

## **How the County response to COVID-19 unfolded**

On January 22nd the first case of the novel coronavirus in the nation was confirmed in King County. On March 1, County Executive Dow Constantine proclaimed a state of emergency. Thus began 2020 as we have known it. At the end of May, Gov. Inslee issued a phased county-by-county approach to a gradual resumption of activities. On June 5th, King County entered Modified Phase 1 of the “Safe Start Plan” and on June 19th, we entered Phase 2. Then on July 28th, with cases rising and COVID spreading, the Governor paused counties progressing in the reopening phases. That pause is still in effect as we are now undergoing explosive growth in the number of positive cases, hospitalizations and deaths.

## **Economic impacts and emergency COVID budgets**

On March 27th, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, a \$2.2 trillion federal stimulus bill, became law. It included funds for state and local governments struggling to address the mounting public health and economic impacts of the virus. King County received more than \$262 million to use for relief and recovery purposes. (We anticipate receiving additional federal funding in January or February.)

Through five emergency COVID-19 budgets transmitted by the Executive, the Council allocated CARES Act funds to significantly expand the public health response and provide relief to individuals and families in need, small businesses, essential workers, renters and landlords. We also provided funding to organizations that support the populations most in need of assistance, including domestic violence victims and survivors, low-income residents, and historically marginalized groups such as immigrants, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color), and those with disabilities and those experiencing homelessness.

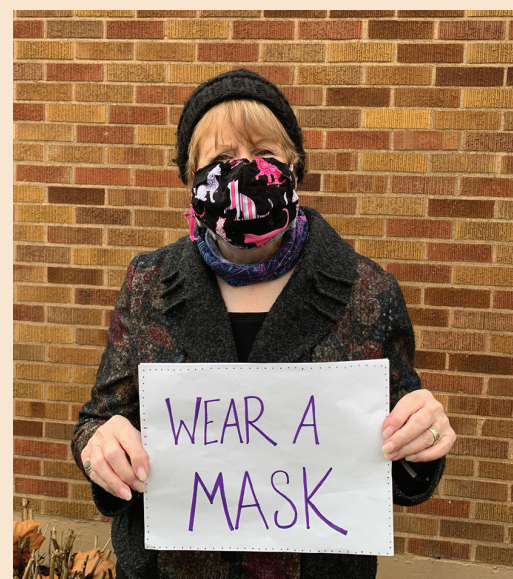
The County distributed 25 million masks to non-profits (including each Councilmember giving out 25,000) and PPE for health care workers, provided free flu vaccines, increased access to health translation services, provided hotel rooms to health care workers impacted by COVID-19 and set up isolation and quarantine centers for individuals who’ve tested positive but with no means to safely quarantine. We opened additional de-intensified shelter beds for those without homes, and expanded COVID-related outreach services and free testing. We also provided much-needed funding for food security, rental assistance and housing stability, broadband access and devices for students, child care, behavioral and mental health services, and assistance to our restaurants, arts, cultural, science, and tourism organizations to be poised to welcome back tourists and visitors to the area once the virus is contained.

## **Impact of COVID-19 on Metro Transit**

Metro ridership levels during the pandemic have been at about 40 percent of the normal levels last year, and the suspension of fare collection (Metro resumed fare collection in October) cost Metro an estimated \$5.5 million per month in lost revenue. Fortunately, Metro received about \$240 million of CARES Act funds. Though ridership dropped dramatically, many riders have

## **2020: An extraordinary year in review**

What a year it’s been. A global health crisis, a long-overdue racial reckoning, unhealthy air from severe wildfire smoke, a serious economic recession and stressful elections. Little did I know when I was appointed Budget Chair in January that the County (as well as the city, state and federal governments) would face unprecedented budget challenges. As Budget Chair I (along with Vice-Chair Rod Dembowksi) worked to achieve a balance in all five Covid budgets passed this year between investing in public health and in helping our food banks, senior centers, and other community based organizations to mitigate the human and economic impacts of the virus. All told, we passed five COVID budgets, the 2021- 2022 County biennial budget and two supplemental budgets for the current biennium for a grand total of 8 budgets in 8 months—and all unanimously!



continued to rely on Metro to access groceries, jobs, medical care, and other critical needs.

