

## 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?

DCNR's mission is to partner with Snohomish County communities to steward resources and manage infrastructure for the purpose of protection, enhancement, use, and enjoyment of our land, air, and water now and into the future. Below are some examples of the higher priority strategic goals that are included in the 2025-2026 budget request.

#### 2025-26 DCNR Strategic Goals:

- *Land Conservation Initiative (LCI)* – With Snohomish County's fast growth rate, it is important to ensure that county lands contribute to the health, economy, and quality of life for the community. In 2022, the County Council funded the Land Conservation Initiative to develop a cohesive strategy for protecting high-conservation value lands. Creating the Land Conservation Strategy (LCS) is a key component of this initiative, along with the Healthy Forest Program and the County Transfer of Development Rights program. . The LCS will guide efforts to preserve important parks, habitats, agricultural lands, forests, and open spaces in perpetuity. The first draft of the LCS is scheduled for completion in December of 2024, and it will then go through a review process in early 2025.
- *Communitywide Climate Resiliency Plan (CoCr)*– Snohomish County has contracted with Cascadia Consulting for the development of a Communitywide Climate Resiliency Plan (formerly the Communitywide Climate Action and Environmental Stewardship Plan). The CwCRP will use the best available climate change science, reflect community concerns, and prioritize equity while ensuring consistency with state, regional and local mandates, policies, and programs. The plan development includes the County's Interdepartmental Climate Resiliency Committee (ICRC) and the Climate Action Advisory Committee (CAAC) as steering groups to assist with identifying and addressing climate related challenges to Snohomish County and will develop strategies that promote resiliency to those challenges. In close coordination with Department of Emergency Management, the CwCRP will include FEMA required disaster preparedness and recovery planning related to those identified climate challenges, as well as robust adaptation and mitigation planning. Overall, the

CwCRP will be used as a blueprint to reduce the impact of climatological changes from heat, sea level rise, wildfires and storms on communities and infrastructure.

- *Snohomish County Food and Farming Center (SCFFC)* – DCNR is pleased to report we have now increased the current funding for the Food and Farming Center to over \$15 million and are in the process of applying for an additional \$20 million EPA Climate grant. This year we brought on the entire Progressive, Design, Build team, we are working closely with them currently in the site validation phase, program operational plans and site design. Permitting and environmental work is also in progress. Partnering with organizations such as the Snohomish County Farm Bureau to begin outreach with regional farmers and attending various meetings and conferences to stay connected with the ag community on progress and seeking continuous input on needed infrastructure within the facilities.
- *Expansion of Fish Passage Culvert Program* – The SWM capital program has increased its focus on designing and constructing projects that eliminate fish passage barriers under county roads. The program expansion began in 2021, and has continued since then, including in the proposed two-year budget for 2025 and 2026. This program has been funded by SWM service charge revenues, funds from the sale of Cathcart properties, REETII, Road Fund, and revenues from state and federal grants. Since 2015, SWM has replaced a total of 57 County road culverts that were barriers to fish passage, and SWM is currently constructing 8 additional fish passage culverts in 2024. SWM is currently in the process of designing over 30 culvert barriers for replacement with larger, fish passable culverts to be constructed in the coming years. Public Works also addresses fish passage barriers as part of their road improvement projects.
- *Chinook Marsh Restoration Project* – The SWM capital program will continue to make progress on this large (~430 acre) estuary restoration project that was originally begun by SWM in the mid-90's and then recently reinitiated. Intertidal restoration is integral to the success of salmon recovery in the Snohomish watershed, as these areas provide essential refuge and rearing habitat to out-migrating juvenile salmon. Following the acquisition of additional property for restoration in 2022 and 2023, SWM started the feasibility and design of the restoration and setback levee elements in 2024. SWM has also been pursuing grant funding for this project, and in 2024, SWM was awarded two grants totaling \$17.7 million. The next steps in 2025 and 2026 involve continuing the design of the restoration and setback levee elements, coordinating the potential relocation of three pipelines that cross through the property, and pursuing additional grant funding opportunities.
- *Continued Investment at the Fair Park* – Parks is working on completing a review and update of the 2014 Fair Park Preferred Plan, which will help to guide long-term planning for facility improvements which will contribute to overall long-term sustainability. Both new facility needs and maintenance/renovation needs for existing structures are included in the plan as well as the extent of needed

improvements however is large and Parks is working to strategize sequencing of work and approaches to funding in order to set a foundation for on-going facility investment.

