



Housing and Homelessness

Building on successful health outcomes from King County’s COVID-19 homeless response, Executive Dow Constantine proposes to advance concrete action steps to move people from homelessness to single-room housing coupled with the onsite supportive services that promote health and stability. The 2021-2022 Proposed Budget also calls for dramatic steps toward reducing homelessness by accelerating the creation of housing.

Priorities for the biennium include:

- Making significant short- and long-term impacts on homelessness;
- Increasing access to housing;
- Accelerating the development of affordable housing; and
- Improving the regional coordination of homeless crisis response through the continued implementation of the new King County Regional Homelessness Authority.

BACKGROUND

Homelessness remains one of the most difficult and complex issues facing King County. On a single night in January 2020, the Point in Time (PIT) count found 11,751 people living homeless across King County, an increase of five percent compared to 2019. Data shows that far more people—more than 30,000—experience homelessness at some point during the year.

King County is dedicated to removing barriers to housing and creating and supporting housing practices that are fair, just, and promote equity. Because of decades of neglect, abuse, and systemic racism, homelessness and housing and economic instability have disproportionately affected Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color.

Funding for housing and homelessness programs currently comes from the federal government, primarily the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD); the State of Washington Department of Commerce; document recording fees; the Mental Illness and Drug Dependency (MIDD) fund, the Veterans, Seniors, and Human Services Levy; lodging taxes; and grants from philanthropy. The Executive has proposed a new fund source, enacting state legislation to collect 0.1 percent sales tax, to raise up to \$70 million in additional funding annually to support housing and behavioral health programs in the region at a time when these services are desperately needed.

KEY INVESTMENTS

Health Through Housing

The 2021-2022 budget proposes to raise \$400 million in 2021 by implementing a new 0.1 percent sales and use tax and immediately bonding against a portion of these revenues to create housing. This could move as many as 2,000 people who are chronically homeless off the streets into safe housing, coupled with onsite case management and other services. At a later date, these properties, in collaboration with local cities, would provide opportunity for redevelopment as permanent supportive or affordable housing.



King County

2021-2022 Proposed Budget

Implementing this legislation also provides funding and stability to the Behavioral Health Fund.

Transition to Regional Homelessness Authority

King County joined with its 39 cities, leaders with lived experience of homelessness, service providers, businesses and others in the community to design a new regional homeless response system. Approved by the Seattle City Council and King County Council, with support from the Sound Cities Association, the new King County Regional Homelessness Authority (KCRHA) will take on the role of coordinating funding, contracting, service delivery, and performance measurement for the regional response to the homelessness crisis.

The transition to the KCRHA began in summer 2020 and continues in 2021 and 2022. It requires a restructuring of the County's roles and functions with respect to homelessness, and the shifting of its focus from shelter and supportive services to increasing upstream efforts to prevent homelessness and build housing stability. Crisis response to homelessness moves to the KCRHA, while all efforts around capital housing development remain with the County. The 2021-2022 Proposed Budget reflects the transfer of \$126 million in funding for services and staff from the County to the KCRHA.

Tenant Supports

In 2019, the County Council directed the Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS) to create a Renters Commission, charged with elevating the concerns of tenants throughout unincorporated King County. DCHS is working to expand this work to encompass tenant support and protection to remain securely housed. The COVID-19 outbreak brings new urgency to this work, as the economic impacts of the virus, including unemployment and lost wages, put added strain on tenants already struggling to pay the high cost of rent in King County.

Supporting Equitable Development

The 2021-2022 Proposed Budget reflects a \$13.8 million investment in the continued implementation of the Puget Sound Taxpayer Accountability Act (PSTAA) to support equitable development, including co-location of early learning and affordable housing. The effort to move PSTAA forward, which began in 2020, will involve staff from several departments within King County.

Alternative Construction Models

King County will expedite housing creation by continuing to pilot alternative construction models. The proposed budget includes a \$4.5 million investment in an innovative project in collaboration with the City of Shoreline for a permanent supportive housing project that will model modular construction that, unlike the shelter project completed in 2020, is not meant to be mobile but will instead be affixed to a permanent foundation. This project will also test the affordability and durability of modular manufacturing and assembly.