



King County

Shannon Braddock

King County Executive

401 Fifth Avenue, Suite 800
Seattle, WA 98104

206-296-9600 Fax 206-296-0194

TTY Relay: 711

www.kingcounty.gov

September 23, 2025

The Honorable Girmay Zahilay
Chair, King County Council
Room 1200
C O U R T H O U S E

Dear Councilmember Zahilay:

I am pleased to transmit my proposed budget for 2026-2027 and accompanying proposed legislation for consideration by the King County Council. This proposed budget continues funding for important services and advances priorities that reflect the values of King County residents.

My proposed budget makes strides in key areas, including:

- **Implementing the new criminal justice and public safety sales tax:** The new 0.1 percent sales tax authorized by HB 2015 is projected to generate \$203.5 million for King County's General Fund in the 2026-2027 biennium. Revenue from the new sales tax will maintain core services and add funding for key priorities in the criminal justice system.
- **Providing safe, clean, and reliable transit service:** Investments in Metro Transit will add more than 400,000 hours of new and restored bus service; launch two new RapidRide lines; extend the Safety, Security, and Fare Enforcement (SaFE) Reform initiative; continue transit security and Metro Transit Police (MTP) staffing; and continue more frequent cleaning of buses and bus stops.
- **Protecting critical programs from federal funding cuts:** Funding dedicated to maintaining essential services, including the transfer of 11 positions in the King County Office of Emergency Management to the General Fund to ensure continued emergency preparedness and support of nonprofits focused on homelessness prevention, shelters, and transitional and supportive housing for youth and young adults.

- **Establishing reserves to protect against potential federal cuts:** A \$31 million reserve will safeguard against potential funding reductions for Harborview Medical Center, and an \$8 million reserve in the Mental Illness and Drug Dependency Fund will serve as a contingency against potential reductions to behavioral health services.
- **Preserving services for people experiencing homelessness:** \$11.3 million will maintain 370 shelter beds that were previously funded with one-time federal COVID funds, and \$3.2 million will fund the new 81-bed Federal Way Red Lion Emergency Shelter.

Budget Outlook

While all budgets reflect the circumstances in which they are developed, King County's 2026-2027 proposed budget is influenced by a unique combination of factors. The County's budget is spread across about 140 funds, each with its own revenue sources for specified uses. Some funds are in strong financial condition, while others face severe challenges.

A year ago, the County's General Fund was projected to have a \$150 million deficit for 2026-2027 because of the longstanding State-imposed one percent annual growth limit on property tax revenue. Inflation and growth of adult and juvenile criminal caseloads increased this gap to about \$175 million by June. While the Legislature did not change the property tax revenue growth limit, it did make available a new 0.1 percent sales tax to counties through HB 2015. I proposed this tax earlier this year, and the Council approved it. The tax will go into effect on January 1, 2026, and is projected to generate about \$203 million for the 2026-2027 biennium. In addition, the Legislature broadened the sales tax base to apply to things not previously taxed, which helps the General Fund, Metro Transit, and several other funds.

As a result of this new revenue, the 2026-2027 Proposed Budget avoids the drastic cuts for the General Fund that would otherwise have been needed. I have also proposed funding increases to support and expand critical services such as adding juvenile probation counselors in Superior Court to support youth and a Special Assault Unit deputy in the Sheriff's Office to help reduce unincorporated areas case backlog; expanding funding for victim support services; and funds to preserve homeless shelters and gun violence prevention work.

The current federal Administration has proposed many budget reductions that would adversely affect County programs and our residents. Our attorneys, working with other state and local governments and nonprofit organizations, have successfully prevented many of these illegal cuts. However, Congress and the President have signaled that the federal budgets for 2026 and 2027 will include large cuts to Medicaid, public health, affordable housing, emergency management, and other areas. My Proposed Budget shifts County resources to preserve emergency management functions and establishes modest reserves to backfill other potential federal cuts temporarily. It is important to note that the County does not have the financial capacity to cover even a small fraction of the likely forthcoming federal funding cuts, which will result in impacts to community partners, service providers, and residents.

The President's tariffs, tax policies, and immigration policies are damaging the economy. The Proposed Budget is based on a July revenue forecast that assumes slow, continued

growth throughout the biennium. The President's policies could induce both a recession and higher inflation, which would hurt all of the County's funds that depend on sales taxes and other economically sensitive revenues. In addition, the County's capital projects could see significant cost increases as a result of spiking tariffs.

Many of the County's other funds are in good financial condition. This year, King County voters renewed the Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) levy (58.3 percent "yes" vote) and the Parks levy (72.9 percent "yes" vote). The Emergency Medical Services (EMS) levy is on the November ballot. The Proposed Budget cannot assume that this measure passes, so if it does, the Council will need to adjust the EMS budget accordingly before final adoption of the budget ordinance.

