



Mayor Wilson's Address on the 2027-2028 Proposed Budget

September 22, 2026

Good afternoon and thank you for joining me today.

Thank you to Dujie Tahat for sharing their poetic gifts with us, and my deep appreciation to Cynthia Green for that moving introduction.

We're here at the Seattle Central Library. The people of Seattle looked at this block and decided, together, to build something that belongs to everyone. A place free to enter, free to use, open to anyone who walks through the door: to read, to learn, to organize, to rest, to look up through blue crossed beams put there by union workers. This library is the physical expression of a belief Seattle has affirmed again and again: that the public realm, and our shared future, are worth investing in.

This is your library. And This is Your City.

I want to begin by recognizing the people who make your city work. To every one of the nearly 14 thousand city employees who do the work every day to keep this city running: You show up for our residents when it matters most. Thank you.

And to the unions that represent those workers, thank you for your partnership in making the City of Seattle a great place to work.

To my Cabinet, and everyone in the Mayor's Office: you are my closest partners in building a government that genuinely delivers for everyone, especially those who need us most. Thank you.

Special thanks to my Budget Director Aly Pennucci and her team of analysts, who worked so hard to give us the clearest possible picture of where we stand and what we can do.

The issues we face do not stop at our city limits, and I want to thank the elected officials from across the region who have joined us today.

Last but not least, I want to recognize my nine colleagues on the City Council, some of whom are in the room today and others who are off serving in other ways and will see this later. We haven't always agreed, and of course it's the conflicts that make headlines, but when I look back at the past nine months, it's clear that we have accomplished a great deal together. It's a lot, so please hold your applause till the end.

Council President Hollingsworth: The 93 bills my office transmitted to Council this year reflect an ambitious agenda, and as Council President, your leadership to steward an effective and transparent legislative process enabled us to move significant policy for the city together. Thank you for your organizational leadership this year.

Councilmember Strauss, thank you for your ongoing collaboration as Chair of our Budget Committee; your leadership will help the Council and the public deliberate on these proposals. Thank you also for your resolve and partnership fighting to get light rail to Ballard back on track, your leadership in expanding our utility discount program, and your foresight in establishing the JumpStart fund reserve that is critical to stabilizing our City budget.

Thank you to Councilmember Saka for your dedication to revitalizing Seattle Center, as we chart a path to fund long-overdue renovations so this iconic campus remains a world-class gathering space for generations to come. And thank you for advocating for a teen late night program at High Point last year that we are making permanent in this budget

Councilmember Lin, you have been a true partner this year. From the SEPA legislation that clears the path for more housing, to fighting alongside us for Graham Street Station, to staying focused on what residents in the CID, Little Saigon, and Rainier Beach need to feel safe in their own neighborhoods. Thank you!

Councilmember Rivera, thank you for your partnership developing a successful library levy proposal, stewarding the FEPP levy implementation plan, and expanding programs for immigrants and refugees in partnership with the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs.

Councilmember Juarez, thank you for your partnership to reduce violence and make our neighbors near Aurora Avenue North safer. And I'm so looking forward to next week's opening of the new Pinehurst Station, which would not have happened without your advocacy.

Councilmember Kettle, thank you for your leadership in continuing to empower the CARE Department as the core of our diversified public safety response. I look forward to continuing our work together as we recruit a permanent Police Chief and keep communities across our city safe.

Councilmember Rinck, thank you for your partnership to stand up for our queer and trans communities and expanding domestic worker protections. Thank you for being a champion for public transit and the newly great Route 8. And thank you for standing with us as the prime sponsor to make sure no one in the city pays more for groceries because of an algorithm. And thank you also for encouraging us to take a moment to stop and celebrate Seattle's newest icon, Jimothy.

Councilmember Foster, thank you for your strong collaboration in banning rental junk fees to make Seattle's rental market more transparent and affordable. And thank you for championing legislation to ban predatory real estate solicitation in partnership with Black legacy homeowners, which I am proud to support in this budget.

This is just a small part of what we've taken on this year. Thank you all for your partnership and your work on behalf of our constituents.

Earlier this summer, the world came to Seattle, and loved what they saw. But what struck me most was not what visitors found here. It was what residents rediscovered. People fell in love with their city all over again. That enthusiasm was not just about our mountain views and long summer days, or our unique taste in hot dogs. It was about what we have built over generations: infrastructure and public spaces that let us find and build community, in a city that chooses to invest in itself.

I want every person in this city to feel that, every single day, in every single neighborhood. That pride in this beautiful city we share and create together.

One of the most important ways we achieve this is through our budget: where we choose to put our money, and how that shapes our city now and into the future. And this year, we are budgeting under conditions that are about as difficult as it gets.

Let's talk about what we're up against. The damage President Trump is doing to our economy – rising costs, devastating cuts to social services – is not the worst of the harm he is causing, but it is a real and present factor in this budget.

