Fund and REET revenues; and

WHEREAS, library investment is a reflection of a community's values; and

WHEREAS, by replacing the expiring 2019 Library Levy, Seattle expands access to education and opportunity, promotes equity, lifts up the places where communities come together, and invests in libraries as treasured landmark and spaces for learning and discovery; and

WHEREAS, the Council intends that a portion of the Library levy funding amount, as transmitted by the Mayor and increased by $10,000,000 by the Council, should be authorized for investments to support maintenance by completing major renovation at the Central Library; and

WHEREAS, the Council intends that a portion of the Library levy funding amount, as transmitted by the Mayor and increased by $4,500,000 by the Council, should be authorized for investments to support operating hours and access by expanding multilingual play and learn programs and English for Speakers of Other Languages programs to additional Library branches; and

WHEREAS, the Council intends that a portion of the Library levy funding amount, as transmitted by the Mayor and increased by $4,060,000 by the Council, should be authorized for investments to support operating hours and access by expanding resource navigation with four additional full-time equivalent Community Resource Specialists and upgrading security badge access at the Central Branch; and

WHEREAS, the Council intends that a portion of the Library levy funding amount, as transmitted by the Mayor and increased by $15,000,000 by the Council, should be authorized for investments to support maintenance by (1) completing the repair, replacement, or upgrades of cooling systems for all Library branches and (2) addressing deferred maintenance and branch electrification; and

WHEREAS, the Council intends that a portion of the Library levy funding amount, as transmitted by the Mayor and increased by $15,000,000 by the Council, should be authorized for investments to support maintenance by renovating a historic Library branch to improve seismic safety, reduce the use of fossil fuels, and upgrade publicly available space; and

WHEREAS, the Council intends that a portion of the Library levy funding amount, as transmitted by the Mayor and increased by $8,400,000 by the Council, should be authorized for investments to support collections by expanding the electronic materials (e-books and e-audiobooks) and physical materials collections and increasing collections staffing; and

WHEREAS, the Council intends that a portion of the Library levy funding amount, as transmitted by the Mayor and increased by $2,500,000 by the Council, should be authorized for investments to support collections by expanding the Peak Pick titles in Library's e-book collection; and

WHEREAS, the Council intends that a portion of the Library levy funding amount, as transmitted by the Mayor and increased by $2,100,000 by the Council, should be authorized for investments to support operating hours and access by expanding Library programming made available live and recorded via the Seattle Channel; and

WHEREAS, the Council intends that a portion of the Library levy funding amount, as transmitted by the Mayor and increased by $8,200,000 by the Council, should be authorized for investments to support maintenance by improving physical accessibility under the Americans with Disabilities Act and by repairing or replacing elevators and escalators; and

WHEREAS, the Council intends that a portion of the Library levy funding amount, as transmitted by the Mayor, should be authorized for investments to support technology services by providing digital skilling programs for teens offered at the South Park and High Point Branch Libraries; and

WHEREAS, the Council intends that a portion of the Library levy funding amount, as transmitted by the Mayor, should be authorized for investments to support hours and access and collections by contracting with the Washington State Black Legacy Institute for programming that celebrates and preserves the rich history of Washington's Black community and offers a powerful tribute to Black resilience, leadership, and cultural contributions; and

WHEREAS, The City of Seattle intends to place a levy proposal on the August 4, 2026, primary election ballot to replace the expiring levy in order to continue to provide financial support to the programs and operations of the Library for the next seven years; NOW, THEREFORE,

BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY OF SEATTLE AS FOLLOWS:

Section 1. Definitions. As used in this ordinance:

A. "City" means The City of Seattle.

B. "Levy proceeds" means that portion of regular property taxes levied and collected as authorized by voter approval pursuant to this ordinance and all interest and other earnings thereon, and, if the City issues bonds, notes, interfund loans, or other evidences of indebtedness payable wholly or in part from the additional taxes authorized under this ordinance, as permitted by Section 4 of this ordinance, then "levy proceeds" also includes the proceeds of those bonds, notes, interfund loans, or other evidences of indebtedness.

