



CITY OF EVERETT 2022 budget address

Sept. 29, 2021

Council President Stonecipher, City Council members, City staff and residents of Everett:

I am pleased to present you with my proposed budget for 2022.

I'd like to start by acknowledging that these past couple of years leading in our city, while navigating a global pandemic have been extraordinarily challenging.

I'm truly grateful to be doing this work together with all of you our dedicated City Council members who I know care deeply and passionately about our residents, our businesses and the health and well-being of our entire community.

It's been a difficult time for all of us with a lot of darkness, uncertainty, fear and frustration.

Often it can be hard to look beyond the current crisis and see the bright future ahead and all of its possibilities.

But a few weeks ago, I was reminded of those possibilities when I had the wonderful opportunity to meet with a company that's recently made Everett its home.

The company is called InFarm and they are working to create a more sustainable food system by growing food close to cities, guided by the philosophy that "your food shouldn't have traveled more than you." InFarm strives to grow food in a way that is more resilient, sustainable and beneficial to our planet. They have built and are building amazing vertical farms that use less land and less water to grow very healthy, organic produce right here in Everett. And this produce will be sold at grocery stores and served in restaurants throughout our area. It was inspiring to see this technology in action and hear about why they chose Everett for their U.S. headquarters.

InFarm is bringing opportunity, jobs, and a vision for a more sustainable world. Sampling their greens was not only delicious, but truly inspiring and gave me a lot of hope for our city, our planet and our future.

It's examples like these that exemplify what I love about Everett. We're innovative. We take care of each other, our environment and our community. And we're driven by a vision for a better future.

So it's with that premise of a better future that I'll now share highlights of our 2022 budget.

The budget I'm presenting is once again built on our foundation of quality-of-life priorities, which include:

- Housing
- Economic, workforce and cultural vitality
- Engaged and informed community
- Safe community
- Transportation and infrastructure, and
- Responsive and responsible government

I'd like to clarify that today I'm focusing on the general government budget as well as our transportation and infrastructure budgets.

I will not be talking about the American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds this evening as those are not part of our operational budget. We're excited about this one-time infusion of federal funds through the ARP and are currently putting together ideas about how we can invest those dollars to help address community challenges and help our community recover from the pandemic. We look forward to bringing recommendations to council for consideration very soon within the next four weeks.

Housing

So for tonight, I'll start with housing, and in particular, how we're addressing homelessness and the investments we're planning for next year.

We have some excellent programs and partnerships in place, but as I think we've all seen, the pandemic has exacerbated the issues on our streets and the need we have for shelter and supportive services.

To help bridge that need and aid our response, my budget funds a new homelessness response coordinator. This will be a full-time position which will work as part of our Community Development team to develop and coordinate strategies to alleviate chronic homelessness.

We're also adding funds to expand our staff capacity to respond to and address encampments. This will bolster our ability to connect unsheltered residents with services through our



Community Outreach and Enforcement Team and partners. It will also support a stand-alone encampment clean up team in our streets department to ensure ongoing safety and sanitation for our businesses and neighborhoods.

The budget also includes funds to support planning, site preparation and implementation of the council-approved additional 40 Pallet shelters. We are still evaluating potential sites and hope to be able to make these shelters available as early as possible in 2022.

In our work to address homelessness our partnerships are of utmost importance. We will direct as much of our limited resources as possible to this work, but it is absolutely necessary that we work closely with Snohomish County, as well as neighboring jurisdictions, nonprofits, faith-based communities and others, to ensure that together we provide care and support to those in need, while increasing overall community health and safety.

The city is expected to add more than 65,000 people in the next two decades. In order to accommodate our growing population, we must also continue to advocate for and support the development of new housing from affordable housing, to market rate housing, to everything in between.

This year our Planning team completed our Rethink Housing initiative, which culminated in a Housing Action Plan with strategies for addressing the current and future housing needs for Everett residents, to increase housing all at price points. This will come before City Council early next month for adoption.

Next year in addition to rolling out our housing action plan, we'll commence with our comprehensive plan periodic update. This will be the first major review and update of the City's foundational planning document since 2015. The comp plan update process will include a robust public outreach component to help shape the vision for the future of our city, and ensure that the prosperity generated through this growth is shared broadly and equitably.

