

People's Academy for Community Engagement

City Government 101 – Text File

Document last updated by the [Seattle Department of Neighborhoods](#) January 2026

For questions or comments, contact PACE@seattle.gov

Seattle Department of Neighborhoods

Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the land and water on which we gather today are the ancestral lands and waters of the Coast Salish people. They are the original, present, and future inhabitants and stewards of this place and continue to exercise their sovereignty and treaty rights to this day.

This acknowledgement serves only as a first step in honoring the land that we occupy and the first peoples of this land. The City recognizes that this will be long and evolving work to build and repair relationships with Native communities, and we are committed to doing this work.

Labor Acknowledgement

We would like to pause to recognize and acknowledge the labor upon which our country, state, city, and institutions are built. We respectfully acknowledge our debt to the enslaved people, primarily of African descent, whose labor and suffering built and grew the economy and infrastructure of a nation that refused to recognize their humanity. We acknowledge that the theft of labor is the theft of generational progress. Nearly all people of color have been robbed of the opportunity and wealth that their ancestors might otherwise have passed on to them.

It is our collective responsibility to critically interrogate these histories, to repair harm, and to honor, protect, and sustain this land and our collective humanity.

Topics in this Presentation

Seattle City Government

- Structure
- Roles and responsibilities
- Elections
- How different governments work together

Legislative Process

- Who is involved in creating legislation
- How to influence legislation
- Seattle City Budget process

Ways to Get Involved and Learn More

Seattle City Government

Basic Organizational Chart

Residents of Seattle

- Municipal Court
- City Attorney
- Mayor City Council

Detailed Organizational Chart

Residents of Seattle

- Municipal
 - Municipal Court
- City Attorney
 - Law
- Mayor
 - Public Safety
 - Fire
 - Police
 - Emergency Management
 - Community Assisted Response and Engagement
 - Arts, Culture & Recreation
 - Arts & Culture

- Parks & Recreation
 - Seattle Center
 - The Seattle Public Library*
- Education & Human Services
 - Human Services
 - Education and Early Learning
 - Seattle-King County Public Health
- Livable & Inclusive Communities
 - Civil Rights
 - Labor Standards
 - Immigrant & Refugee Affairs
 - Economic Development
 - Neighborhoods
 - Housing
 - Construction & Inspections
 - Planning & Community Development
- Utilities, Transportation & Environment
 - City Light
 - Public Utilities
 - Transportation
 - Sustainability & Environment
- Administration
 - Finances & Administrative Services
 - Intergovernmental Relations
 - Employee Ombud
 - City Budget Office
 - Human Resources
 - Office of the Mayor
 - Information Technology
- City Council
 - City Auditor
 - Hearing Examiner
 - Inspector General
 - Legislative
- Economic & Revenue Forecasts (a subgroup between the Mayor and City Council)

*The Library is governed by a five-member citizens' board of trustees, appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the City Council.

At the bottom of the page separated from the main organizational chart:

- Civil Service Commissions
- Community Police Commission
- Employees' Retirement System
- Ethics & Elections Commission
- Firefighters Pension Board
- Police Relief & Pension Board

Image Source: [2025-2026 Adopted Budget Book](#)

Seattle Mayor

- Mayor Katie Wilson
 - Current Term: January 2026 – December 2029
- Carries out policies set by City Council
- Manages and appoints directors for 32 departments
- Establishes priorities that guide work of City departments
- Supports the City's annual budget process
- Appoints Commissioners when authorized by legislation
- Issues Executive Orders in times of emergency or to provide official directives to agencies in the executive branch
- Elected for four-year term

[Mayor's webpage](#)

Seattle City Council

- Considers resolutions and ordinances
- Creates and oversee City department work plans
- Supports the City's annual budget process
- Votes on Mayoral department director appointments
- Appoints Commissioners when authorized by legislation
- Elected for four-year terms

[Meet the Council Webpage](#)