We are watching seismic shifts in the tech sector, which anchors so much of our regional economy. State-imposed property tax caps are squeezing us too, creating deficits in cities and counties across Washington exactly when people need us most. These pressures aren't unique to Seattle, but they all show up in our city budget.

When I took this office, I inherited a General Fund deficit that was estimated at around \$175 million. That gap had been growing since the pandemic began, through years of high inflation, as the needs in our city rose while the funding to meet them did not keep pace. For years, that deficit was papered over rather than faced head-on.

That ends today.

We cannot keep lurching from shortfall to shortfall, year after year. We cannot keep kicking the can down the road, because there is NO. MORE. ROAD.

After nearly nine months in City Hall, it's clear to me that the moment we're in demands comprehensive action to ensure our city's long-term fiscal health. That work goes far beyond balancing next year's budget. It has three pillars.

The first is righting the ship. With the budget I am proposing today, we take a major step toward structural balance. This year, for the first time since before the pandemic, I am transmitting a budget that shows no General Fund deficit, not just next year but all the way through 2030.

The second pillar is effective government. Seattle residents believe in what government can do, and we put our money where our values are, repeatedly voting to fund parks, libraries, transit, early childhood education, affordable housing and more. That trust deserves a government that uses every dollar with discipline and care.

Last week, I signed an executive order to strengthen the City's internal operations and build the administrative foundation that makes delivering excellent public services possible and sustainable.

The third pillar is growing a resilient economy, also the subject of an executive order I signed earlier this month. The City will lead in partnership with our private sector, and labor, to diversify our economy, revitalize our downtown, support the growth of small and mid-sized businesses, and create pathways for entrepreneurs, artists, and workers from every background to succeed in Seattle. A thriving economy means great jobs for our residents, and it's also the essential tax base for a robust public sector.

So let's talk about this budget. A large deficit forces a choice: new revenue, or reduced spending. I have made the difficult decision to transmit a budget without major new revenue, and I want to talk frankly about why.

We have done real work since 2020 to rebalance a tax code that has long asked working families to pay more than their share. The JumpStart Payroll Expense Tax. I see Councilmember Teresa Mosqueda in the audience – thank you for your tireless work to make that a reality. Our Social Housing Tax. The Seattle Shield Initiative.

All these measures asked the large businesses that benefit from everything our city and workforce have to offer to give back more. We can be proud of what that revenue makes possible. JumpStart sustained city services through the pandemic and makes major investments in affordable housing, climate resilience, equitable development, and support for small businesses. Our social housing developer acquired its first building this year. Seattle Shield supports food assistance, rental assistance, and shelter in the face of federal cuts.

We can be proud of this progress.

But right now, we don't have good options to raise more progressive revenue that don't also come with great risks.

Our economy and especially our downtown are fragile. In that context, raising additional revenue through JumpStart is not the right move.

A local capital gains tax is worth building toward. I want to thank Councilmember Foster for her leadership pushing that option forward, yet the complexity of standing it up with the state means it wouldn't bring in revenue for some years. Other progressive revenue options need more work, or state authorization, or both. I will keep pushing on this, but it doesn't help us with this budget right now.

That leaves us balancing largely through reductions and efficiencies.

I am proposing nearly \$50 million in annual general fund reductions. Most departments will manage reductions between 1-8%. I worked hard to keep cuts away from the services people actually feel. We aligned department budgets to actual spending, eliminated long-vacant positions, and were honest that programs funded with one-time money by prior administrations cannot simply be carried forward as if that money still exists.

I am continuing to direct JumpStart dollars beyond the programs it was originally intended for, in order to preserve essential services that people rely on daily. In this budget, over 30% of annual JumpStart revenue continues to be dedicated to affordable housing. It is my goal to grow that share in the budgets ahead.

The same factors that have stressed our general fund also hit other revenue sources that support our Department of Transportation. We are bringing a projected \$110 million, three-year deficit, in our Transportation Fund into balance, and I will not pretend that is painless. Some maintenance projects will experience delays, and my office will be working closely with SDOT to right-size projects to current resources and streamline effective delivery of these complicated capital programs.

Across city departments, my budget eliminates 128 full-time positions. Most of those positions are vacant, but 15 are currently filled. I do not say that number lightly as the people in those filled positions, each with a family budget of their own, navigate their options.

I am not touching this city's reserves. We live in Seattle – there's always rain in the forecast.

That is the discipline.

Now let me tell you what my budget makes possible.

Our residents depend on the City to take care of the basics with competence, respond to crises quickly and effectively, and to lift up the most vulnerable. I'm proud to have built a budget that achieves this.

My budget prioritizes shelter and human services, community safety, investments in our youth and defending the rights of all.