Economic, workforce & cultural vitality

Helping Everett get back on its financial 'feet' and recover from the impact of the pandemic is clearly another top priority.

Our approach includes supporting local businesses. During the pandemic, we've worked to create and share resources to aid businesses as they navigate the ever-changing conditions of COVID-19. We've developed toolkits to help them plan and adjust operations to align with the latest health guidance and requirements. We also awarded Everett CARES grants to support our local businesses and will continue to do everything we can to help our community recover.



Our economic development strategy also aims to strengthen, expand and diversify the businesses that call Everett home. Boeing and aerospace remain vital sources of jobs and the backbone of our economy. As travel restrictions are lifted and people discover they *can* safely go places again, the industry is slowly recovering and I'm confident—and fortunately aerospace experts agree – that Boeing and our aerospace partners in the city will experience a rapid and lasting recovery within the next five years.

The diversification of our economy remains a priority. The world is increasingly demanding more sustainable products and services which is why we are committed to establishing Everett as a hub for the green economy. We're successfully recruiting companies like TerraPower, which is developing advanced nuclear energy. We also have Zap Energy and Helion Energy, both working to create commercial fusion power generators that electric utilities will buy to power our cities. We're pleased to be home to Seagen, a company that's developing transformative cancer medicines to heal one of the world's most deadly diseases and help people through treatment. And we're welcoming companies like MagniX, which is developing electric-propulsion units for airplanes.

I really believe these companies are going to change the world and am excited to have them doing this world-changing work right here in Everett, providing our community with outstanding family-wage jobs that we need and keeping us in the center of innovation.

I'm also excited to create a home for similar companies at EPIC Green, which is our own Everett Point Industrial Center. The City owns much of this large, undeveloped industrial site, giving us a unique opportunity to shape its future development. EPIC Green spans about 100 acres near the Riverside neighborhood, just northeast of the intersection of I-5 and Highway 2. With patience and focus, EPIC Green will be the green hub of the Northwest and we're committed to attracting green businesses to this site, specifically those working to lower the world's carbon footprint.

Everett is recognized worldwide for our advanced manufacturing workforce. Cultivating well-established pipelines into major industries and networks helps create a highly-skilled, locally-sourced and dynamic workforce. And it is our priority to continue to forge partnerships with local vocational schools, the trades, apprenticeship programs and others to strengthen our workforce pipelines and create future career opportunities in Everett. We are thrilled that WSU-Everett's recently-launched business administration degree program is taking off, and we are working with partners like Northwest Innovation Resource Center and WSU to make Everett a national leader in data analytics. Opportunities in multiple sectors are booming in Everett.

And thanks to our partnership with Economic Alliance of Snohomish County, Washington Economic Development Association and Greater Seattle Partners, Everett's influence is growing. Partnering with these organizations allows us to leverage our efforts and stretch our



investments to successfully recruit and retain talent and attract family-wage jobs that were once beyond our reach.

An important part of economic and cultural vitality is celebrating, and investing in, things that make our city that much more beautiful, vibrant and welcoming.

We have amazing parks, a beautiful waterfront, a diverse range of delicious dining options, an ever-growing craft beverage scene, unique shops and retail services and a state-of-the-art regional airport! We want to showcase these assets through “placemaking” so that we can welcome more people and businesses to our beautiful city and ensure the highest quality of life for our residents.

This includes maintaining and improving our over 900 acres of parks and recreational facilities, as well as hosting festivals, maker’s markets, and other events – and managing these activities in a way that stewards our resources while always aligning with current health guidelines and requirements.

Next year we’ll continue updating our parks, with plans to add new playgrounds at Howarth and Thornton A Sullivan parks, as well as continue work on our recreational trail around Silver Lake.

We’ve budgeted for our most popular events, such as Sorticulture, Wintertide, the Fourth of July and the Wendt/Mayor’s Art awards. We’ll also continue to partner with external organizations like the Downtown Everett Association, Everett Music Initiative, the Schack, the Village Theater, the Port of Everett and others, to support events like our Everett Farmer’s Market, Music at the Marina, Jetty Island Days, downtown festivals, and many more.

