

People's Academy for Community Engagement

City Government 101



Seattle
Neighborhoods

Document last updated by the [Seattle Department of Neighborhoods](#) January 2026
For questions or comments, contact PACE@seattle.gov

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

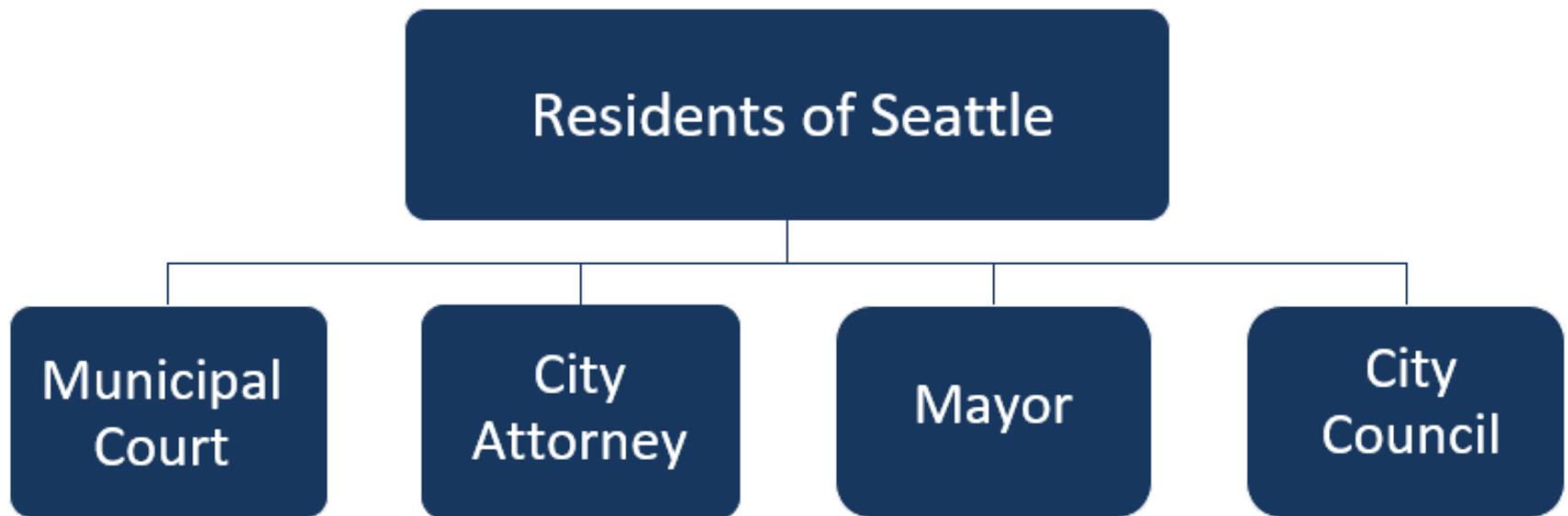
Ways to Get Involved and Learn More

Seattle City Government



Seattle City Hall building from 4th Avenue. Source: [Civic Center webpage](#)