I'll start with homelessness. This budget takes on the crisis of unsheltered homelessness that has escalated for far too long. Last week I announced a shelter accelerator plan that will add nearly 1,000 shelter beds by end of 2027, serving an estimated 1,750 people every year.

This work is already well underway. Our first major new site, Bayside Shelter, opened in June with 73 units for people with complex needs. Cloverleaf Shelter, with 90 units, will open later this month. Over half the units in my plan are already in development. This budget funds and sustains that work.

These new investments are paired with stronger oversight of our homelessness dollars. This summer, County Executive Girmay Zahilay and I announced a regional reset, moving the city's share of KCRHA contracts back into the Human Services Department. In this budget I am dedicating \$183 million to address homelessness, including \$37 million for this new shelter capacity – paired with the services that actually help someone rebuild a life, not just survive a night.

What makes a city exciting and alive is the magic that happens in our shared spaces: the conversation on the bus, the soccer game in the park, the meal from a food truck at a neighborhood festival. But that magic only happens on a foundation of safety. A city can't thrive if people are scared to enjoy it.

This budget affirms that public safety is about the essential work of our first responders, and it's also about prevention, intervention, and upstream investments so that fewer moments become crises in the first place.

I am proposing to fully fund the current SPD hiring plan to reach and sustain 1,250 Seattle police officers, which is 66 more officers than were funded in this year's budget. At the same time, we are continuing more than \$100 million a year in community safety, violence prevention, survivor services, and diversified response, including new positions in the City Attorney's office to tackle Extreme Risk Protection Orders and felony human trafficking. I am thankful to City Attorney Evans for her partnership.

Seattle believes in putting the right responder on the scene when someone is in crisis, and our CARE Department is central to that vision. Chief Barden and Interim Chief Sayles together have increased the utilization of our Community Crisis Responders. I am maintaining these responders' newly expanded hours from 6:30am to 1am, and will continue to work with CARE, our Community Service Officers, SPD and Fire to maximize their use so our police can focus on policing. At the same time, CARE will be the new command center for the violence reduction work I announced in my Gun Violence Plan last week, with new investments to support that function.

In these departments, we are also trimming spending modestly while staying tightly focused on delivering results. My budget continues to hold vacant 14 unfilled community crisis responder positions, and eight 9-1-1 dispatch positions at CARE.

And SPD, whose budget is seeing a net increase of 13% due to increased contract costs, also has a reduction of approximately 2% to civilian positions, hiring incentives and marketing.

The Fire Department budget maintains core fire and emergency response services. and reduces overtime equivalent to 2% of their total budget. This will be managed through advance staff planning that ensures coverage of a service area when positions are vacant or staff are sick.

I am also sustaining the recent expansion of our Office of Emergency Management, which is key to the executive order I signed last week to enhance our emergency management systems, reduce vulnerabilities, and better prepare our communities for any eventuality.

Let's talk about our youth. This year, I've heard from so many young people across our city about what they need to feel safe and supported. In a recent conversation in Rainier Beach, we envisioned a world with no gun violence. Again and again, I've heard that's what's needed to make that world possible are positive pathways.

Every young person in this city deserves the chance to grow up with places to be, things to do, adults who believe in them, and a future they're excited about. That's why I am proposing ongoing funding to continue the Teen Late Night pilot this year in High Point, bringing us to nine Teen Late Night programs citywide. I am funding a new Community Learning Center after-school pilot at Rainier Beach High School. I am expanding support for peer mentorships and teen programs. I'm also maintaining funding for paid internships through the Seattle Youth Employment Program, because a young person who has a mentor, a job, and somewhere to be is a young person building the bright future they deserve.

No one should have to wonder whether they can afford to eat, so this budget invests in food access. This is a responsibility we have taken on as a community. As grocery prices climb and Trump and his allies gut food assistance from Washington, D.C., we are not retreating.

Last year's budget directed over \$10 million in one-time funds to expand Fresh Bucks to 5,000 more households, and to support food banks and meal delivery, setting those programs up to stop abruptly in January. In this budget, I am making those investments ongoing. And starting this month, every child in Seattle Public Schools has access to free breakfast and lunch every day at school.

Every child deserves nutritious food and hungry kids don't learn well. I'm proud to have worked with Council and alongside so many parents, students, and educators to make that happen.

Housing is at the heart of our affordability crisis. As a renter, and as a mom raising a family in an apartment, I know what it's like to cram too many people into too few rooms. To wonder what big number you're going to see on your next rent increase notice. You don't need a dishwasher or your own washer and dryer to live a good life – but you do need basic stability.

Seattle deserves affordable and abundant housing. I signed an Executive Order last month to accelerate housing production, streamline permitting and launch a Housing Production Task Force. This budget creates the new Affordable Housing Ombud position promised in that order, so that community-led developers can navigate our permitting systems faster.