- *Regional Trail projects* – Regional trails continue to be a top priority for Snohomish County residents and the 2025/2026 CIP includes continued design of the Snohomish River Regional Trail and Centennial Trail South extension, as well as funding to complete the Whitehorse Trail connections. Full development of the Snohomish River and Centennial Trails are estimated to cost more than \$100 million collectively and the ultimate funding source for development has not yet been identified.

### **National, state and local landscape:**

1. What critical issues are you facing in your department/industry, and how are you addressing them?

- Parks maintenance/staffing

Staffing levels for Rangers and Maintenance have essentially not changed in over 20 years (17.75 Rangers and 26 Maintenance Staff in 2003 vs 18 Rangers and 28 Maintenance Staff in 2024), while at the same time County population has increased 20% and the number of parks in Snohomish County's system has increased from 103 to 120. In this time additionally, the following parks and facilities have been opened to public use and operational management: Willis D. Tucker, Whitehorse Park (ballfields and campground), Lake Goodwin, Wenberg, Tambark Creek, Miner's Corner, River Meadow's Yurt Village, 10 new campsites at Flowing Lake, Heybrook Ridge, Paradise Valley Conservation Area, Lake Stickney, Lake Stevens, Cavalero, Martha Lake Airport, SR 530 Slide Memorial and Corcoran Park, 8 miles of the Centennial Trail and 21.5 miles of Whitehorse Trail.

With limited staffing, we prioritize safety and security of the park system before taking on other items that need to be addressed. This is resulting in an accumulation of deferred maintenance needs to be addressed and a reduced ability to be proactive in scheduling work. Parks is further reviewing if the adopted level-of-service for parks should be reduced.

- Culvert needs

Snohomish County has a growing list of culverts under County roads that need to be replaced with new culverts, either because they have failing pipe conditions or because they are partial or total barriers to fish passage. To date, SWM has evaluated the fish passage conditions for nearly two-thirds of the 1,783 county-owned stream culverts. Of these, 331 were found to be total barriers and 468 are partial barriers to fish passage. These numbers will undoubtedly increase as the remaining culverts are evaluated.

In addition, over 200 culverts have been observed to have failing pipe conditions. Out of these, 17 culverts have been partially repaired by Public Works, and the permits to make the repairs require the County to replace these culverts with fish passable culverts. Many, but not all, of the failing culverts coincide with the list of fish barrier culverts.

Both SWM and Public Works include the replacement of County road culverts as part of their capital programs. The cost to replace each fish-barrier culvert typically ranges from \$600,000 to \$2,000,000, so funding is one of the challenges. Since 2015, SWM has replaced a total of 57 County road culverts that were barriers to fish passage, and SWM is currently constructing 8 additional fish passage culverts in 2024. In recent years, additional County funding has been allocated to increasing the number of fish passage culverts replaced by SWM, including SWM service charge revenues, REET2 revenues and one-time funds from the sale of County-owned property at Cathcart. SWM has also been aggressively pursuing grant opportunities to leverage County funds that have been allocated. SWM has been awarded roughly \$16 M in grant funds to be used from 2024 to 2026 to install new fish passage culverts.

- Open Space taxation

Agriculture Open Space taxation has recently been brought up requiring agritourism farms to remove land from the open space designation that have event facilities/parking lots/corn mazes and other structures. Farmers are receiving letters stating a portion of their properties are being removed from open space, landowners are required to pay 7 years back taxes and interest on the land being removed.

- OES

Hiring for technical positions within OES Weatherization has strict prerequisites to obtain necessary certifications – these continue to pose challenges in the current market, where there is a high demand for construction / energy conservation related skillsets and limited experienced applicant pools.

The removal of funding for OES additional help in 2025-26 will impact regional outreach and collaboration efforts, as well as the ability to pursue needed grant funding.

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.

- Washington State [RCW 39.04.151-.152](#) changed the way County agencies maintain small work rosters. Snohomish County has chosen to use the State MRSC small works roster, instead of maintaining their own. This has caused issues with contractor procurement for the Weatherization program,

preventing previously used procurement practices. This could impact more programs as the full weight of losing a County-approved small work roster is determined in upcoming months and years.

- In August, the County was issued a new 5-year NPDES permit, which contains some new requirements for CNR and other departments, such as requirements for SWM to construct more water quality improvement projects and to conduct more water quality planning. SWM is attempting to meet these new requirements using existing SWM staff and revenues together with additional potential grant funding.
- Regional cost escalation has impacted the number of projects that can be completed and more funding within Parks' capital budget is needed to maintain the system that we have. In 2014 Parks typically allocated \$80,000 to install or replace a playground. That same playground now costs closer to \$400,000 or greater, if unitary surfacing is incorporated. This trend is requiring a shift toward increased focus on current facilities and less development of new facilities, unless additional and/or alternative funding can be identified.

