

MEMORANDUM

TO: Jared Mead, Chair

CC: Nate Nehring, Vice Chair
Megan Dunn, Councilmember
Sam Low, Councilmember
Strom Peterson, Councilmember

FROM: Dave Somers, Snohomish County Executive

DATE: December 13, 2024

RE: 2025-26 Biennial Budget

I submitted my proposed 2025-2026 budget on September 4, 2024. In my proposed budget, I included cuts to almost every department and office in the county. We proposed a modest tax increase of \$24 per year on the average-valued home in Snohomish County by 2026. I and my team then rejected nearly every proposal for new employees in the general fund not backed by new revenue or otherwise cost neutral to department budgets. While difficult, these decisions were necessary and prudent to ensure we could balance our budget, fulfill our responsibilities, and continue to run an efficient county government.

My proposed budget was balanced, supported public safety, provided funding to retain and attract employees, and responsibly met the public's needs. I have always approached budgeting with the seriousness it demands. I think responsible budgeting should reflect our values while avoiding political gamesmanship. I understand that some want to use the budget process as a springboard for their own political ambitions. I think that's wrong and a disservice to the public. They expect us to do our jobs without gamesmanship. Nevertheless, as Council Chair, you decided to delay consideration of the budget for two weeks so that there could be a platform for political posturing. You rushed a poorly informed performance audit and failed to provide the Executive Office an opportunity to fully engage and consider a thorough and thoughtful response to it. This is unfortunate.

To be clear, the performance auditor did not recommend that any staff be cut. In his public testimony, the performance auditor stated that he believes the Executive Office is neither overstaffed nor understaffed, with one exception, legal counsel, where he recommended additional staff. Any arguments to the contrary are not true.

The budget process should be thoughtful, serious, and responsible. It should have our responsibilities at its core, not political posturing. Rather, we have been dealt a budget that is a disservice to our dedicated

county employees who work miracles with the resources they are provided; overreaches into personnel decisions that are the Executive's prerogative; diverts critical funding to help address the ongoing affordable housing crisis; and dramatically impacts our ability to serve and build relationships with many communities throughout the county.

For all of the above reasons, I was inclined to veto the budget. However, because consideration of the budget was delayed for two weeks and Council will be going on recess for two weeks, a veto would almost certainly mean that county government would shut down in the new year. In good conscience, I cannot do that to our employees nor the public who relies on Snohomish County's services. Instead, over the next two years, I will work with my team to identify measures and strategies to lessen the negative impacts of this budget if it were to be fully enacted as adopted.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the leadership demonstrated by Councilmembers Dunn and Peterson, in particular, for their efforts to prioritize the needs and health of our community and the county organization. Despite the difficult position they were in, with the council chair repeatedly siding with the council minority, they succeeded in mitigating damage. We are in a far better position because of their work. And while we may have our share of philosophical differences, I am grateful that Councilmembers Low and Nehring have always sought compromise. Though, I wish and believe they should have moved closer to true middle ground. Nevertheless, we've consistently worked well together for many years, and I am hopeful that can continue.

I want to work constructively with Council. The public expects it. I and my staff have been extraordinarily flexible, making compromises and accommodating the needs of Council, while looking out for the public's interests. I also want to ensure that the county does not become dominated by gamesmanship. I hope our next budget process is more constructive and less performative.