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## **Snohomish County Authorizes Affordable Housing Effort**

*Will more than double affordable housing production over next five years*

**SNOHOMISH COUNTY, Wash., December 15, 2021** – The Snohomish County Council today authorized using the authority granted in HB 1590 to increase the stock of affordable housing in Snohomish County. Executive Somers will sign the ordinance. Collection of the 0.1 percent (\$0.01 per \$10 purchase) will start in April 2022.

Authorizing this new source of funding will support the creation of a projected 300 new units of affordable housing over the next five years, more than doubling the current production rate and increasing the total new affordable housing units to 522. It would also create at least 100 new units of bridge and permanent supportive housing which, when combined with other investments in process, could bring 42 percent of all unsheltered residents off the streets and into safer places.

“Today’s decision is one of many actions we are taking to address the housing affordability crisis and homelessness,” said Snohomish County Council Chair Stephanie Wright. “The housing crisis is an overwhelming burden for too many Snohomish County residents, and we must take action now to help those who are struggling. These strategies will help stabilize families, get people off the streets, and provide the services they so desperately need. Public safety and the health of our community require these bold steps.”

“I am proud to support this effort to address homelessness and the lack of affordable housing stock,” said Snohomish County Council Vice Chair Megan Dunn. “There are families across the county who are suffering because the skyrocketing housing costs and lack of housing options have left them without shelter or living in precarious situations. We can start to make a difference with these investments.”

“Housing affordability is negatively impacting people across the economic spectrum in Snohomish County,” said Snohomish County Councilmember Jared Mead. “This is a modest and sensible approach to the crisis that is facing too many families. If we act now with the urgency this crisis demands, we can begin to make progress. Doing nothing would be easier but also leave us with problems that become even more difficult to solve.”

“The Council has shown real leadership today, and I’m looking forward to working with them, our community, city, and tribal partners to ensure these funds are fairly and equitably spent to address the needs of our residents throughout the county,” said Snohomish County Executive Dave Somers. “No one can deny that there is a housing affordability crisis, and no one can argue against the need to take bold action. We cannot allow this crisis to further erode our economy, our environment, and the health of our community. We will now begin to make a difference.”

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

- Over 33 percent of households in Snohomish County are cost-burdened, meaning they pay more than 30 percent 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 percent of their income toward housing.
- Approximately one-third of all households are at 60 percent 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 percent 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 or in transitional housing 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.

The following counties and cities in Washington have already authorized 0.1 percent 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.

This authorization in Snohomish County is expected to raise approximately \$116 million over five years for investments in affordable housing.

Any proposed spending on affordable housing, shelter, and behavioral health projects resulting from this authorization will be coordinated with cities and towns, as well as two established bodies: the Snohomish County Housing and Community Development Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and the Policy Advisory Board (PAB). These bodies have representatives from impacted communities, cities, towns, and housing experts.

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