## Programs

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

Most of the ARPA funds that were allocated to DCNR were used to support the advancement of capital projects, including the McCollum Food and Farming Center, the Chinook Marsh Restoration project, and required stormwater pond excavation at the Smith Island Restoration site. The Food and Farming Center and Chinook Marsh projects have also received millions of dollars in grant funding and will continue to explore grant opportunities to fill the funding gap for these two large projects.

The remaining funds were used to fund a project position in 2023 and 2024 to support STEM education through the Glacier Peak Institute. This position has been vacated and will not be refilled.

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 Snohomish County Advanced Ag Technology program will expand with the recent funding received in the Flood Plains by Design grant. The next step will allow soil mapping and the placement of soil moisture sensors throughout farms in the Snohomish Watershed beyond the current test beds providing data to reduce water consumption and nutrient management.
- OES-Weatherization will be implementing a new program in collaboration with the Human Services-Energy Assistance Program to install high efficiency heating and cooling units in eligible households within Snohomish County.

This will reduce client utility costs, lower electric grid usage, as well as reduce GHG emissions. This effort is funded by the Climate Commitment Act through the Washington Dept. of Commerce.

- Since the addition of a dedicated Fair Manager to the Fair Park in 2023, significant progress has been made in identifying and starting to address facility needs. The list of renovations needed however is extensive and it is recognized that revenue from the Fair Park will not fully provide the funding needed to complete the identified work. A Preferred Plan review/update process will be completed later this year and is setting a path for prioritizing work and ensuring it aligns with the long-term vision for the facility. Additional funding sources are actively being pursued with a strong emphasis on building out and expanding a sponsorship program to bring additional funding to the facility.
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.

No.

### **Internal Operations**

1. Please explain how you intended to meet the Executive's 3% Resource Alignment request.
- Parks/Agriculture – Implementation of a new Reservation System that will be a cost savings and transferring of Twin Lakes Park to the City of Marysville will help Parks to meet the 3% reduction.
  - OES – Cost reductions were met by removing additional temporary staff support and reducing other annual expenses, like subscriptions to regional / national climate resiliency organizations.
  - SWM – SWM was exempt from this request since SWM is funded by SWM utility charges together with grants and other funding sources.
2. How are increasing Internal Service Rates impacting your department/programs?
- Internal service charges have increased, just as many other types of expenses have also increased, including construction, consultant, staffing, property, and many other costs. The combined effect of these cost increases makes it more challenging to provide the same level of service to the public. CNR continually looks for more efficient ways to conduct business to help offset these different cost increases and we additionally appreciate when service providers and thoughtful with their programs and associated increases.
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



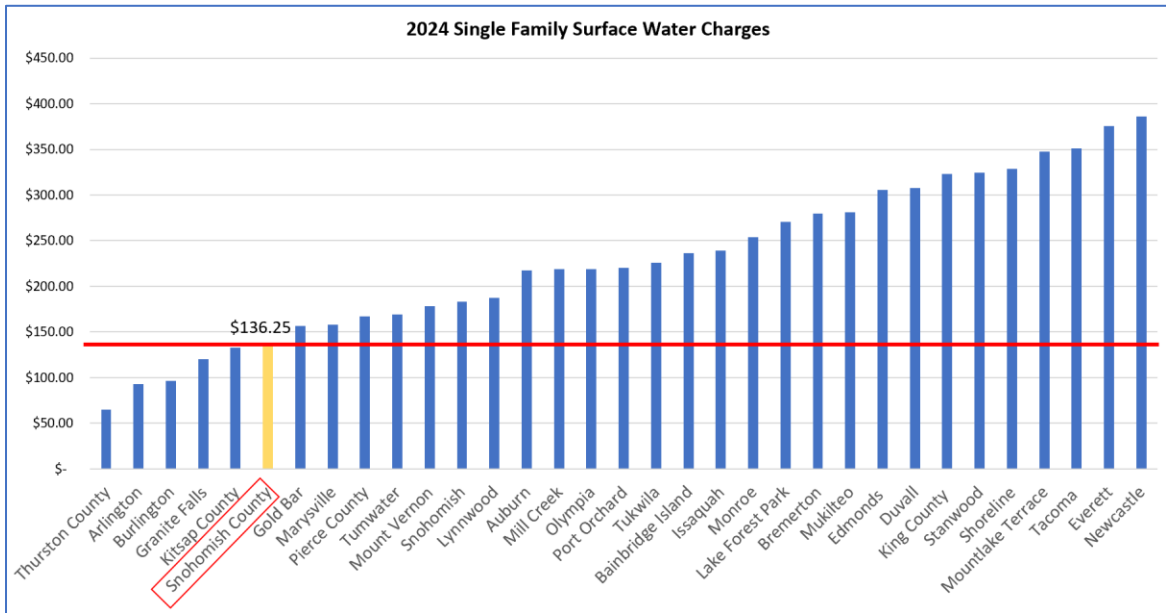
convenience and conformity; if already tracking information in another format, that is acceptable as well. Please list each vacancy separately.