This year’s budget supports a thriving arts community. Art is a powerful form of expression, especially during our most challenging times. Art heals, allowing us to express emotions in ways that words alone cannot. And art can help a community thrive.

So next year, we plan to bring more public art into the city. We’re evaluating our current rotating art collection to bring in some new pieces, including some interactive sculptures as well as an Indigenous piece, to complement our council’s recent action to add a land acknowledgement at their meetings. This piece will acknowledge the land on which Everett rests and the Indigenous Peoples who first called this area home. It will honor the sacred spiritual connection that the original inhabitants of this place and their successors have with these lands and waters.

And we’ll continue to invest in our important Cultural Arts grant program. This program provides essential resources to local arts organizations to expand arts education and



programming throughout the city. If you've seen the new mural at Clark Park or visited Nubian Jam this year, then you've seen how these grants help bring art and events to life. This year, one of our cultural arts grants helped repair and provide musical instruments to kids in local public schools, empowering the next generation of artists in Everett.

We're also working with our cultural arts commissioners on a public art project that will capture our shared experience of this pandemic. This artist-led project will invite the community to participate and will culminate in a new public art piece at the Evergreen Library.

Engaged & informed community

It's important for people to feel connected to their community, especially during a pandemic like this that has changed how we typically meet, socialize, gather and connect.

Our Everett Public Library in particular has excelled at helping people connect, and I've been impressed with the quality, caliber and diversity of virtual programs we've added to keep people of all ages engaged and learning. Whether it's hearing from a local crime author, exploring native plants with an expert, or learning how to make Nanaimo bars – the library has offered something for everyone at a time we all have needed new ways to connect.

My proposed budget adds a full-time fundraiser for the library to ensure the library's growth and sustainability now and into the future. We've learned from the success of having a full-time fundraiser at the animal shelter that this position will more than pay for itself, as well as bring new revenue, which we hope will go toward expanding operating hours and programming.

Another way of connecting is through our neighborhoods. My budget adds resources back to support our Council of Neighborhoods and our neighborhood associations, as well as our boards and commissions which are an important way for the community to engage with us as a city. We will continue our neighborhood mini-grants program, and I look forward to continuing our great neighborhood partnerships throughout the city.

Transportation & infrastructure

Next I'll touch on transportation and infrastructure.

Starting with Everett Transit, our plan for 2022 will be thoughtfully restoring service to provide more connections, especially to new and growing business centers like the Riverside Business Park and the waterfront. We've added 10 new drivers and through that will offer improved service on Evergreen Way, east of Broadway, as well as access to areas where customers can transfer to Community Transit and future light rail stations.



We'll also continue working with Community Transit, as Council requested, to expand upon and explore the concept of a unified system of transportation services.

Our public works team works around the clock to ensure the safety, cleanliness and efficiency of our roads and other facilities. We also manage our regional water supply, providing a safe and reliable supply of drinking water to meet current and future needs.

One important project next year will be the replacement and upgrade of the emergency backup power generation system at our water filtration plant. The new generators will improve the plant's resiliency by providing more reliable and robust emergency power.

Other priorities for 2022 include designing the California Street Bicycle Corridor which will provide a regional bicycle link between our downtown and US Highway 2.

We'll also begin construction on the Edgewater Bridge replacement on Mukilteo Boulevard. The bridge has aged beyond its useful life and needs to be re-built to meet modern seismic safety standards. Construction will require closure of the bridge for roughly 12 months, which will be a challenge for everyone who lives or travels in the area, but all in all this is an important investment in our transportation infrastructure and the safety of this neighborhood— reducing the risk of it being isolated in the event of a major earthquake.

Public safety

Keeping our city and everyone in it safe will always be a core priority.

My proposed budget continues to support our public safety teams in Everett Fire, Police, and Emergency Management as well as our legal department and municipal courts.

These teams have served on the front lines through the duration of this pandemic along with all of their other responsibilities to keep our community safe, help those in need and keep us prepared.

My budget for police supports training, community policing programs, and the completion of our Council-requested police department assessment. We're increasing funding for our Community Outreach and Enforcement Team and adding a social worker intern to our library and hopefully other areas to further expand resources to respond to the rising challenges of homelessness in our community.