C. "Library Board" means the board of trustees of the Library, a five-member body appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the City Council, with exclusive control of the finances of the Library under RCW 27.12.210 and sole authority to expend the Library Fund under Article XII of the Seattle City Charter, consistent with the annual appropriation of funds by the City Council.

D. "Library levy funding amount" means not less than $479,760,000 of the increased levy amount over seven years resulting from the proposition's passage.

E. "Library services" means the programs, services, capital improvements, and administration referred to in Section 6 of this ordinance, with such modifications as the City Council may from time to time authorize by ordinance.

Section 2. Levy of regular property taxes – Submittal. The City submits to the qualified electors of the City a proposition as authorized by RCW 84.55.050 to exceed the levy limitation on regular property taxes contained in RCW 84.55.010, for property taxes levied in 2026 through 2032 for collection in 2027 through 2033 respectively. This proposition shall be limited so that the City shall not levy more than $68,537,143 in the first year and is expected to raise approximately $479,760,000 in aggregate over seven years for Library services. The levy amount in the first year shall be used to determine subsequent years' allowable regular levy limit in accordance with chapter 84.55 RCW. Amounts collected in excess of the Library levy funding amount are available for other City purposes for which the City's regular levy may be applied. In accordance with RCW 84.36.381 and RCW 84.55.050, the City will exempt seniors, veterans with disabilities, or other persons with disabilities who qualify under 84.36.381 RCW from the increased levy amount resulting from the proposition's passage. Pursuant to RCW 84.55.050(4), the maximum regular property taxes that may be levied in 2033 for collection in 2034 and in

later years shall be computed as if the levy lid in RCW 84.55.010 had not been lifted under this ordinance.

Section 3. Deposit of levy proceeds. Unless otherwise directed by ordinance, Library Levy funding shall be deposited in the Library Levy Fund to pay for Library services. Levy proceeds may be temporarily deposited or invested in such a manner as may be lawful for the investment of City money, and interest and other earnings on Library Levy funding shall be deposited in the Library Levy Fund, used for the same purposes as the proceeds. The Fund shall receive earnings on its positive balances and pay interest on its negative balances. The Director of Finance is authorized to create other accounts within the Library Levy Fund as may be needed or appropriate to implement the purposes of this ordinance.

Section 4. Bond and notes. To the extent permitted by applicable law, the City may issue bonds, notes, or other evidences of indebtedness payable wholly or in part from the additional taxes authorized under this ordinance, and may pledge and may apply such taxes to the payment of principal of, interest on, and premium (if any) on such bonds, notes, or other evidences of indebtedness and to the payment of costs associated with them.

Section 5. Use of levy proceeds. The Library Levy funding amount shall be used solely for Library services in accordance with the provisions in Section 6 of this ordinance and in accordance with RCW 84.55.050. If levy collections exceed the Library levy funding amount, the excess funds are available for City purposes for which the City's regular levy may be applied.

Section 6. Library services. Levy investments will be made in five categories of Library services. Program elements in subsections 6.A through 6.E of this ordinance are illustrative examples. In accordance with the annual City budget process, each year the Library Board shall

adopt an annual operations plan and capital budget. The Executive Director and Chief Librarian and the Library Board shall submit to the Mayor and the City Council an annual levy expenditure plan that will support, maintain, and improve the core Library services identified in this section. Levy Proceeds will be used, in combination with the annual budget appropriation of City General Fund, Real Estate Excise Tax (REET), and other City funds as available to the Library, for Library services.

A. Operating hours and access. Major program elements include: supporting Library operating hours in neighborhood branches and the Central Library; providing access to Library programs and services in the community; supporting programming targeted towards children ages zero through 5; and outreach and engagement services throughout the city.

B. Collections. Major program elements include: increasing the variety, depth, and accessibility of collections with new titles and additional copies in various physical and digital formats; providing additional online resources as new platforms and services emerge; curating a local history collection and making those resources more widely available through digitization; providing fine-free access to the Library's collections; and continuing innovative approaches to collection distribution and to fulfilling patron material requests.