Seattle City Councilmembers

- **Councilmember Rob Saka**
 - **District 1:** West Seattle, South Park, Georgetown, Pioneer Square
 - **Current Term:** January 2024 – December 2027
 - **Committee Chair:** [Transportation, Waterfront, & Seattle Center](#)
 - **Committee Vice Chair:** [Public Safety](#)
- **Councilmember Eddie Lin**
 - **District 2:** South Seattle, Chinatown International District
 - **Current Term:** December 2025 – December 2027 (elected to serve a partial term)
 - **Chair:** [Land Use & Sustainability](#)
 - **Vice Chair:** [Housing, Arts, & Civil Rights](#)
- **Council President Joy Hollingsworth**
 - **District 3:** Central Seattle
 - **Current Term:** January 2024 – December 2027
 - **Chair:** [Governance & Utilities](#)
 - **Vice Chair:** [Libraries, Education & Neighborhoods](#)
- **Councilmember Maritza Rivera**
 - **District 4:** Northeast Seattle
 - **Current Term:** January 2024 – December 2027
 - **Chair:** [Libraries, Education & Neighborhoods](#)
 - **Vice Chair:** [Finance, Native Communities & Tribal Governments](#)
- **Councilmember Debora Juarez**
 - **District 5:** North Seattle
 - **Current Term:** July 2025 – December 2026 (appointed to serve a partial term)
 - **Chair:** [Parks & City Light](#)
 - **Vice Chair:** [Governance & Utilities](#)
- **Councilmember Dan Strauss**
 - **District 6:** Northwest Seattle
 - **Current Term:** January 2024 – December 2027
 - **Chair:** [Finance, Native Communities & Tribal Governments](#)
 - **Vice Chair:** [Land Use & Sustainability](#)
- **Councilmember Robert Kettle**
 - **District 7:** Downtown to Magnolia
 - **Current Term:** January 2024 – December 2027
 - **Chair:** [Public Safety](#)

- **Vice Chair:** [Parks & City Light](#)
- **[Councilmember Alexis Mercedes Rinck](#)**
 - **District 8:** Citywide
 - **Current Term:** January 2026 – December 2029
 - **Chair:** [Human Services, Labor, & Economic Development](#)
 - **Vice Chair:** [Transportation, Waterfront, & Seattle Center](#)
- **[Councilmember Dionne Foster](#)**
 - **District 9:** Citywide
 - **Current Term:** January 2026 – December 2029
 - **Chair:** [Housing, Arts, & Civil Rights](#)
 - **Vice Chair:** [Human Services, Labor, & Economic Development](#)

Seattle City Attorney

- City Attorney Erika Evans
 - Current Term: January 2026 – December 2029
- Criminal Division
 - Prosecutes misdemeanors, gross misdemeanors, and traffic infractions in Seattle Municipal Court.
- Civil Division
 - Represents the City in lawsuits and advises City officials as they develop programs, projects, policies, and legislation.
- Administration Division
 - Staff provide budgeting, accounting, human resources, clerical, and information technology services for the City Attorney's Office.

[City Attorney's Webpage](#)

Seattle Municipal Court

- 7 elected judges and 5 appointed magistrates
 - Seattle Municipal Court Judges
 - [Honorable Willie Gregory](#)
 - [Presiding Judge Anita Crawford-Willis](#)
 - [Honorable Faye R. Chess](#)
 - [Honorable Damon Shadid](#)
 - [Honorable Andrea Chin](#)
 - [Honorable Catherine McDowall](#)

- [Honorable Pooja Vaddadi](#)
 - Seattle Municipal Court Magistrates
 - Honorable Lisa Mansfield
 - Honorable Seth Niesen
 - Honorable Robert Chung
 - Honorable Noah Weil
 - Honorable Mary Lynch
- Roles and responsibilities:
 - Misdemeanors
 - Crimes where the maximum sentence is 90 days in jail and \$1,000 fine.
 - Gross Misdemeanors
 - Including offenses such as driving under the influence (DUI), domestic violence, theft, and trespass.
 - Infractions
 - Like parking tickets and other violations of the traffic code
 - Civil Offenses
 - City of Seattle seeks enforcement of fire code, housing, and other City ordinance violations.