Other critical partners in public safety are our legal team and our municipal court. Our prosecutors work side by side with law enforcement, prosecuting crimes and supporting alternative pathways such as diversion and treatment. This team is playing an important role



helping analyze new police reform legislation adopted in Olympia this year, so we can update our policies and procedures accordingly.

In 2022, our municipal court hopes to secure grant funding for a program to help people with substance use disorders who are involved in the criminal justice system. The goal is to reduce recidivism rates by providing assessments of defendants more quickly and helping them into treatment and services. We've seen how successful this type of approach can be with the court's mental health alternative program (MAP), which has reduced recidivism rates by over 90% since the program's inception.

My proposed budget also sustains funding for our fire and emergency management teams so they can continue to ensure our city is well-equipped, well-prepared and well-trained to fulfil their mission of being *here for us* when we need them most. This includes funding to support an anti-bias training curriculum, aligned with our diversity, equity and inclusion objectives.

I'm so grateful for the dedication and commitment of these public safety teams and thank each and every one of our police, fire, emergency management, legal and municipal court team members for their service to our city.

Public safety also includes our animals! And our Everett Animal Shelter continues to do great work to advance the safety, health and well-being of our local furry friends and family. My budget includes adding hours for veterinary support staff. Our plan is to offer reduced-cost vet services for income-qualifying residents. Sadly, some people may have few options but to surrender a beloved pet when they face unanticipated costs in veterinary care, or they may delay seeking that care altogether. Our intent is to improve animal care and keep pets together with their family and out of the shelter. Next year we'll also continue to build our program to provide spay and neuter services for other animal welfare organizations. This increases their adoption and transfer capacity and generates revenue for our shelter.

Responsive & responsible government

The last category I'll highlight today is being a responsive and responsible government, which of course involves being a good steward of our City resources, pursuing cost and operational efficiencies, and seeking to continuously improve how we deliver services to our community.

One of our teams that's especially good at identifying opportunities for efficiency and improvement is our IT team. This department continues to keep us ahead of the curve and ensure City departments are well-supported with the latest tools and systems with an increased focus on cybersecurity. This year we witnessed significant disruptions in critical infrastructure and data breaches nationwide. The increase in ransomware attacks is being felt by more and



more organizations. So my proposed budget includes the deployment of new tools that will help manage cybersecurity risk.

Another part of being responsive and responsible is ensuring equity and access to City services. In recent years I have focused on diversity, equity and inclusion with the aim to diversify our workforce, connect with new community members, make our government more accessible and address racism. In 2022 we'll continue working toward those goals and strengthening relationships with our Black, Indigenous and other communities of color as well as our LGBTQ community. My budget allocates funds for additional training opportunities for our staff, City leadership and members of some of our boards and commissions on topics to help us identify and eliminate barriers to equity in the work we do for our city.

I'd like to touch on fiscal responsibility.

Last year we introduced a new consumer-driven health plan, and we're already seeing impressive results. It's great when our employees rave about going to the doctor! And that's because we have something really special at Vera Whole Health. The team there works hard to keep staff and our families healthy, and also saves the city money. Our projections for next year's general government health benefits costs all total came in nearly a million dollars less than the original forecast, due in large part to the success of the new health plans. We're lowering the growth rate in the cost of health benefits, while at the same time providing access to quality health care for our employees. I'm pleased with the success of this program and the positive health outcomes it's creating for our staff.

Another successful strategy in fiscal responsibility has been creating partnerships to help deliver important community services. Last year we did a call for proposals, seeking innovative partnerships to use park properties and facilities for the community's benefit. The goal was to increase or improve recreation opportunities for the public, repurpose or recondition park assets, decrease costs to the City, and possibly generate additional revenue. That led to some partnerships we're really excited about.

Some of these include:

Management of the Carl Gipson Senior Center by Volunteers of America (VOA). We are thrilled to partner with VOA to restore programming at the center. This pandemic has been especially difficult for our seniors, and I know they have missed being able to connect and engage with others in our community. VOA will be a great partner – they have experience serving older adults and their mission and values are aligned with what we want for the future of the center. In the first full year of the agreement, we'll save more than \$280,000 over the cost of running the facility on our own. These savings will grow over the life of the 14-year contract.



This is a win win win. The City saves money. VOA delivers on its mission. And seniors benefit from the restoration of services and being able to connect with each other again.

