

SNOHOMISH COUNTY • 2027–2028 BUDGET

Community Engagement Findings

*Community Priorities, Perspectives, and
Considerations for Fiscal Decision-Making*



About LISC

The Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) is one of the country's largest community development organizations. LISC Puget Sound is its Washington State office.

47 years

Of work in communities,
since 1979

\$38B

Invested across the country

\$93B

In other public & private
money brought in

34

Local offices, in big cities &
rural counties

We work with local governments, community organizations, businesses, and residents on housing, small business, jobs, food security, and neighborhood investment.

How We Work With Local Government



Our work starts with the people who live there.

HOW WE PARTNER WITH GOVERNMENT

Needs assessments, strategic planning, feasibility analysis, program design, and implementation support. We work alongside staff and elected officials, not around them.

HOW WE REACH PEOPLE

Surveys, focus groups, one-on-one interviews, and public meetings, in the languages people speak at home, through the organizations residents already trust.

WHAT WE BRING FROM ELSEWHERE

Forty-seven years of practice in cities and rural counties with very different budgets and politics. We show you the tradeoffs and the evidence.

WHO WE HEAR FROM

Renters & homeowners

Small business owners

Seniors & youth

Immigrant & refugee families

Faith congregations

City & county staff

We show findings you can trace to what people said, including where they disagreed.

Our job is to help communities thrive.

Engagement at a Glance

500+

Participants

80

Survey Responses

24

Boards &
Commissions
Engaged

75+

Community &
Partner
Organizations

13

Roundtables &
Listening Sessions

Three questions guided every conversation:

1

What should be protected as
fundamental to community well-being?

2

Where is there flexibility if reductions
become necessary?

3

What principles should guide difficult
budget decisions?

Five Principles Behind Community Priorities

1

Make Decisions for the Long Term

Weigh prevention and future costs, not just immediate savings.

“Consider the long-term costs of budget cuts, not just the immediate savings”

2

Think in Systems, Not Programs

County investments are interconnected – reductions shift costs elsewhere.

“When I think about community safety, I think about prevention, not just policing”

3

Maximize Impact of Every Dollar

Pursue efficiency, modernization, and partnerships before cuts.

“Don’t cut the dollars that unlock the dollars”

4

Protect People with Fewest Alternatives

Reductions affect vulnerable residents most – weigh that first.

“Consider which communities are being currently impacted at the highest levels, and cut the least from them”

5

Build Trust Through Transparency

Communicate fiscal realities and how input shaped decisions.

“The presentation helped me understand why these decisions are so difficult”

A Balanced Approach- Not Reductions Alone

Many participants pushed back on reductions as the only lever and asked the County to pair spending decisions with revenue and partnership strategies.

1

Strengthen Partnerships

With nonprofits, businesses, and community organizations to help sustain services.

2

Adjust County Fees

So fees more fully recover the true cost of providing services.

3

Pursue Outside Funding

Additional state and federal funding to reduce pressure on the General Fund.

4

Explore Dedicated Funding

Voter-approved measures and dedicated sales tax for public safety and priorities.

Also raised: transportation funding options and property-tax-related revenue strategies as part of a broader fiscal sustainability approach.

Service Area Community Priorities

Public Safety, Law & Justice

Community Priorities for Potential Service Impacts

Potential Service Impact	Community Priority
Response times for emergency and non-emergency calls	Priority to Protect
Patrol coverage and available deputies	Priority to Protect
Capacity for criminal investigations	Significant Impact if Reduced
Corrections staffing and inmate support services	Significant Impact if Reduced
Time for court proceedings and charging decisions; fewer cases forwarded to the courts	Lower Impact if Reduced
Death investigations timing and death certificate processing	Lower Impact if Reduced
Specialized programs such as search and rescue	Lower Impact if Reduced

Community Guidance for Decision-Makers

Participants encouraged County leaders to:

- **Maintain emergency response capacity and patrol coverage** as core governmental responsibilities that directly influence community safety and confidence.
- **Recognize the connection between prevention and public safety**, including the role of behavioral health, housing stability, diversion programs, and crisis response in reducing long-term emergency service demand.
- **Support workforce recruitment and retention** to sustain emergency response, investigations, and corrections capacity over time.
- **Balance investments across prevention, intervention, and enforcement** to strengthen both community outcomes and long-term fiscal sustainability.

Roads, Infrastructure & Transportation



Community Priorities for Potential Service Impacts

Potential Service Impact	Community Priority
Transportation projects (paving, corridor & intersection improvements, ADA ramps, culverts)	Priority to Protect
Road maintenance	Priority to Protect
Ability to provide matching funds for transportation grants (\$1 local returns \$3 in grants)	Significant Impact if Reduced
Pothole repair	Significant Impact if Reduced
Bridges and other infrastructure	Lower Impact if Reduced
Mowing, brush cutting, and litter removal	Lower Impact if Reduced

Community Guidance for Decision-Makers

Participants encouraged County leaders to:

- **Prioritize maintenance and preservation of critical infrastructure** to avoid larger future repair costs and protect public safety.
- **Protect local investments that leverage state and federal transportation funding**, recognizing their significant return on investment.
- **Recognize transportation as essential community infrastructure** that connects residents to employment, healthcare, education, housing, and emergency services.
- **Consider the differing transportation needs of urban, rural, incorporated, and unincorporated communities** when evaluating service changes.