The two major funds of the Department of Local Services (DLS) are in dire condition. The Roads Fund relies largely on property taxes from the unincorporated area, which are subject to the same one percent revenue growth limit under State law. The Road Services Division has steadily reduced its capital program in recent years. The proposed budget includes minimal capital funding in 2026 and 2027 and will include no capital funding in 2028 and beyond unless new revenue becomes available. That would mean that roads and bridges in unincorporated King County would plan to gradually be closed because there is no funding available for major repairs or replacements.

The DLS Permitting Fund has a large deficit because building permits are currently at the lowest level ever, mainly due to the slowing economy and high interest rates. The proposed budget takes actions that will lead to return to a positive fund balance in six years.

While the 2026-2027 budgets for Public Health and Metro Transit remain steady, each faces challenges in later years because revenue growth does not keep up with cost growth. These departments are also highly vulnerable to potential federal cuts. The Metro budget acknowledges that achieving the goal of a fully zero-emissions fleet by 2035 is not possible, even if funding were available. Local utilities cannot provide the required electricity on this schedule, nor can bus manufacturers produce enough reliable vehicles. Assuming funding is available, reaching full zero emissions by the early 2040s is more attainable.

Finally, the proposed budget pulls together various funding sources to maintain our current homelessness response system. However, the combination of expiring federal funds, decreased state support, and lower document recording fee revenue means that some shelters may have to close after May 2027. Federal cuts could also reduce the number of permanent supportive housing and rent-supported units as soon as 2026.

The Budget Transmittal Package

In addition to the 2026-2027 Proposed Budget Ordinance for operating and capital budgets, this transmittal package includes the following separate proposed legislative components and reports.

Proposed Ordinances

Property Tax Ordinances – Included in this transmittal package are the proposed property tax ordinances necessary to collect the 2026-2027 property tax revenue supporting the proposed budget. The Office of Performance, Strategy, and Budget staff will work with Council staff to ensure final numbers are included in these ordinances once that information is received from the Assessor, consistent with the previous year's practice.

Non-Represented Employee 2026-2027 General Wage Increase (GWI) Ordinance – This proposed Ordinance would authorize a 3.75 percent general wage increase from the 2025 schedules, effective January 1, 2026, and a 3.75 percent increase from the 2026 schedules, effective January 1, 2027, for regular, short-term temporary, and term-limited temporary employees in non-represented county positions. The proposed Ordinance is submitted pursuant to the provisions of King County Code 3.12.130 and 3.12.140. The proposed Ordinance also outlines the insured benefits agreement for non-represented employees beginning January 1, 2026, and approves the enclosed 2026 3.75 GWI King County Hourly Squared Schedules:

- 2026 3.75 GWI King County Hourly Squared Schedule;
- 2026 3.75 GWI King County Annual FLSA Exempt Squared Schedule;
- 2026 3.75 GWI King County Standardized Hourly Salary Schedule;
- 2026 3.75 GWI King County Standardized Annual FLSA Exempt Salary Schedule;
- 2027 3.75 GWI King County Hourly Squared Schedule;
- 2027 3.75 GWI King County Annual FLSA Exempt Squared Schedule;
- 2027 3.75 GWI King County Standardized Hourly Salary Schedule; and
- 2027 3.75 GWI King County Standardized Annual FLSA Exempt Salary Schedule.

Department of Local Services Community Needs List Ordinance – This proposed Ordinance would adopt the community needs lists for the six rural community service areas and the five urban unincorporated potential annexation area geographies, as required by King County Code 2.16.055.C. The proposed community needs lists include the potential services, programs, facilities, capital improvements, and standard operations that need additional resources to respond to community-identified needs, including those that build on the communities' strengths and assets. They were developed in consultation with members of the 11 communities.

King County Civic Campus Stewardship Committee Ordinance – This proposed Ordinance would establish a King County civic campus stewardship committee, its priorities, functions, and composition.

Mental Illness and Drug Dependency (MIDD) Service Improvement Plan Extension Ordinance – This proposed legislation would amend Ordinance 15949, as amended, extending the due dates of the MIDD III Implementation Plan until an Ordinance is enacted adopting a new MIDD Implementation Plan.

Limited Tax General Obligation (LTGO) Bonds Ordinance – This proposed Ordinance would authorize the issuance of not-to exceed \$776 million of limited tax general obligation (LTGO) bonds to provide funding for various proposed capital projects. Included among the projects are nearly \$285 million for Solid Waste Division capital projects, \$87 million for housing projects, \$166 million for various land acquisitions, \$92 million for various technology projects, and \$176 million for facility improvement and other projects. The proposed Ordinance would also authorize the issuance of LTGO refunding bonds during the biennium to reduce debt service costs on outstanding bonds whenever the savings exceed certain targets identified in the County’s Debt Management Policy as adopted by Motion 15984. The proposed legislation would continue to delegate authority for the sale of the bonds to the County’s finance director.

