

# Claudia Balducci

Council Chair and Councilmember, District 6  
Metropolitan King County Council



King County

## A County Budget That Puts People First

*King County Council unanimously adopts \$12.59 billion King County biennial budget*

On November 17, 2020, the King County Council unanimously passed the 2021-2022 King County biennial budget. I'm proud that the Council and the King County Executive stood together in a time of pandemic and economic crisis to build a budget that provides critical services while retaining the flexibility to navigate the ongoing economic uncertainty we all face.

In this budget we are making sound investments in programs and projects that will make a difference to people now, while positioning the County towards a better and more equitable future.

Here are some highlights:

### **Health, Housing, Human Services and Education Investments**

Prior to the Coronavirus pandemic, we knew that many of our neighbors struggled with mental health and substance issues and that nearly 12,000 people in our county didn't have a place to call home. Since the pandemic, these problems have only gotten worse. I'm proud that despite the significant financial challenges facing the County, we were able to find ways to continue to serve those most in need.

- \$2 million for mental health. I successfully advocated to restore \$2 million in proposed cuts to the Mental Illness and Drug Dependency (MIDD) fund and preserve critically needed mental and behavioral health services for adults and children that are even more needed as the pandemic continues and accelerates.
- Health Through Housing. With the newly adopted sales tax King County will start its Health through Housing program that aims to purchase distressed hotels and motels and use the rooms to house roughly 1,600 people who are currently homeless in the next two years. In addition to providing a roof overhead, the funds will also pay for a variety of services needed to help people address their mental health, substance use and other issues so they can succeed and thrive.
- Building affordable housing. This budget continues the County's investment in Transit Oriented Development by helping to fund affordable housing to people earning 60% or less of Area Median Income around future transit stations, including \$10 million for a Bellevue Spring District project and \$5 million for a project along either EastLink or I-405 bus rapid transit.
- Improving educational outcomes. Via the Puget Sound Taxpayer Accountability Account the budget includes \$6.9 million for building early learning facilities; \$4.5 million for King County Promise to increase access to community college; and \$2.5 million for community-based organizations to provide K-12 services to improve high school graduation rates, particularly among Black, Indigenous and Communities of Color (BIPOC) whose young people have disproportionately low graduation rates.

### **Criminal Legal Reforms**

After over two decades of hard work, King County has one of the lowest incarceration rate per capita for youth and adults in the nation. Yet, despite our efforts, BIPOC people are disproportionately overrepresented in the criminal legal system and in our jails. We heard from tens of thousands of people

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who took to the streets this year to protest for racial justice that we must do more to reform our systems and decrease disproportionality.

This budget includes two new programs that will create alternatives to the traditional criminal justice system by funding community organizations to provide services and community connections to help people stay out of the criminal legal system. Both proposals include a victim restitution fund. These new programs will be funded using savings in attorney, court and jail costs that will result from fewer people going through the criminal legal system. The details of these programs will be worked out in 2021 for program implementation in 2022. I, and my colleagues on the County Council, will review the plans and monitor these programs carefully to ensure that they meet their intended goal of increasing public safety for all our residents.

- Restorative Community Pathways. Through a collaboration between the Executive's Office, Prosecuting Attorney's Office (PAO), the Department of Public Defense (DPD) and non-profit community organizations, the Restorative Community Pathways program will divert up to 600 young people annually from the court system and instead connect them with services and community supports.
- First Felon Diversion. In the coming year, staff from the Executive's Office, PAO, DPD, the Department of Community and Human Services and non-profit community organizations will work together to design a series of programs that will divert approximately 1,000 of the lowest level first time adult felony offenders to community-based alternatives. Once someone has a felony conviction, it becomes much harder to find a job and a place to live, which can often lead to more criminal charges. Helping people avoid that first felony and giving them access to supports that will help them avoid future charges will benefit us all.

## Trails and Transit Improvements

Helping people move around, whether biking or walking on a trail or taking the bus, is a central part of our role as the County government. By investing in trails and transit, we are helping to build more healthy communities and addressing the climate crisis. The budget includes substantial investments to help people connect with trails and buses and light rail that will greatly benefit the quality of life of the Eastside and throughout King County.

- Eastrail investments. Thanks to voters in 2019 who approved the 6-year King County Parks Levy, this budget provides more than \$30 million in transformative investments for Eastrail, including rebuilding the Wilburton Trestle, extending the trail in Renton and making improvements north to Woodinville.
- Northup Way Connector partnership. Through a budget amendment I proposed, the budget provides \$500,000 that, when combined with the \$2 million pledged by Facebook and REI for Eastrail, will construct the Northup Way Connector. The Connector will complete a gap linking Eastrail and the 520 Trail so that people on foot or on a bike can move safely between these two regional trails.
- Eastrail Fiber. We are taking advantage of the buildout of Eastrail to add broadband fiber along the length of the trail. As this project is developed, it will be important to ensure that we maximize the benefit to the public from this investment and I am committed to providing the needed oversight.

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- Marymoor connections. In conjunction with the Sound Transit expansion of Link Light Rail to Downtown Redmond, new Marymoor Park improvements include a connection to tie-in the Redmond Central Connector with the East Lake Sammamish Trail, as well as additional improvements around the Park.
- Easier access to youth ORCA cards. In response to an idea from a constituent, I have been working hard with Metro to find ways to get more ORCA Cards in King County students' hands. This budget takes the next step and requires Metro to provide ORCA cards to all schools once they return to in-person learning.
- Restarting RapidRide Lines. The economic crisis resulting from the pandemic has hit Metro Transit particularly hard given its reliance on sales tax and fares for revenue. As a result, anticipated new RapidRide Lines K, J and R will be put on hold. Through the budget, I have asked Metro to not completely pause development of the K line, which will connect neighborhoods and destinations from Totem Lake to Bellevue College, and instead continue planning for post-pandemic restart of RapidRide K, J and R Lines.
- A new subsidized annual pass for our transit riders who are in greatest need – those at or below 80% of the Federal Poverty Level will be able to receive a subsidized annual pass to travel on services provided by King County Metro, Sound Transit and the City of Seattle. This program will give more people across King County more access to mobility.
- Sidewalks and bus stops. Approximately \$21 million will be spent in the next two years to build new bus stops and sidewalks in anticipation of opening EastLink and I-405 bus rapid transit.

## Directly Supporting District 6 Community Work

I am deeply grateful to be your representative on the King County Council, in part because it gives me the opportunity to engage with organizations doing great work in our community. I always look for ways to support those organizations and the people they serve. Here are some investments we are making in this budget:

- Environmental restoration. I successfully advocated for \$50,000 that Trout Unlimited will use to fund a pilot project to remove invasive milfoil along Lake Sammamish to protect habitat for the Kokanee salmon, whose numbers are plummeting.
- Housing stability. Several organizations are working every day to help keep vulnerable Eastside residents in stable housing. I was pleased to allocate a total of \$500,000 to three organizations for this work in 2021: LifeWire, Eastside Legal Assistance Program and Mercer Island Youth and Family Services.
- Get Active Stay Active. As in past years, this budget includes funding for Get Active Stay Active grants in District 6. Stay tuned for opportunities to apply for this funding in the first quarter of 2021.

This has been the most challenging budget during my time on the King County Council. It took creativity, flexibility and a resolve to build a budget within the financial constraints of the COVID-19 crisis. Thank you to the many dedicated community members and organizations who provided their input and advocacy to this budget.