Another happy partnership is with T&L Nursery, which is now leasing the greenhouses at Legion Park, keeping them in productive use while providing revenue to support our Parks Department.

We're also pleased to have the YMCA as a partner in providing programming at Camp Patterson for kids in our Everett community.

Those are just some examples and we're eager to explore additional partnerships in 2022.

Another way we'll improve efficiencies and reduce waste is by adding a full-time resource conservation manager to the City. This is a new position within our Parks and Facilities team; their role will be to evaluate how we're using energy, water and other natural resources and recommend opportunities for efficiency and conservation to not only achieve cost savings but also ensure we are being good stewards of the environment.

In the Pacific Northwest, we are fortunate to have such incredible natural surroundings. As local government, it's important we do what we can to minimize our negative impacts on our environment, as well as find proactive ways to make it even better.

This is especially critical given the climate change impacts we continue to experience year after year. This summer's heat wave broke records and made national headlines. We're also seeing more intense storms, longer and more dangerous wildfires, and other extreme weather events— all of which threaten the vitality, livability and prosperity of our city.

Last year our Council adopted a Climate Action Plan to provide strategies for the City to be more green and reduce our carbon footprint. To help ensure we continue to make progress toward these sustainability goals, I am redirecting a portion of an existing full-time employee to lead the coordination of this work, which spans many City departments.

I'm proud of the fact that our Everett Transit remains a regional leader in electrification, with plans for *half* of our fleet to be all-electric by next year. Right now our electric buses are reducing greenhouse gas pollution by almost 2 million pounds per year, and that will only increase as we take delivery of additional zero-emission buses. Our Climate Action Plan also includes land use strategies to support more compact, high-density communities, well-served by public transit, as well as improving overall walkability throughout the city. These strategies will be folded into our planning department's periodic update process.



We look forward to reporting progress on our Climate Action Plan and overall sustainability work in the coming months.

CONCLUSION

Those are just some of the highlights of our budget I wanted to share with you tonight, which support our quality-of-life priorities and investments.

I'm very pleased we didn't have to make cuts to important services to balance the budget, as we've sadly needed to do in previous years.

This is in part thanks to operational efficiencies, creative innovations and strategic partnerships, which have helped us continue providing core services and beloved programs, at significant savings.

It's also due in part to unexpected savings, which are a result of the high number of vacant positions we've had. Like businesses everywhere, we're struggling to recruit enough qualified applicants to fill these open positions.

Together these factors allowed us to balance without cuts this year.

But still we are faced with the reality of a growing structural deficit and City revenues that are not keeping pace with the cost of delivering public services. The past few years, we've done everything we can to bring our budget into balance, including painful cuts to internal services and City teams, cuts to beloved programs, putting off maintenance of our buildings, vehicles and equipment, and deferring payments toward long-term liabilities.

There isn't anything left to cut or defer without negatively impacting our quality of life or our economic recovery.

So we are now at a crossroads where we have to decide what kind of city we want Everett to be. To balance future budgets, we have to look at other options.

We have not asked our community for additional resources to support general services, like police, fire, parks and the library, since the 1% limit on property tax was enacted 20 years ago. I believe it is time to allow voters to weigh in on which services...and at what level... they are willing to support before we propose more cuts in future budgets. Everett residents should have a direct voice in these decisions.



I look forward to working with you our city council, as well as engaging our community over the coming year to determine the best options to pursue in order to put the City's finances on a long-lasting sustainable path.

Before I close, I'd like to acknowledge what a significant undertaking it is to put together a city budget and make sure it balances! It takes literally months of behind-the-scenes work of our City staff. We have a pretty amazing finance department so I'd like to take a moment to thank everyone who rolled up their sleeves and contributed to building this balanced, fiscally-responsible budget, with a special thanks to Susy Haugen, Rae Ann Nielsen, Wai Poon and Yi Liu. Thank you.

I'll end now by saying I am proud and pleased with our proposed 2022 budget. It supports housing, economic growth, public safety, transportation and infrastructure and even begins to tackle important issues like climate change, homelessness and equity. Everett is on a strong path forward and it's an honor to serve our residents together with you, our city council, and together take care of our beautiful Everett community.

Thank you.