Unlimited Tax General Obligation Bond Authorization Summary – This proposed Ordinance would authorize the issuance and sale of one or more series of unlimited tax general obligation bonds not to exceed \$1,496,429,985 to finance public health, safety, and seismic improvements to Harborview Medical Center, and to pay the costs of issuing the bonds. Ordinance 19325 authorized \$1.74 Billion in UTGO Bonds and will expire in 2026. This new authorization Ordinance allows the County to issue bonds for up to \$1.5 billion, the remaining authority authorized by voters in the 2020 Proposition 1 levy.

Hospital Services Agreement (HSA) Amendment – This proposed Ordinance would authorize execution of a second amendment to the HSA for Harborview Medical Center. The Second Amendment to the HSA recognizes an urgent, increased need to support the County’s Mission Population programs and services and provides for an increased mission support payment to King County. The Second Amendment to the HSA also provides the opportunity to allow University of Washington to be responsible for management, design, planning, development and contract oversight of Board-approved Medical Center capital projects. The Harborview Board of Trustees is anticipated to approve this amendment at its meeting on September 25, 2025. The Board of Regents has approved it.

Fee Ordinances

Department of Local Services Permitting Division Fee Increase Ordinance – This proposed Ordinance would authorize a new permit application processing fee and an 11.8 percent increase of the existing Permitting Division fee. It also adds a 3.5 percent temporary surcharge for development permit fees and adds permit application fees for the Historic Preservation Program and River and Flood Management programs of the Department of Natural Resources and Parks for 2026-2027.

Department of Natural Resources and Parks Surface Water Management Fee Increase Ordinance – This proposed Ordinance would authorize a 4.99 percent \$18 fee increase to the Surface Water Management fee, bringing the annual rate from \$361 to \$379 per residential parcel for 2026-2027, with corresponding adjustments in the rates for classes of non-residential property. This increase supports ongoing efforts to improve and maintain

stormwater infrastructure and provide necessary surface water management services to protect public health and safety.

Department of Natural Resources and Parks Noxious Weeds Special Assessment

Increase Ordinance – This proposed Ordinance would authorize a 30.97 percent or \$1.92 increase for the Noxious Weed Control program’s special assessment, bringing the annual rate from \$6.20 to \$8.12 per parcel for 2026 and 2027. The Noxious Weeds special assessment last increased in 2022. The proposed increase would restore the Noxious Weed fund reserve and cover three years of inflationary increases through 2027 to sustain existing levels of service, enabling the program to respond to high-priority noxious weed outbreaks and support the Clean Water Healthy Habitat Strategic Plan.

King County International Airport Landing, Fuel, and Aircraft Parking Fee Increase

Ordinance – This proposed Ordinance would increase the landing, fuel, and aircraft parking fees at the King County International Airport (KCIA). These fees have not increased since 2014. The proposed Ordinance would also create new administrative fees related to security badges and service operator permits. Increasing existing fees and establishing new administrative fees will support the financial sustainability of the Airport.

King County Sheriff’s Office (KCSO) Civil Fee Ordinance

– This proposed Ordinance increases the KCSO’s existing civil process fees by 19.8 percent to account for inflationary increases for providing services. State law allows counties to raise fees to recoup costs under RCW 36.18.040(1). The last increase was on January 1, 2021. Covered services include personal and real property court orders, protection orders, court-ordered evictions, family law actions, and notice of small claims.

KCSO Civil Appearance Fee Ordinance – This proposed Ordinance would establish a new fee reimbursing the KCSO for the cost of staff subpoenaed to testify in civil litigation. This would ensure KCSO staff expenses are appropriately reimbursed and public funds are not used to subsidize private litigation.

King County Code Changes

King County Code Section 2 Department of Executive Services Harborview

Construction and Infrastructure Division Change – This proposed legislation would establish a new division in the Department of Executive Services, the Harborview Construction and Infrastructure Division, to manage the planning, contracting, and construction of all County capital projects at HMC, among other duties. The division will include 15 existing FTE positions transferred from the Facilities Management Division and three FTE positions added in the 2025 first Omnibus (Ordinance 19956). The Executive’s Proposed Budget adds eight new positions to support the design and construction of a new multi-story inpatient tower and associated improvements on the Harborview campus. The new division will be funded by the Harborview Bond Program and the County Hospital Levy.

King County Code Section 2 Department of Information Technology Chief Information Security Officer Change – This proposed Ordinance would amend King County Code to establish the position of chief information security officer within the Department of Information Technology (KCIT). The chief information security officer will serve as the sole authority on cybersecurity and privacy matters across all branches of government, strengthening the County’s cybersecurity infrastructure and ensuring the protection and continuity of vital public services. This is an existing FTE within KCIT.