Basic Organizational Chart



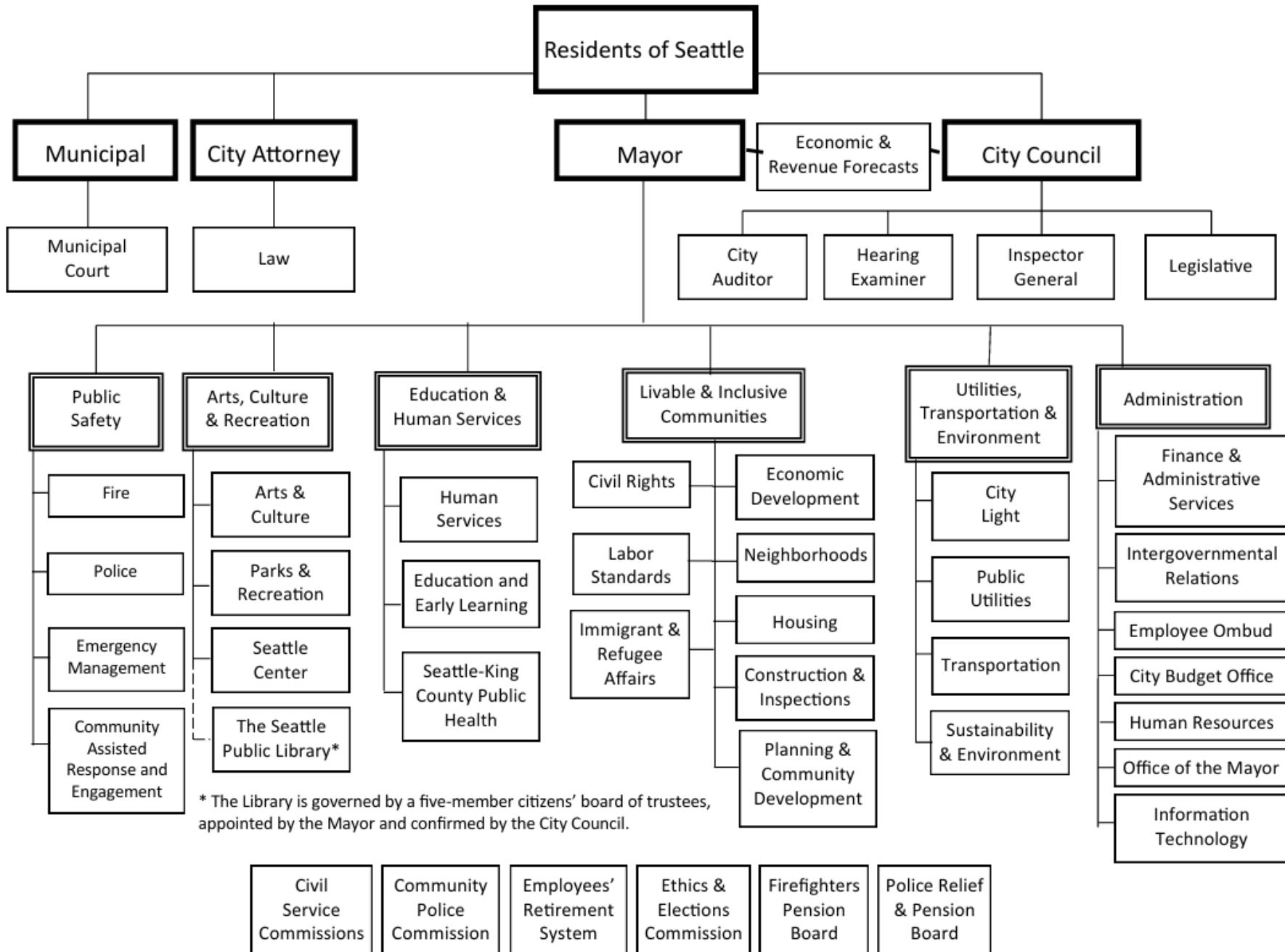


Image Source: [2025-2026 Adopted Budget Book](#)

Seattle Mayor



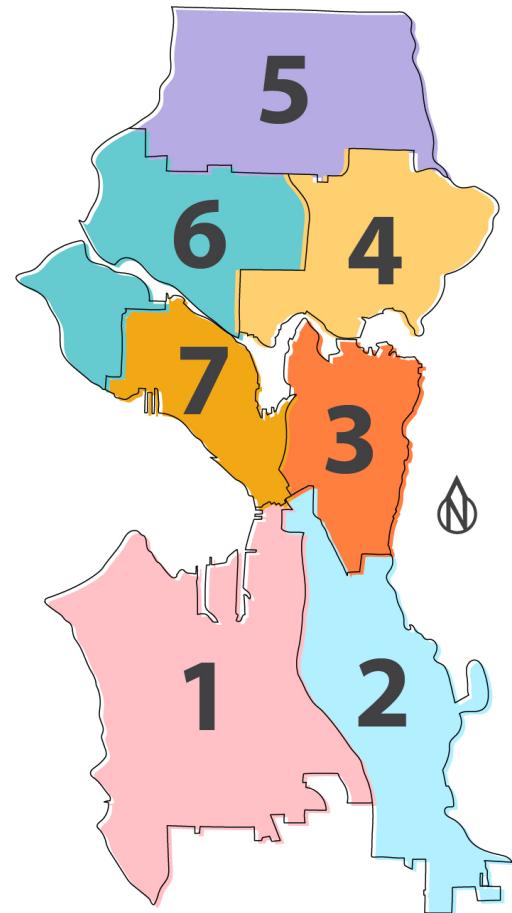
- Carries out policies set by City Council
- Manages and appoints directors for 32 departments
- Establishes priorities that guide work of City departments
- Supports the City's annual budget process
- Appoints Commissioners when authorized by legislation
- Issues Executive Orders in times of emergency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

Mayor Katie Wilson
Current Term:
January 2026 –
December 2029

[Mayor's Webpage](#)

Seattle City Council

- Considers resolutions and ordinances
- Creates and oversees 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: Positions 1-3



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](#)