[Seattle Municipal Court webpage](#)

Elections Information

- [Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission's Election site](#) offers an introduction to and navigation for our Seattle election information including:
 - the Seattle Voters' Guide,
 - Seattle campaign finance information,
 - a list of who is campaigning for Seattle Mayor, City Council, and City Attorney
 - who is campaigning for or against Seattle Ballot Issues
 - [Democracy Voucher Program](#)
- [King County Election's site](#) offers voter registration information as well as ballot information.
 - [Find election results](#)
 - [Get a ballot](#)
 - [Find accessible voting options](#)
 - [Register to vote](#)

[Seattle Elections Webpage](#)

Democracy Vouchers

- The Democracy Voucher Program offers a way for Seattle residents to support campaigns and/or get funding to run for office themselves.
- Assigning your Democracy Voucher to a candidate is the same as donating to a candidate's campaign.
- Candidates participating in the Democracy Voucher Program must follow strict reporting guidelines to qualify for the program.
- You **do not** have to be a registered voter to use Democracy Vouchers. If you meet the criteria, you may [apply for Democracy Vouchers](#).

[Democracy Voucher website](#)

Example of How Different Governments Work Together: [RapidRide G Line Bus](#)

- **City of Seattle – Seattle Department of Transportation**
 - Applying for funding
 - Design
 - Outreach and Communication
 - Maintenance
 - Funding – Move Seattle Levy
- **King County (KC) Metro**
 - Operation - KC Metro
 - Safety at stops and on board - KC Sheriff
 - Funding
- **Washington State**
 - Detours, Road Closures, Funding
- **Federal – Federal Transit Administration**
 - Funding for construction
 - Regular multijurisdictional calls during planning and construction phases

Legislative Process

Seattle City Council Legislation

- Council Bill

- Items of legislation that have not been approved by City Council
- Ordinance
 - Items of legislation that have the force of law
- Resolution
 - Items of legislation that are advisory or policy-oriented in nature and serve to offer a collective opinion or intention of the City Council
 - Can be used to approve grant applications, set hearing dates, or take actions that do not commit the City to expenditures

Origin of Legislation

Legislation can be initiated by any branch of City government:

- Legislative (City Council)
- Executive (Mayor)
- Judicial (Municipal Court and the City Attorney)

Members of the public may collaborate on the development of legislation for consideration through any branch.

Legislation submitted for City Council consideration is reviewed by the City Attorney's Office. Note: Must also include a Fiscal Note, which describes the financial impact of the proposal

Legislation sponsored by the Mayor is reviewed by the City Budget Office and the City Attorney's Office before it is submitted to City Council.

[Webpage that further explains the legislative process](#)

City of Seattle Legislative Process

The City Clerk reviews legislation.

- Publish in Introduction and Referral Calendar.
- Recommend sponsorship and committee referral.
- Assign bill numbers.

From there, the bill may go directly to Full City Council or to City Council Committee.

- Some urgent and very routine matters may bypass committee review and be referred directly to the Full City Council.
- At City Council Committee, members of that committee debate legislation.

- Make amendments to legislation.
- Hold legislation.
- Conduct further research.
- Hear public comment.

Once the bill is either voted out of committee or directly sent to full City Council, they debate legislation.

- Make amendments to legislation.
- Hold legislation.
- Adopt legislation.
- Hear public comment.

The City Council President signs legislation passed by City Council.

- The legislation then goes to the City Clerk who updates official record to reflect the full City Council action.

The final step is where the Mayor reviews passed legislation with the City Budget Office.

- The Mayor vetoes the bill, allows the bill to go into law without signature, or signs the bill into law.

Seattle City Budget Process: When do budget decisions happen?

The City of Seattle follows a biennial (two-year) budget process in which the City Council approves funding for year one while endorsing the amounts for year two. In the second year of the biennial budget, the Mayor and City Council propose adjustments to the Endorsed Budget.