King County Code Section 2 Department of Public Defense Standards Change – This proposed Ordinance would amend King County Code to clarify King County’s intent to follow the Washington State Supreme Court’s Standards for Indigent Defense.

King County Code Section 2 Department of Judicial Administration, Customer Services Division Name Change – This proposed Ordinance would amend King County Code to rename the Department of Judicial Administration’s Norm Maleng Regional Justice Center Customer Services Division to the Customer Services Division to more accurately reflect its function across locations.

King County Code Section 4A Capital Definition Changes – This proposed Ordinance would amend King County Code with updated definitions pertaining to the design and schedule of capital projects and programs in King County. These changes align County Code with industry best practices and provide consistency with other County documents.

King County Code Section 4A Right-of-Way Construction Permit Inspection Fee Change – This proposed Ordinance would increase the permitting inspection fee from \$176 per hour of utility inspection to \$187 per hour of utility inspection, an increase of 6.3 percent.

King County Code Section 4A Tax Exemption for Sales of Lodging Change – This proposed legislation would amend the King County Code’s tax rate exemption language for sales of lodging. This technical adjustment is made at the request of the Department of Revenue.

Fund Change Ordinances

Behavioral Health Administrative Services Organization (BHASO) Fund Ordinance – This proposed Ordinance would create a new fund for Behavioral Health Administrative Services Organization (BHASO) finances. The new fund is established in response to State Health Care Authority (HCA) requirements for detailed accounting and reporting of BHASO Funds. The separate BHASO fund will enable DCHS to improve revenue and expense tracking and eliminate the need for redundant systems to meet state HCA requirements to track the BHASO cash balance and to substantiate routine fiscal reporting.

Harborview Construction and Infrastructure Administration Fund – This proposed Ordinance would create the new Harborview Construction and Infrastructure Administration fund as a special revenue fund to receive reimbursement for costs related to Harborview construction and infrastructure capital projects. Creation of a new fund specific to Harborview construction and infrastructure activities managed by the County will support increased transparency and tracking of specific operational costs associated with these activities.

King County Code Section 4A Parks Fund Changes - This proposed Ordinance would amend King County Code to remove references to the expiring Parks Levy and replace them with references to the newly approved Parks Levy. These changes will allow Parks to receive new levy revenue and spend it according to the newly adopted six-year allocation plan.

Additional Materials

Child Savings Account Motion – This proposed motion requests a report from the Executive on the feasibility of establishing child savings accounts in King County. The report will include a review of similar programs established in other jurisdictions, a draft implementation plan, and a recommendation from the Executive on whether and how such a program could be implemented in King County.

Current List of Projects in Project Review Board (PRB) Oversight Report –King County Code 2A.380.200 requires the Chief Information Officer to provide a list of all information technology capital projects with active appropriation authority, including projects not seeking funding in the proposed budget and the unexpended appropriation for each project, to be included with the Executive Proposed Biennial Budget.

2025 Acceptance of Electronic Payments Report (2025 eCommerce Report) – Included with this transmittal is the 2025 Acceptance of Electronic Payments Report as called for by Executive Policy FIN-8-5-2-EP, Accepting Electronic Payments, Section IV.F.1, effective July 1, 2021. The enclosed report lists those agencies countywide that accept electronic payments (credit cards, debit cards, and electronic checks) and the specific subset of agencies that absorb transaction processing costs, instead of passing them on to their customers, as approved by KCC 4A.601.025. For absorbed costs, the report further lists the actual or budgeted amounts for the previous fiscal year, the present budget year, and the upcoming budget year.

4Culture Budget Submittal – The 2026-2027 4Culture Budget is included in accordance with Ordinance 18684.

Administrative Fund/Subfund Closure Report – The 2025 Administrative Fund/Subfund Closure Report is transmitted to the Council for approval in accordance with the requirements of King County Code (KCC) 4A.200.020. As required, the enclosed report

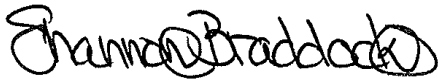
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describes the administrative funds and subfunds closed, the amount of the residual balances in those funds at the time of closure (if any), and the disposition of those residual balances.

I certify that funds are available.

If you have any questions, please contact Dwight Dively, Director, Office of Performance, Strategy and Budget at 206-263-9727.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shannon Braddock". The signature is stylized with a large, looped 'S' and a cursive 'B'.

Shannon Braddock
King County Executive

Enclosures

cc: King County Councilmembers

ATTN: Stephanie Cirkovich, Chief of Staff, King County Council
Melani Hay, Clerk of the Council

Karan Gill, Deputy Executive, Chief of Staff, Office of the Executive
Stephanie Pure, Council Relations Director, Office of the Executive
Dwight Dively, Director, Office of Performance, Strategy and Budget
Elected Officials
Department Directors