And Metro implemented new safety procedures, installed plexiglass safety partitions and upgraded air filters. My Council colleague Rod Dembowski and I also designated funds to install mask dispensers and supply masks on the 100 busiest Metro routes.

## **County response to calls for racial justice**

The disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 exposed some of the long-term effects of systemic racism on BIPOC and communities. The killing of George Floyd—and other cases of police brutality—brought about a national call to action.

In June, the King County Board of Health adopted Resolution 20-08 (which I co-sponsored), declaring racism a public health crisis, acknowledging that COVID-19 disproportionately impacts BIPOC communities. The Board found that structural, historical and systemic racism are the root causes for this disproportionate impact.

And the Council also worked to fund changes to our criminal legal system and address the public health impacts of racism. In working with communities of color, we drafted a biennial budget that reimagines a legal system and a regional government that work to undo harm caused to our BIPOC and other marginalized communities and creates new pathways for all in King County to achieve their fullest potential.

## **Preventing evictions**

In response to the economic fallout caused by COVID-19, an eviction moratorium was issued by the federal and state governments, and by the Council—which I co-sponsored—to protect renters in unincorporated King County from being evicted.

As part of this effort, the County has provided rent subsidies for tenants impacted by COVID-19 so that landlords are not forced to shoulder the entire burden. Rental assistance has also been provided to small businesses that might otherwise have to close their doors.

## **Homelessness and COVID-19**

A key concern on the part of public health experts is the



*I am pleased to have shepherded through legislation and funding to help save Ballard's beloved P-Patch, a community treasure that provides more than 2,000 pounds of food annually to the Ballard food bank. (Photo: Morgan Keuler)*

plight of those experiencing homelessness. Getting people into safe, socially-distanced housing is critical to containing the virus, as is isolating those who have tested positive, and treating those who have COVID-19 and are symptomatic.

The County has opened Isolation/Quarantine (I/Q) and Assessment and Recovery (AC/RC) facilities throughout the county. These facilities slow the spread of COVID-19 and minimize the strain on our local health care facilities. Several under-used hotels in District 4 are providing rooms through contracts with the County.

Just as important is reducing crowding in shelters to allow for social distancing. The County opened several new sites in order to “de-intensify” current shelters, including in Interbay on Elliott Avenue in District 4. Once open, this modular shelter will provide safe housing and 24/7 onsite services in response to COVID-19. The project is currently awaiting necessary permits from the City to open.

The Council also invested in supportive housing for those deemed “chronically homeless” by providing permanent, supportive housing for up to 2,000 individuals, with direct access to services on-site. (See below for more information.)

## **Final 2021-2022 budget passed unanimously**

The budget (as amended by the Council) passed unanimously as did all our other seven budgets (five Covid and two Supplemental) for the year. With funding for anti-racism programs, the beginning of the transformation of the criminal legal system, investments in public health and in regional supportive housing, the biennial budget responds



to the immediate needs of residents across the County as well as to building back our economy for the future.

The budget benefits communities throughout the county, including for organizations in District 4. Many non-profit organizations, senior centers, food banks, and arts, culture and science organizations are suffering from the economic fallout caused by COVID-19. This budget supports these critical institutions in their work of improving health outcomes, decreasing the impacts of systemic racism, addressing behavioral health and homelessness, and supporting small businesses.

The budget includes major investments in reforming the criminal legal system. The Council approved proposals to shift \$4.6 million in marijuana excise tax revenue away from law enforcement and toward community-based programs that support reversing some of the disproportionate damage the war on drugs placed on BIPOC communities.

Beyond funding the Restorative Community Pathways diversion program with more than \$6 million that will provide comprehensive, community-based services to 800 young people in lieu of filing criminal charges, we added a requirement that \$1.5 million be used to build capacity at community-based organizations involved in work related to the Restorative Community Pathways diversion program.

While the budget did push for transformation of law enforcement and the criminal legal system, it also continued to invest in keeping communities safe, including adding \$1.2 million and four full-time employees to support expansion of electronic home monitoring to 24/7. Most departments, including the Sheriff's Office, had to take about a 5% reduction in 2021 and in 2022. We can adjust in supplemental budgets as our economy improves.