C. Technology. Major program elements include:

1. Replacing and upgrading the Library's technology infrastructure, including maintaining its Integrated Library System, the Library's main business platform for procuring, processing, and tracking Library materials;

2. Replacing and upgrading its enterprise network that provides high-speed internet and Wi-Fi access to the Central Library and all 26 branches;

3. Replacing and upgrading its technology equipment such as switches, routers, servers, cabling, computers, tablets, printers, copiers, scanners and widescreen monitors, and other audiovisual equipment for newly emerging technologies;

4. Maintaining and enhancing the SPL.org website and catalog, with a focus on language accessibility as well as device compatibility and compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act; and

5. Supporting the Library's digital equity efforts, including digital literacy instruction and provision and support of internet access devices for use within Library buildings and for check-out.

D. Maintenance. Major program elements include: enhanced resources to provide routine, preventive, and major maintenance for the Library's heavily-used buildings as they age, to prolong their useful life. Maintenance also includes funding to seismically retrofit one landmarked branch identified as high-vulnerability in the City's Unreinforced Masonry Building Study.

E. Administration. Major program elements include: supporting implementation and accountability measures for Levy programs and annual reporting to the City and public on Levy outcomes.

Section 7. Reporting. The Executive Director and Chief Librarian and the Library Board shall submit to the City Council and the Mayor an annual progress report from 2028 to 2034 on levy spending and program delivery of the Library services identified in Section 6 of this ordinance. The report shall be due to the City Council and the Mayor by no later than April 15 each year.

Section 8. Election – Ballot title. The City Council directs that the City Clerk file this ordinance with the Director of Elections of King County, Washington, as ex officio supervisor of elections, requesting that the Director of Elections call and conduct a special election in the City in conjunction with the primary election to be held on August 4, 2026, for the purpose of submitting to the qualified electors of the City the proposition set forth in this ordinance. The City Clerk is directed to certify to the King County Director of Elections the ballot title approved by the City Attorney in accordance with the City Attorney's responsibilities under RCW 29A.36.071. The following ballot title is submitted to the City Attorney for consideration:

THE CITY OF SEATTLE

PROPOSITION NO. 1

Property Tax Levy for The Seattle Public Library

The Seattle City Council adopted Ordinance No. XXXXXX concerning replacing an expiring levy to fund library services.

The City of Seattle's Proposition 1 would replace an expiring levy, funding investments in Library operating hours and access, collections, technology, maintenance and administration, as provided in Ordinance XXXXXX.

It authorizes a seven-year levy for collection beginning in 2027 of an additional $0.23/$1,000 of assessed value, for a maximum total levy rate of $3.14/$1,000. 2027's levy amount will be the base for subsequent levies through 2033. RCW 84.36.381's senior citizens and disabled persons exemption applies.

Should this levy be approved?

Yes

No

Section 9. Section titles. Section titles are for convenient reference only and do not modify or limit the text of a section.

Section 10. Severability. The provisions of this ordinance are declared to be separate and severable. The invalidity of any clause, sentence, paragraph, subdivision, section, or portion of this ordinance, or the invalidity of its application to any person or circumstance, does not affect the validity of the remainder of this ordinance or the validity of its application to other persons or circumstances, including the validity of authorizing additional taxes by levy.

Section 11. Any act consistent with the authority of this ordinance taken after its passage and prior to its effective date is ratified and confirmed.

Section 12. Those portions of this ordinance providing for the submission of a ballot proposition to the voters shall take effect and be in force 30 days after its approval by the Mayor, but if not approved and returned by the Mayor within ten days after presentation, it shall take effect as provided by Seattle Municipal Code Sections 1.04.020 and 1.04.070. Those portions of this ordinance that are dependent upon voter approval of said ballot proposition shall take effect in accordance with applicable law.

Passed by the City Council the 14th day of April, 2026, and signed by me in open session in authentication of its passage this 14th day of April, 2026.

President _____ of the City Council

☑ Approved / ☐ returned unsigned / ☐ vetoed this 21st day of April, 2026.

Katie B. Wilson, Mayor

Filed by me this 21st day of April, 2026.

Scheereen Dedman, City Clerk

(Seal)