Seattle City Councilmembers: Positions 4-6



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

Seattle City Councilmembers: Positions 7-9



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

- **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
Erika Evans
Current Term:
January 2026 –
December 2029

[City Attorney's Webpage](#)

Seattle Municipal Court

7 elected judges and 5 appointed magistrates

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](#)



Seattle Municipal Court Judges

Standing, Left to Right:

[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

Standing Left to Right:

[Honorable Lisa Mansfield](#), [Honorable Seth Niesen](#),
[Honorable Robert Chung](#), [Honorable Noah Weil](#),
and [Honorable Mary Lynch](#)

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](#)

Elections Information (continued)



Seattle.gov

Ethics and Elections Commission

Wayne Barnett, Executive Director

[Ethics](#) [Elections](#) [Democracy Vouchers](#) [Lobbying](#) [Whistleblower](#) [Commission](#)

Seattle Elections

► [Elections Home](#)

[Voting](#)

[Voters' Guide](#)

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[Past Elections](#)

[FAQs](#)

Who Is Campaigning for What?

What's coming up on the ballot?

How much money has been raised this year?

Who is contributing to the campaigns?

How do I Vote?

Seattle Voters' Guide

Info on Democracy Vouchers

Campaign Finance Law And Rules

Info for Treasurers And Campaign Staff

What's been disclosed lately?

[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



Still from a video recording of the March 18, 2025 Seattle City Council meeting.

Source: [Seattle Channel](#)

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.

Origin of Legislation (continued)

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 Clerk

(Some urgent and very routine matters may bypass committee review and be referred directly to the Full City Council.)

Review legislation. Publish in Introduction and Referral Calendar.

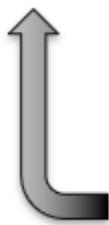
Recommend sponsorship and committee referral. Assign bill numbers.

Full City Council

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

City Council Committee

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



Vote bill out of committee



City Council President

Signs legislation passed by
City Council.



City Clerk

Updates official record to reflect
the full City Council action.



Mayor

Reviews passed legislation with
City Budget Office. Veto bill, allow
bill to go into law without
signature, or sign 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

Continued on next slide

[City Budget Office webpage](#)

Seattle City Budget Process: When do budget decisions happen? (continued)

Each year in:

- **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

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



Community Shares Ideas for a More Connected and Welcoming South Downtown. Source: [Office of Planning and Community Development Blog](#)

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

[Seattle City Clerk's Public Comment Guide](#)

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

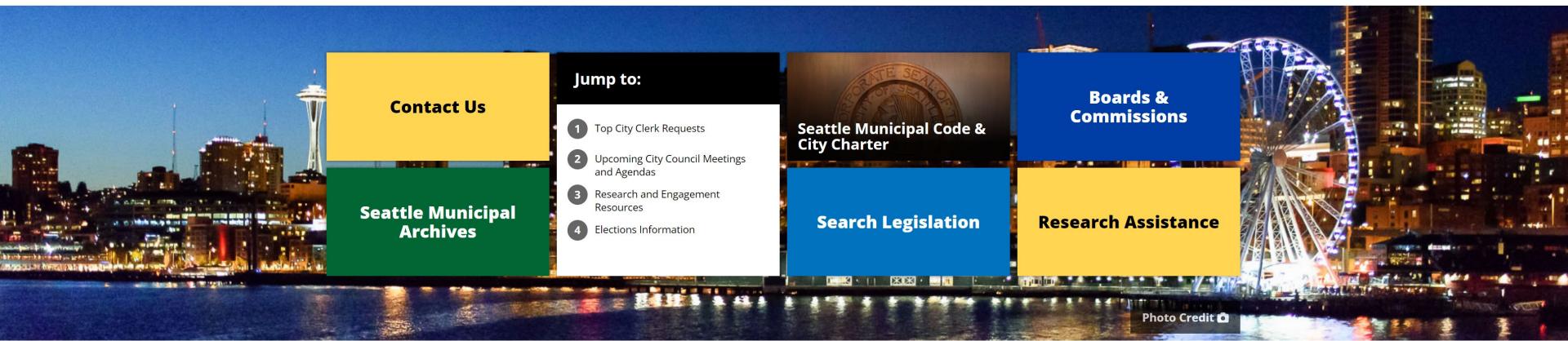
- Individuals serve on over 70 different boards, councils, and commissions
- Provide advice and feedback on issues like:
 - Civil Rights
 - Transportation
 - Renters' Rights
 - Green New Deal
 - Ethics and Elections
 - Land Use



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

Office of the City Clerk

[City Council Agendas](#) [Legislation & Research](#) [City Clerk Services](#) [About](#) [Seattle Municipal Archives](#)



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