Included in the budget is a relatively small sales tax increase of 0.1% that will allow the county to create permanent supportive housing for up to 2,000 people suffering from chronic homelessness. The approved measure will use bonding against proceeds generating \$340 million to purchase disused existing hotels, motels, and nursing homes to provide housing quickly for those who need it most.

Also included:

- \$1 million for a White Center Community HUB project.
- \$1.65 million to the Public Defenders Association's new JustCARE program for individuals suffering from chronic homelessness and behavioral health challenges in Pioneer Square and Chinatown/International District, for the CO-LEAD program in Burien and South County, and for planning for expanding the JustCARE program to

Ballard Commons, Lake City, West Seattle Junction and other urban villages.

- \$2 million to support behavioral health and recovery programs reduced by the loss of sales tax revenue during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Council succeeded in passing a budget for the next two years that invests with purpose, makes responsible reductions, supports our BIPOC communities and vulnerable populations, and does so in a way that is fiscally prudent and sustainable. We did so while maintaining a balanced budget, \$20.8 million in the General Fund Rainy Day Reserve, and a Triple A rating with our bond agencies.

## ***Climate Change and Puget Sound***

We were reminded once again this summer that we are fighting two "natural" crises at once: a global pandemic and rapidly accelerating climate change. In September, the wildfire smoke in Puget Sound reached unprecedented, dangerous levels. It also left toxins behind in the soil and water.

As part of the County's commitment to an equitable approach to fighting climate change, the 2020 Strategic Climate Action Plan (SCAP) is incorporating community-driven policy guided by a new Climate Equity Community Task Force (CECTF). The CECTF is made up of community leaders who represent frontline communities and whose experiences bring unique strengths and insights into climate resilience strategies. Frontline communities are those that will be disproportionately impacted by climate change.

The County also authorized Metro's purchase of up to 120 battery-electric buses and the Council passed legislation to

***Delivering masks to the Queen Anne Food Bank at Sacred Heart Catholic Church. This year, my office delivered nearly 25,000 masks throughout District 4.***





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

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**SAVE THE DATE! I will be co-hosting a virtual town hall with Councilmembers Rod Dembowski (Dist 1), Joe McDermott (Dist 8) and Girmay Zahilay (Dist 2) on March 3rd from 6 to 7:30 pm. You can watch the event in real time on Facebook Live at [www.facebook.com/cmkohlwelles](http://www.facebook.com/cmkohlwelles). Submit questions in advance to [Jeanne.kohl-welles@kingcounty.gov](mailto:Jeanne.kohl-welles@kingcounty.gov).**

speed up Metro’s transition to all-electric fleet. Also, this year, Metro retired the last of its diesel-only buses. The transition is underway!

In addition, the County surpassed its goal of planting one million trees—a year early.

### **Important measures approved by voters**

In November, voters approved all seven charter amendments placed on the ballot by the King County Council to reform our Sheriff’s office and make thoughtful improvements to our county’s Charter.

- Charter Amendment 1: Provides an attorney to families of those involved in officer-involved shooting inquests.
- Charter Amendment 2: Removes the restriction on the county’s authority to transfer, lease or sell real property for less than fair market value when the property will be used for affordable housing.
- Charter Amendment 3: Replaces the word “citizen” with “public,” “member of the public” or “resident,” as applicable in the Charter.
- Charter Amendment 4: Authorizes the Office of Law Enforcement Oversight to subpoena witnesses, documents and other evidence related to its investigations and reviews of County law enforcement officers

- Charter Amendment 5: Returns the position of King County Sheriff to an appointed position.
- Charter Amendment 6: Amends the duties of the county Sheriff and the department of public safety to be established by County ordinance.
- Charter Amendment 7: Prohibits discrimination based on family caregiver, military or veteran status.

Voters also approved a \$1.74 billion bond measure to fund much needed upgrades to Harborview Medical Center.



**I awarded the MLK Medal of Distinguished Service to D4 constituent Colleen Echohawk, Executive Director of the Chief Seattle Club and founder of the Coalition to End Urban Native Homelessness.**