

2025-2026 Supplemental Department Questions

Please answer the following questions in a word document and return to Council. The answers to these questions will be provided to council as supplemental information. While not part of the physical budget presentation to Council, departments should be prepared to answer questions Council may have on these supplemental questions. If you feel that you have provided an answer in a previous question, please don't repeat your answer, simply refer to the earlier question/answer.

Strategic Goals:

1. Provide your 2025-2026 strategic goals; How are they reflected in your budget request?

As an independently elected office, we are responsible for delivering accurate, courteous, and efficient services to our customers with our four main divisions: Elections and Voter Registration, Animal Services, Licensing, and Recording.

Our strategic goals for 2025-2026 are aligned with our delivery standards for these core services and include:

- Leveraging our reputation as a trusted, reliable source and the communication skills and capacity we have developed in the 2024 Presidential year to further our efforts to combat dis/misinformation through the sharing and delivery of timely, accurate information about our Auditor's Office services, standards, and processes.
- Developing division dashboards to provide greater visibility and insight into work and project progress.
- Implementing observer and voter outreach strategies and programs that highlight transparency, access, accuracy, and accountability of our elections process and encourage participation in elections by all communities and eligible voters.
- Organizing information sharing opportunities for our regional animal services partners so we can better coordinate activities, share insights, and support regional expertise all with the goal of creating a safer Snohomish County for people and animals.

Recognizing the current financial picture, the Auditor's Office plans to achieve these goals with **no new programs and no new positions**.

National, state and local landscape:**1. What critical issues are you facing in your department/industry, and how are you addressing them?**

Continued propagation of mis/disinformation and threats against election workers: At the federal, state and local level there continues to be focus on the integrity of the elections process and the spread of misinformation about elections, all which raise safety concerns for voters and staff during critical election times. We appreciate the support of both the Council and the Executive by enabling the remodel of our elections space to ensure secure facilities for voters, observers, and our election workers. We continue to leverage our communications capacity to combat rumors with accurate information from the source – us!

Nationwide trends in property fraud through the recording process: The property records industry has seen increased concern about property theft by the recording of fraudulent documents. Our team is working with auditors and industry experts to identify ways we can help prevent the use of the recording system for this type of crime, which might include indexing more data such as notary names and expiration dates.

Statewide License Plat Shortage: License plate inventory is provided to counties and their subagents by the Washington State Department of Licensing. There has been a statewide shortage in some license plates. We have been addressing this by carefully tracking and managing our inventory and by collaborating with our subagents spread across Snohomish County.

Fewer pet owners acquiring pet licenses: While there is no indication that there are fewer animals in the county, year over year trends show that fewer pet owners are licensing their pets. The Auditor's Office recently surveyed known animal owners to identify potential motivations for licensing. We will be using this information to modify our licensing program and approaches.

Maintaining critical staff: The Auditor's Office continues to lose critical staff to other county offices and departments, specifically in animal control officer and project coordinator positions. While upward mobility and greater variety of experiences are two key draws for staff leaving, compensation is the primary driver. A Project Coordinator in the Auditor's Office is compensated approximately \$30,000 less annually, when compared to their counterparts in Executive departments. We continue to work with Human Resources on this issue.

- 2. Are there federal, state, and local issues/mandates that will impact your department, operationally and/or fiscally. Please address what it is, the anticipated impact, and how you plan to mitigate it.**

There are ongoing mandates from the federal and state government for all our divisions, but there are not currently any *new* mandates that would materially impact the forthcoming biennium budget at this time.

Programs:

- 1. With ARPA funding ending, what programs/services will be impacted and how? What is your plan for mitigating the impacts?**

Most of our ARPA funding was prudently invested by the Council for one-time capital projects, such as the renovation of our elections space, rather than ongoing expenses. Therefore, there is no impact to the Auditor's Office regarding the end of ARPA funding.

- 2. What new programs are you proposing for 2025-2026? What need or efficiency is that new program addressing? How is that program funded for sustainability? What metrics are in place to determine effectiveness?**

The Auditor's Office is not proposing any new programs. With no new programs and no new FTEs, the Auditor's Office continues to be a bargain for the biennium.

- 3. Are there departmental change requests not in the Executive's Recommended Budget that you feel Council should consider including? If so, please provide the change request number and justification for the inclusion of the request.**

Yes. We are requesting Council consider exempting the Auditor's Office from "Resource Alignment" Cut.

While the restoration requested by the Auditor's Office would be "only" \$80,000 each year, that seemingly small amount means a lot for a relatively small office that is already managed lean and is seeking no new programs or FTEs.

Elections are vital to our democracy and identified as critical infrastructure. Our licensing, recording, and animal services work has been recognized as essential services that must continue to be performed for the well-being of our community, state, and country.

All divisions generate revenue to offset costs so cutting \$80,000 can have a corresponding hit to the revenue we bring into the County.

If required to cut \$80,000 per year, we would first attempt to find savings by maintaining vacancies but would also need to consider cuts to the few non-mandated levels of service we provide such as translation and interpretation services or rehabilitation services of animals in distress for potential adoption.

Internal Operations:

1. Please explain how you intended to meet the Executive's 3% Resource Alignment request.

Clarification: It's our understanding that the Executive's Resource Alignment request is for 1 ½ %, rather than 3%.

Request for Exemption: Please see our earlier response which includes our request that Council consider exempting the Auditor's Office from Executive's "Resource Alignment" cut.

If required to cut \$80,000 per year, we would first attempt to find savings by maintaining vacancies but would also need to consider cuts to the few non-mandated levels of service we provide such as translation and interpretation services or rehabilitation services of animals in distress for potential adoption.

2. How are increasing Internal Service Rates impacting your department/programs?

Thank you for asking this question. The internal service rates have increased and that increase in costs makes it more difficult for our office to fund our direct services to customers, especially if we are required to take the cut ("Resource Alignment") that is being applied to executive branch departments.

3. To help inform Council on experiences around hiring and retention, please provide a list of all vacant position titles, position codes, FTE amount (1.0, 0.5, etc.), date vacated, and date first posted. Template spreadsheet attached for convenience and conformity; if already tracking information in another format, that is acceptable as well. Please list each vacancy separately.

Our office filled in the template spreadsheet.

4. When was the last time your department implemented a fee increase? Do you have any plans to increase fees? Are your current fees established based on a full cost recovery model?

- Animal Services: Consistent with our annual practice, we submitted ECAF 2024-1995 on August 20, 2024 which will, when the related motion is approved by Council, enable us to fully cover the animal “relinquishment” and “redemption” costs, which include the increased costs at the Everett Animal Shelter, increased costs for transportation, and increased personnel costs.
- Elections: The Auditor's Office reimbursed by local jurisdictions and by Washington State for most of the costs of administering four to five elections year. In addition, cities and towns reimburse the county approximately 55% of the costs of maintaining voter registrations each year. The Office has also successfully obtain grants in recent years, sourced by the federal and state governments.
- Licensing: The fees for the largest services provided by our Licensing Division are set by the State Legislature and are set at levels with the intent to fully recover costs. Overall, the Licensing Division of the Auditor's Office generates net revenue for the county.
- Recording: The fees for the largest services provided by our Recording Division are set by the State Legislature and are set at levels with the intent to fully recover costs. Overall, the Recording Division of the Auditor's Office generates net revenue for the county.

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