In this budget I am preserving, with no reductions, rental assistance and tenant services to keep people in their homes. And I am proposing a fee to fund enforcement of the legislation I signed just last week to ban rental junk fees.

Renters deserve to know what their monthly rent is going to be, so they can find a home they can afford.

In this budget I worked hard to sustain the Equitable Development Initiative, so the communities pushed to the margins of this city's growth have the means to stay anchored in it.

Participation in everything our city has to offer requires being able to travel around it. Transportation is not a convenience; it is access to our economy, culture, and civic life. The transportation fund deficit I mentioned earlier does not impact funding for our voter-approved transportation levy projects; and we remain focused on delivery.

Every serious injury or death on our streets is one too many, and last month I signed an Executive Order to accelerate our Vision Zero work. My budget prioritizes those investments. We are also protecting transit speed and reliability improvements, neighborhood-level traffic calming and pedestrian safety projects, and upgrades to Aurora and Rainier.

Seattle's values are under attack, and we will not be quiet about it. Seattle welcomes people fleeing oppression wherever they're from, including other parts of this country. I am proud to invest \$500,000 ongoing to support queer and trans communities and I thank the LGBTQ+ Commission for their advocacy and leadership.

We are also sustaining \$4 million in ongoing support for immigrant and refugee communities for legal services, rapid response, support for immigrant workers and small businesses.

I'm proud that this budget funds implementation of our new Fair and Transparent Pricing policy. Council's final vote later today will make Seattle the first city in the country to take on algorithmic price discrimination for groceries. The same product, in the same store, should cost the same no matter who is pushing the cart.

And last month, our Office of Labor Standards recovered \$4.4 million owed to over 14,000 Uber Eats drivers, which is what it looks like when a city keeps its word to the people who hold its economy together. In this budget, I prioritized this office's vital role fighting for the rights and well-being of Seattle's workers.

This budget invests in a thriving economy for every Seattle neighborhood. It continues support for small businesses through programs like Capital Access, Tenant Improvements, technical assistance, the business community ownership fund, and the Liberty Project. We will build on these programs as we execute my Building a Resilient Economy Executive Order and make it easier to open, operate and grow a business in Seattle.

We are also maintaining JumpStart funding for our Green New Deal programs across several departments. That includes decarbonizing buildings and supporting our urban forest. We're helping to grow green jobs through clean energy apprenticeships, and developing youth leadership and job skills through the Duwamish Valley Youth Corps. This work supports our climate and our economy at the same time.

Living in an expensive city like Seattle, many of us don't have a ton of personal space. That's what makes the public spaces we all share so vital. The city becomes your living room, and the parks become your backyard. That means that, like any good living room or backyard, they need to be safe, welcoming, and – speaking as the mother of a young child – not too far from a toilet.

My budget includes \$1.4 million dollars for 10 public restrooms across the city. I'm also funding two new bathrooms in our parks -- one at Cheryl Chow Park in South Seattle and one in northeast Seattle. That's a dozen new public restrooms so everyone can explore our beautiful city with comfort and confidence.

Our community centers and parks are a priceless asset for families and people of all ages. My budget nearly doubles Seattle Parks and Recreation's scholarship budget, to serve 1,400 more people every year. We offer amazing classes like pottery, dance and martial arts, environmental learning programs, and youth athletics, and a price tag should not limit who gets to enjoy them.

If any one place can be called our city's living room, it's Seattle Center. It's a hub for culture, sports, and families playing in the fountain on a hot day. And it needs significant investment to extend its useful life. This budget includes over \$3 million to study and plan for a 2027 Seattle Center Bond issuance for redevelopment. It's a great opportunity for a partnership between government, arts, business, and labor.

I am also allocating \$500,000 to enhance safety and security at Seattle Center to continue welcoming the public to all the wonderful events there.

Together we will revitalize Seattle Center and support the many institutions that call it home.

Every budget is a set of choices. About revenue. About spending. But underneath all of that, it is a choice about who we believe we are.

I am choosing a budget that tells the truth about where we are, and still dares to point toward where we are going.

We will run this government the way the people of Seattle deserve, with honesty instead of obfuscation, with care instead of convenience, and with the discipline to make hard choices without losing sight of who those choices are meant to serve.

And then we will do more than steady the ship. We will set a course.

Toward a Seattle where stability is not the ceiling of our ambition, but the ground beneath it.

Where a balanced budget gives us the strength to build, to repair, to protect, and to imagine. Where the measure of a thriving city is not what we show the world for one extraordinary summer, but what a child sees from their window, what a family feels on their block, and what every person believes is possible for their life here.

This is Your City. It always has been.

And my promise is that we will spend every day working to make those words meaningful, until belonging is not merely something we say, but something you can feel; until progress is not merely something we announce, but something you can see; until the promise of this city reaches every neighborhood, every block, every person who calls Seattle home.

Thank you.