



## 2021, another remarkable year

In January, many of us were hopeful that vaccines would bring a definitive end to the COVID pandemic which, unfortunately, has not happened. But here in King County as of December, about 88% of residents 5+ years of age were fully vaccinated. However, with the appearance of variants (first Delta and now Omicron), vaccine hesitancy, misinformation, and other factors, COVID will likely be with us for the foreseeable future.

The pandemic has impacted each of us over the past two years. And, as it has become clear that COVID-19 disproportionately impacts communities of color and lower-income neighborhoods, we have centered equity in King County’s COVID response.

For the County Council, our meetings continue to be completely virtual, and much of our work in 2021 focused on ensuring that communities had the resources they needed to stay open and safe. As Chair of the Council’s Budget and Fiscal Management (BFM) Committee since January 2020, I led the Council in determining distribution of federal and state COVID relief funds through eight separate COVID budgets. Along with our 2021-2022 biennial budget and four biennial supplemental budgets, we passed a record of thirteen total budgets.

And a lot of other work was accomplished, too. I hosted public town halls, moderated our annual Women’s History Month Program, and continued sending out my twice-weekly eNewsletters, just to name a few. It has been a challenging but productive year.

At the time of writing, this year’s committee assignments are still being finalized, but I likely will be chairing the Committee of the Whole. I am honored to serve you on the Council and will continue to work tirelessly for my constituents and all King County residents. Some highlights from the past year are included in this newsletter.

*I visited dozens of community organizations in 2021, including ones based in District 4 that were recipients of funds for their response to COVID. Here, I’m pictured with staff and participants from Path with Art.*

## Responding to COVID-19 and the budgets

Since the pandemic began, the County has provided more than \$1.4 billion in federal and state funding to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic; improve public health outcomes; and assist workers, residents, and approximately 900 organizations (so far). Some specific examples include vaccinating and providing health care to hundreds of thousands of people, and helping families avoid eviction and businesses remain open. The funding has also helped the County stand up isolation/quarantine facilities and de-intensification shelters and allowed the court system to manage the pandemic-induced backlog. We also supported arts and cultural organizations and, in doing so, helped our hospitality, tourism and creative sectors. A good example is the opening of the County’s Harbor Island Film Studios.

And this past November we approved a \$672 million mid-biennial budget in which we made necessary adjustments to the biennial budget and restored earlier cuts, including in the Mental Illness and Drug Dependency program. Other examples include added funding for climate equity projects, gun violence reduction, bus service restorations, tiny home villages, waterfront shuttle service, bike helmet awareness, economic recovery, and more. And the County continued investments it has made in public health, transit, housing, and public safety, and will help individuals seeking emergency shelter or permanent housing, and families utilizing the Best Starts for Kids (BSK) programs.

## Addressing health and human services needs

In 2020, the King County Board of Health, of which I am a member, officially acknowledged that racism is a public





*Last year I awarded retired vans from the King County Vanpool program to four organizations: Evergreen Treatment Services, Low Income Housing Institute, The Arc of King County and Seattle's Union Gospel Mission. Above, I am pictured with Monique Brown, Executive Director of FOB HOPE, a 2020 van recipient.*

health crisis. And the pandemic has emphatically proved the point: systemic racism has caused long-term social and economic impacts with direct health consequences. With that in mind, Public Health and the County have targeted COVID services to those most in need, prioritized translation and other outreach services and focused on strengthening existing connections with trusted community groups to provide education and resources to hard-hit communities.

In August, King County voters renewed the Best Starts for Kids levy, continuing a program that has been truly transformative for children, youth, and families. BSK has provided critical support to over half a million children, youth, and families during key windows of development in early childhood and adolescence. I will continue to work closely with my colleagues to ensure it is effectively and efficiently implemented.

If you've been to the King County Courthouse in Pioneer Square, you likely know of the adjacent City Hall Park, about which there have been safety and public health concerns for decades. Last October, the Council approved my legislation to allow the County to acquire the park from the City of Seattle and consider improvements and future uses for it. In November, Executive Constantine and Seattle Mayor Durkan announced a land swap agreement to transfer ownership to the County, which our Council approved through my legislation last month and which the Seattle City Council is taking up. The ordinance ensures the park will remain as an open space and that any plan for change would go through extensive public process.

After a Crosscut story reported data showing nearly half of all helmet citations in Seattle going to BIPOC and homeless individuals, I requested the Board of Health review disparities in enforcement of our law requiring helmets. Conversations are currently underway about how to address this disproportionate enforcement while still encouraging helmet use. I included funding in our November supple-

mental budget for a new Public Health staffer to promote helmet use and helmet distribution. The board likely will vote on this issue at our January meeting.

### ***Tackling homelessness, increasing affordable housing, and protecting tenants***

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent economic fallout have exacerbated our housing crisis, especially for renters on the brink of eviction. In 2021, as in 2020, a major Council focus was on housing those without homes, preventing evictions and increasing available affordable housing.

We approved the Executive's new and exciting Health Through Housing program, funded through a portion of sales tax revenues dedicated to purchasing hotels and other single room buildings for use as emergency shelter and permanent supportive housing for people experiencing chronic homelessness. To date, the initiative has purchased nine facilities, three of which are in District 4. The Health Through Housing purchases are more cost effective than building new structures, are located near transit, and will provide 1600 safe shelter alternatives by the end of 2022 with wraparound services to support individuals exiting homelessness.