[See separate file.](#)

- 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?

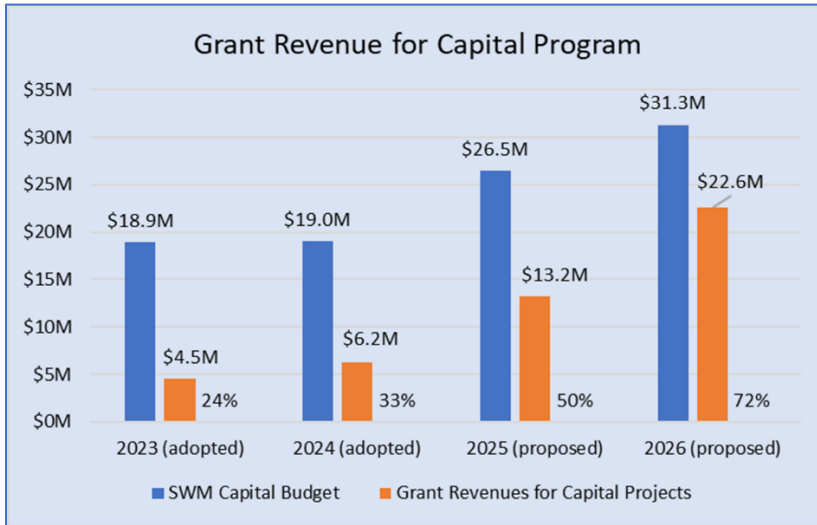
[SWM](#)

The rates for SWM’s service charges are established in County code. The last time Council approved a change in SWM’s rates was in 2019, and the changes first took effect in 2020. At the time, the Council also approved in County code an annual cost adjustment in SWM’s rates of 2.8 percent, in order to enable SWM to provide the same level of service in the face of constantly increasing costs. The first year that the 2.8% increase took affect was in 2021, and it has continued each year since then. The current annual surface water rate for single family property owners is \$136.25, which is one of the lowest rates for jurisdictions within Snohomish County as well as across the region (see below). SWM’s rates are based on a full cost recovery model.



Every year, SWM leverages its surface water rates with other funding sources, such as grant funds and REET II, to provide services that exceed the capacity of what can be provided from our utility charge revenues alone. In recent years, SWM has been very successful obtaining grant funding, which together with other funding has allowed SWM to temporarily increase its capital program. The chart below shows the increase of SWM’s capital program (blue column), which has been largely fueled by a corresponding increase in grant revenues (orange column) over the next two years. Some of the larger sources of grant funding

have come from federal programs, much of which is short term in nature and is not expected to continue at these levels much longer.



Conversely, SWM has experienced an unusually high increase in costs over the past few years, partly caused by unusually high inflation as well as an increase in construction costs, consultant costs and staffing costs. As a result, SWM's revenues are unable to fund the same level of service that they used to provide just a few years ago. SWM has been closely monitoring our finances and making financial projections for the coming years, which indicate that SWM's fund balance will start to decline in the coming years if no action is taken. SWM provided a PowerPoint presentation to Council on this topic and then went through that presentation with Council members at a Council meeting on July 16th.

SWM's recent success in obtaining grant funding has helped delay the need for an immediate increase in SWM's rates. However, because additional grant funding is only a short-term solution and will likely drop back to more normal levels in the near future, SWM continues to update our financial forecast and to evaluate different options for SWM's rates. We will engage with and update Council as those evaluations progress. Until then, we recommend that the annual cost adjustment for SWM rates of 2.8% remain unchanged in code so that SWM services do not have to be reduced.

### Parks

Park Impact fees were last updated in 2018 and are currently proposed for adjustment. The fee changes have been reviewed and approved by the Planning Commission and will be routed through Council for consideration fall 2024.

The Park Fee Schedule is reviewed annually and adjustments are made as necessary.