Health & Community Well-Being

Community Priorities for Potential Service Impacts

Potential Service Impact	Community Priority
Family Resource Centers that help households avoid crisis situations	Priority to Protect
Emergency assistance for low-income households	Priority to Protect
Support for senior centers	Priority to Protect
Veterans support services	Significant Impact if Reduced
Disease investigation and outbreak response capacity	Significant Impact if Reduced
Restaurant permitting and food safety inspections	Lower Impact if Reduced
Support for long-term care facilities responding to disease outbreaks	Lower Impact if Reduced

Community Guidance for Decision-Makers

Participants encouraged County leaders to:

- **Protect services that help individuals and families remain stable and avoid crisis**, particularly those serving residents with the fewest alternatives.
- **Preserve County investments that leverage broader state, federal, nonprofit, and healthcare resources**, maximizing community impact.
- **Consider the long-term impacts of reductions**, recognizing that decreased preventive services may increase demand on healthcare, emergency response, and criminal justice systems.
- **Continue strengthening coordination with community partners** to improve outcomes while making the most effective use of limited public resources.

Parks, Environment & Community Spaces



Community Priorities for Potential Service Impacts

Potential Service Impact	Community Priority
Park maintenance and restroom cleaning	Priority to Protect
Trash pickup and facility upkeep	Priority to Protect
Hazard tree removal	Significant Impact if Reduced
Community programming (4-H, Master Gardeners, Beach Watchers, Park Naturalists, Office of Agriculture programs)	Significant Impact if Reduced
Operation of spray pads and seasonal amenities	Lower Impact if Reduced
Ballfield maintenance and mowing	Lower Impact if Reduced

* Community programming emerged as one of the highest priorities during the Casino Road Listening Session, highlighting that priorities may differ across communities based on local needs and available resources.

Community Guidance for Decision-Makers

Participants encouraged County leaders to:

- **Differentiate between essential maintenance and discretionary amenities** when evaluating potential service adjustments.
- **Prioritize maintenance activities that preserve safety, accessibility, and public assets**, including restroom cleaning, trash removal, and hazard mitigation.
- **Expand volunteer and community partnerships where appropriate** to supplement, rather than replace, core County responsibilities.

Planning, Permitting & Neighborhood Safety

Community Priorities for Potential Service Impacts

Potential Service Impact	Community Priority
Code enforcement and investigations	Priority to Protect
Capacity to address environmental hazards	Priority to Protect
Response to nuisance property complaints	Significant Impact if Reduced
Enforcement and compliance activities	Lower Impact if Reduced

Community Guidance for Decision-Makers

Participants encouraged County leaders to:

- **Continue modernizing permitting and development review processes** to improve efficiency without reducing service quality.
- **Explore operational improvements before reducing service capacity**, particularly where technology, cross-training, or process improvements can improve outcomes.
- **Recognize the role of permitting in supporting housing production, economic development, and the County's long-term tax base.**
- **Maintain core functions that protect neighborhood health and safety**, including code enforcement and environmental hazard response.

Decision-Making Framework

Before reducing a County service, participants encouraged leaders to ask:

1 Does this investment prevent larger future costs?

2 Who will be most affected?

3 Will this shift costs or demand elsewhere?

4 Does this investment leverage additional outside resources?

5 Have operational improvements or alternative delivery approaches been fully explored?

From Community Input to Budget Decisions

Budget Process and the Horizon

AUGUST–SEPTEMBER

Budget Development & Public Rollout

- Community feedback synthesized and shared
- Executive budget proposal finalized and released
- Additional public communication and engagement opportunities

1

Analysts have completed all technical review of budget changes and made recommendations.

2

The Executive Team has evaluated all proposals, received additional research and is making final decisions.

3

Community Input will be used to evaluate original budget guidance and assumptions and inform future strategies.

4

If we didn't get it right, changes will be made.

The 2027-2028 biennial budget will be presented to County Council on September 1.

Where the Tension Is

Community told us:

- Protect prevention
- Protect emergency response
- Protect infrastructure
- Think long term
- Avoid across-the-board cuts
- Explore revenue
- Improve government first

The County must also:

- Balance the General Fund
- Meet legal obligations
- Maintain core operations
- Address inflation
- Address compensation
- Make decisions across every department

Five Principles Behind Community Priorities

1

Make Decisions for the Long Term

Weigh prevention and future costs, not just immediate savings.

Public Safety hiring is difficult. Investing in recruitment strategies has big payoff in service levels and retention.

2

Think in Systems, Not Programs

County investments are interconnected – reductions shift costs elsewhere.

Assessing the County's properties and equipment will lead to savings and better ROI.

3

Maximize Impact of Every Dollar

Pursue efficiency, modernization, and partnerships before cuts.

Protecting transportation grants by investing one-time dollars now with an eye to a sustainable future.

4

Protect People with Fewest Alternatives

Reductions affect vulnerable residents most – weigh that first.

Preserving Family Resource Centers that are a vast network providing support and assistance to people in need.

5

Build Trust Through Transparency

Communicate fiscal realities and how input shaped decisions.

Implementing a modern ERP system will allow more robust and immediate access to data, internal and external.

What Comes Next



September 1

- Executive Recommended Budget Submitted to Council with the report

October

- Community Forum on Budget with Council

Questions