In June, the Council approved a transformative tenant protections package I introduced along with Councilmember Zahilay that caps move-in fees, creates new 'just cause' eviction criteria, and provides other protections for renters in unincorporated King County. It will help prevent unnecessary evictions and protect tenants while respecting landlords' rights to collect rent and impose fair evictions when justified.

King County has also been implementing our Eviction Prevention and Rent Assistance Program (EPRAP) to distribute a total of \$385 million in state and federal funds to tenants and landlords across King County. As of October, EPRAP had paid out over \$100 million in 2020 and 2021 and is continuing to distribute up to \$12 million per week.

And King County is partnering with BRIDGE Housing Corporation and Community Roots Housing to move forward on a new 232-unit affordable housing building on the northern portion of Metro's Northgate Park and Ride



*I celebrated two long-awaited events last October: the opening of three new light rail stations and the opening of the John Lewis Memorial Pedestrian and Bicycle Bridge across I-5, connecting North Seattle College and the new Northgate transit station. I'm walking here with other local leaders, including then-Mayor Jenny Durkan and former Councilmember Larry Gossett. (Photo: Tim Durkan Photography.)*

lot. Another affordable housing facility is in the works at North Seattle College in partnership with Chief Seattle Club and Bellwether Housing, for which I secured funding.

### **Restoring and Expanding Transit**

In the fall, Metro restored much of the previously suspended service due to the pandemic. It brought back 36 routes and restored service on a total of 48 routes and launched the North Link Mobility Framework and Policy Updates. These updates revised routes to improve east-west connections and enable transit riders to easily access the three new Sound Transit Link light rail stations in the University District, Roosevelt, and Northgate.

### **Protecting the environment and addressing climate change**

Last year's extreme weather events demonstrated that climate disruption is here now. Environmental degradation has serious public health impacts that we are working to mitigate. These effects are only expected to worsen.

The Council approved the new 2020 Strategic Climate Action Plan (SCAP) last year, which included cutting greenhouse gas emissions countywide in half by the end of the decade, focusing on climate justice and preparing

the region for climate impacts. The County also invested in low-interest loans for new energy and seismic retrofits for commercial buildings and funded a pilot program for residential heat pump retrofits.

In the interest of expanding green infrastructure, I sponsored legislation that passed requiring the building of electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure along with certain development activities in unincorporated King County.

Also, the Council approved about \$5 million in grants for water quality improvement projects, and more than \$400,000 of the \$2.6 million in direct King County Council WaterWorks allocations went to projects in District 4. The grants fund community-led projects supporting native plants, marine wildlife, local watersheds, and green storm water infrastructure.

I also sponsored a \$65 million funding package for critical upgrades to the West Point Wastewater Treatment Plant to prevent any future bypass of untreated wastewater. It invests in the plant's power supply systems as power system unreliability was a key factor in recent storm water spills.

### **Advancing social justice and reforming the criminal legal system**

After voters approved changing the King County Sheriff to an appointed position rather than an elected one, the Public Safety Advisory Committee was stood up to develop recommendations for selection of a new sheriff. Now, recruitment is underway to select a new sheriff, with Patti Cole-Tindall serving as Interim Sheriff.

The Council appointed Tamer Abouzeid, an attorney, mediator and community organizer, as the new director of the Office of Law Enforcement Oversight, as well as six new District Court judges.



*In September, Councilmember Rod Dembowski and I attended the dedication of the Kraken Community Iceplex and presented Mari Horita, Exec. Director of the Kraken/One Roof Foundation, with \$50,000 for youth programming at the facility from the Youth and Amateur Sports Grant program. I'm also excited about the opening of Climate Pledge Arena in District 4 and welcoming the new NHL Kraken team and the returning OL Reign women's soccer team.*



## King County Councilmember **Jeanne Kohl-Welles**

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[www.kingcounty.gov/kohl-welles](http://www.kingcounty.gov/kohl-welles)**

**Town Hall Announcement: Please join me at 6 p.m.  
on Wednesday, February 23rd for a virtual town hall.  
Details on attending will be shared closer to the date  
on all my social media channels and in the eNews.**

Early in the year, I introduced legislation to ban government use of facial recognition software by County agencies, including by the King County Sheriff. The use of facial recognition technology by government agencies poses distinct threats to our residents, including potential misidentification, bias, and the erosion of our civil liberties. It was passed unanimously, making ours the first county in the nation to enact such a ban.

Also, in response to an uptick in shootings in King County, we allocated emergency funding for gun violence prevention efforts, including scaling up the Regional Peacekeepers Collective, a trusted community group.

And my legislation passed reaffirming our commitment to combatting human trafficking and called on the Executive to engage in the upcoming statewide public awareness campaign to prevent human trafficking. Last time we participated in the regional campaign, there was a significant

rise in the number of individuals contacting the National Human Trafficking Hotline from Washington state.

### ***A note on redistricting***

In December, the County's Districting Committee completed its work adjusting the boundaries of Council districts to reflect population changes from the past decade. District 4's boundaries are shrinking as we had the highest number of residents in the county. All nine districts will now have about 252,000 residents. You can view the new map on the 2021 King County Districting Committee website.

It is an honor to serve all King County residents, and especially those in District 4. Please contact me with any questions or comments and I will get back to you.

***I was honored to present the County's Martin Luther King Medal of Distinguished Service representing District 4 to Carlye Teel. For 32 years, Carlye has served as the Executive Director at Ballard NW Senior Center and managed the Greenwood Senior Center for 10 years during that time. She has dedicated her life to serving others, particularly those over 50, working to help them be their best selves.***

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