

**Contact:**

Kent Patton

[Kent.Patton@snoco.org](mailto:Kent.Patton@snoco.org)

425-388-3883

## **Snohomish County Leaders Propose to Authorize Funding to More Than Double Affordable Housing Production Over Next Five Years**

*If approved, the County will engage with the Housing Affordability Regional Task Force for Maximum Impact*

**SNOHOMISH COUNTY, Wash., December 1, 2021** – Today, Snohomish County leaders—including Executive Dave Somers, Council Chair Stephanie Wright, and Council Vice Chair Megan Dunn—proposed to authorize new funding for affordable housing through a 0.1% sales tax, as allowed under HB 1590.

Using existing federal, state, and local resources, Snohomish County anticipates being able to construct and acquire 222 new units of affordable housing in the next five years. Authorizing this new source of critically needed funding would help support the creation of a projected 300 new units of affordable housing over that same time, more than doubling the current production rate and increasing the total new affordable housing units to 522.

Snohomish County, like many parts of the region and country, is facing an affordable housing crisis. Many teachers, first responders, tradespeople, public servants, and others are finding it increasingly difficult to live in their own communities because housing costs have skyrocketed, pushing many towards the margins.

“Too many of Snohomish County’s residents are worried about being forced onto the street because they have been on the losing end of the affordable housing crisis,” said Snohomish County Executive Dave Somers. “For years, the supply of affordable housing has not kept pace with demand, and the spike in housing costs has pushed people to the limits. It is time for us to take bold action and do what we can to address the affordable housing crisis. Without this investment, our economy will weaken, more people will become homeless, and our quality of life will be diminished.”

“There are people throughout Snohomish County who are being forced to choose between food, medicine, and losing their home. This is not just a crisis for those experiencing or living on the verge of homelessness but one that affects the safety and economic health of our entire county,” said Snohomish County Council Chair Stephanie Wright. “We have the opportunity to make significant, long-term impacts on homelessness, and to provide wholistic services that address the root causes. During the pandemic, these problems increased even as federal and local dollars were used to maintain

stability. It is a moral imperative that we take action, and this is another important step in protecting our residents and ensuring that we create healthy communities where all can thrive.”

“In order to address the underlying causes of homelessness, we need sufficient access to supportive housing and services to address mental health challenges and substance abuse,” said County Council Vice Chair Dunn. “Every night, over 1,000 people experience homelessness in Snohomish County with the majority in our urban centers. This funding provides sustainable revenue for emergency and affordable housing, long term supportive housing, and operating and maintenance costs coupled with the wrap around services needed to help people get back on their feet. This is not only addressing a humanitarian challenge to house our residents with dignity; funding will support our economic growth and get us on a better path as we recover from the pandemic.”

The affordable housing crisis in Snohomish County has been well documented:

- Over 33% of households in Snohomish County are cost-burdened, meaning they pay more than 30% of their income on housing costs (based on 2018 Census Bureau report).
- Nearly half of all households in Snohomish County cannot afford an average two-bedroom apartment offered at fair market rent without becoming cost-burdened.
- As of 2019, Snohomish County would need 127,215 additional units of housing by 2040—approximately 6,300 new units each year—for no household in Snohomish County to spend more than 30% of their income toward housing.
- Approximately one-third of all households are at 60% of Area Median Income or below. This means that about one-third of Snohomish County households are in need of housing that will not be produced without governmental or nonprofit interventions.
- During 2020 in Snohomish County, the Fair Market Rent (FMR) for a two-bedroom apartment was \$2,099. To afford this level of rent and utilities, without paying more than 30 percent of income on housing, a household must earn \$6,997 monthly or \$83,960 annually. Assuming a 40-hour work week, 52 weeks per year, this level of income translates into an hourly housing wage of \$40.37.
- To afford a two-bedroom apartment at minimum wage, a household would have to work three full-time jobs.
- Additionally, there has been a 50-67% decline in low rent housing in our region from 2011 to 2017 and new construction has not made up for these declines.
- In 2020, there were 1,132 people living unsheltered in Snohomish County, according to the Point in Time Count. It is likely that number has increased significantly due to the pandemic.

In response to the housing crisis, Executive Somers and Lynnwood Mayor Nicola Smith established the Housing Affordability Regional Task Force (HART) that met throughout 2019 and 2020. One of the action items in the [HART report](#) was the need to find additional resources to build more affordable housing. If authorized by the County Council, Executive Somers intends to coordinate any spending on affordable housing with HART to ensure these resources have truly regional and equitable impact.

The following counties and cities in Washington have already authorized .1% sales tax for affordable housing, including Jefferson, King, Skagit, Spokane, Whatcom Counties, and the Cities of Anacortes, Ellensburg, Olympia, Port Angeles, Poulsbo, Tacoma, and East Wenatchee/Wenatchee.

Snohomish County has distributed approximately 90% of their \$67.7 million in federal and state-funded rental assistance. That assistance is a short-term solution for a long-term problem; more affordable housing is needed.

The Snohomish County Council will now consider the ordinance and hold public hearings later this month. It is expected that if approved this would raise approximately \$116 million over five years for investments in affordable housing.

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