Each year in:

- **March:** the City Budget Office (CBO) provides budget guidance to City departments based on revenue forecasts and other factors
- **June:** Departments propose budget changes
- **June to Late September:** CBO supports Mayor to build the full budget based on proposals
 - Mayor announces proposed budget, usually in late September
- **Late September to Late November:** Seattle City Council reviews, amends, and adopts changes

- Every September, the Council receives a proposed City budget from the Mayor
- From September through November, the Council focuses solely on the budget, holding a number of budget committee meetings and public hearings
- Seattle City Council votes to approve the budget, usually in late November
- **January and Beyond:** Departments implement programs
- **Ongoing:** Communities experience outcomes

[City Budget Office webpage](#)

People Power

Seattle's City Charter guarantees the people certain direct powers, including:

- The power to suggest legislation to be voted on directly by the people (initiative)
- The power to propose a vote of the people to overturn legislation passed by the City (referendum)
- The power to propose an amendment to the City Charter to be voted on by the people

[Link to Seattle City Charter, last amended in Nov. 2013](#)

Example of Legislation: Domestic Workers Bill of Rights

Through the collective efforts of domestic workers, hiring entities, and other community members, Seattle joined multiple States as the first City to pass a Domestic Workers Bill of Rights in 2018.

This Bill of Rights included:

- a new law, the Domestic Workers Ordinance
- clarification of the anti-discrimination protections for domestic workers in the City's Fair Employment Practices Ordinance.
- the creation of the [Domestic Workers Standards Board](#)

Ways to Get Involved and Learn More

Engage with local government

- Stay Informed
 - Learn about the role of each branch of government.
 - Sign up for e-newsletters, attend public meetings, read local news.
- Connect
 - Connect with elected officials at Council meetings, town halls, phone calls, letters, email, etc. and make your needs known.
- Vote
 - Vote and invite others to vote. Local elections are as important (and at times) have more impact on you than federal elections.
- Follow Up
 - Follow up on meetings, communications, and actions taken.
 - Keep the pressure on if necessary.

Get in touch with City Councilmembers

- Find your district and Councilmembers on this [webpage](#)
- Phone: Call their offices
- Email: Visit their website to learn about their staff
 - See if staff has particular focus area you want to comment on or ask about. If they do, include them in your email to the Councilmember.
- In Person: Some Councilmembers hold office hours
- Find information on their websites or sign up for e-newsletter updates
- You can sign up to receive one or many Councilmembers' email updates on the City Council [website](#)

Give public comment to City Councilmembers

- Councilmembers may be contacted at any time to comment on legislation. (Except on items that fall under the quasi-judicial rules for certain types of land use decisions.)
- Public hearings are a formal opportunity for members of the public to comment on a proposed piece of legislation
- Members of the public may also address Council on a proposed piece of legislation at a Council Committee and full Council meeting when the legislation is on the agenda

Community organizing strategies to influence decision makers

- Learn Their Interests
- Meet in Person
- Build Relationships
- Tell Stories
- Gather the Facts
- Build Coalitions
- Utilize the Media
- Persevere

Join a Board or Commission

- Individuals serve on over 70 different boards, councils, and commissions
- Provide advice and feedback on issues like:
 - Civil Rights
 - Transportation
 - Renters' Rights
 - Green New Deal
 - Ethics and Elections
 - Land Use

Learn more and apply on the [Seattle Boards and Commissions webpage](#)

How the City Clerk's Office can help you research

The Office of the City Clerk website offers more information on:

- [How to Read a Bill](#)
- [Legislative Glossary](#)
- [City Council Meetings, Agendas, links to watch meetings](#)
- [How to File Petitions for Initiatives, Referenda, and Charter Amendments](#)

City Clerk Information Service Desk and Research Room at Seattle City Hall offers:

- Access to specific documents, like a piece of legislation or a report

- Seattle Municipal Archives materials
- Other items for research purposes