

2015 State of the City
Seattle Mayor Edward B. Murray
February 17, 2015

[Introduction]

President Burgess, members of the Seattle City Council, City Attorney Holmes, and residents of Seattle.

President Obama said in his State of the Union address last month that the state of the nation is strong.

It is strong, I believe, in no small part because our cities are strong and vibrant and innovative centers of change that are helping to drive the national agenda.

And Seattle is as strong, vibrant and innovative as any city in the country, leading on issues of equity, transportation and the environment.

The diversity of our residents, the energy of our businesses, the creativity of our arts together have created a unique moment in the history of this growing city.

We are in the midst of a moment rich with opportunity to shape dramatically the Seattle of tomorrow.

Last year, we showed how progressives can work together to make government function and improve the lives of the people of this city.

This year, we will start to see the results of last year's great successes.

In April, because of our action, Seattle's minimum wage will rise to \$11 per hour.

And in April, because of our action, we will begin increasing park maintenance and expanding park programming...

In June, because of our action, we will begin to see the largest increase in bus service in the city of Seattle since Metro Transit was created in the 1970s.

In July, because of our action on priority hire, when the City invests in infrastructure, we will also invest in local workers.

In September, because of our action, we will see three- and four-year-olds attending new City-funded preschool programs...

We must remain committed to implementing these achievements: Following through and getting it right is just as important as getting it in the first place.

But while Seattle is strong and, I believe, getting stronger, we must recognize that the benefits of our thriving city are not jointly shared.

We see inequities...

...in how we experience growth – between those who benefit from it and those displaced by it ...

...in prosperity – between those who can afford to live here and those being pushed out ...

...in our schools – between those who are coming to school ready to learn and are graduating on time, and those who are not...

...in public safety – between those who are safe from crime, and those who are at greater risk of crime because of who they are or where they live...

And, of course, cutting across all these inequities is the most challenging inequity of all – and that is racial inequity.

We must keep working together so that we can keep driving better outcomes on each of these vital issues.

Our city is many things, including a city of young people – nearly half of Seattle residents are younger than 35.

And so I have invited high school students from around the city to join us here.

Let us take this opportunity to welcome all of you to City Hall.

You are coming of age at a time of unprecedented growth and change in your city.

This can be exciting and energizing – and it can also be confusing and unsettling.

But it does present us right now with a once-in-a-lifetime chance to define the future of this city while each of you is beginning to define your own future.

So let us define both together.

Together, we can determine the destiny of our city to ensure that Seattle is a safe, affordable, vibrant, interconnected city for all.

[Growth and planning]

Seattle is growing faster than its surrounding suburbs for the first time in over a century.

Over the past twenty years, the City set goals for growth in designated areas, and we met those goals: three quarters of all growth occurred in urban villages.

In the next twenty years, Seattle is expected to add 120,000 new residents.

And as we grow, our City must ensure that we become a more livable and sustainable city.

In Ballard, for example, population has increased by 25 percent in the past decade but investments in transportation have lagged far behind.

In Rainier Beach, where the unemployment rate is three times the city rate, we must plan for growth in jobs as we plan for growth in population.

So this year, we will launch a different approach to these issues as we restructure City government to meet our rapidly changing city.

As we provide plans for new density in a neighborhood, we will also provide plans for how the City will invest to ensure the neighborhood continues to thrive.

To the students in the room, take a moment and think out twenty years from now.

You will be in your mid-30s. You're likely to have a job. A spouse. Perhaps children.

Where will you be living? Near light rail? Will it be a house with a yard? Will you be able to walk to work or to a park?

Those are the questions before us. And we want to hear your answers. Your vision for the next chapter in Seattle's story.

This year, we as a City are asked to look 20 years ahead to envision Seattle in 2035.

The revision of our Comprehensive Plan is a chance for all of the city – for millennials, families, and seniors – to discuss and decide...

... where we should grow...

... how we can grow sustainably...

...and, as new housing and new businesses grow...

...how we will prioritize our investments.

In keeping with one of the fundamental tenants of my administration, I am putting a new emphasis on equity in planning.

Growth must be about placing without displacing.

Therefore, in the coming weeks I am sending a resolution to Council that recognizes race and social justice as one of the core values for the Plan.

It will call on all of us to develop new equity goals and practices, and build in public accountability through more inclusive stewardship.

And since these questions affect everyone, we will redouble our outreach efforts to ensure all voices are heard.

Evening meetings in community centers are simply not enough.

So we will conduct digital outreach, telephone town halls and find other ways to engage those deeply affected by these questions but seldom heard from – immigrants and refugees, those working evenings or those at home taking care of their families.

And this spring, I will host my second annual Neighborhood Summit to continue this citywide conversation about our major initiatives, such as...

...updating the Comprehensive Plan,

...renewing transportation funding, and

...creating more affordable housing.

[Transportation]

With a vibrant economy, our challenge is to continue creating more transportation choices for everyone, while also reducing carbon emissions.

In the year since I took office, we have made a series of moves to give Seattleites more options.

We created a legal and safe framework for taxis and rideshare companies like Uber and Lyft.

We added miles of new protected bike lanes throughout the city.

Last year, we brought in Pronto bike-share, and this year, we are funding its expansion into under-served neighborhoods.

We are allowing car-share companies like Car2Go to expand.

Last November, the voters of Seattle generously voted to tax themselves to expand bus service in this city.

This is major progress.

As I said in these chambers last year, this City has many worthy individual plans for bikes, freight, cars, transit, and pedestrians.

But we lack a unified, modern, interconnected transportation plan. A philosophy for how to get our city moving.

Until now.

By the end of this month, I will release a new comprehensive vision for how Seattle approaches transportation....

...a vision that integrates our many transportation plans into a single strategy that is greater than the sum of its parts, which I have named Move Seattle.

Move Seattle is a vision for growing and expanding our transportation choices to meet the needs of all users, for today and tomorrow.

We will use Move Seattle to guide our investments as we renew our transportation levy this year.

We will get the basics right by improving our aging roads and bridges and sidewalks.

And we will make the investments necessary to build a safe, integrated transportation system with an expanding variety of choices available to all.

Seattle, it bears mentioning, is not an island. To keep our city's economy moving, we must also keep our region moving.

With Sound Transit opening two new light rail stations in the coming year – one at the University of Washington and the other on Capitol Hill – now is the time to build on this momentum.

We are working with leaders throughout the three-county region to pass authority for Sound Transit 3 in Olympia this year.

Sound Transit 3 is our path forward to build new light rail connections within the city, including to Ballard and West Seattle.

These vital connections would link our growing light rail system to Puget Sound's largest job centers.

Together, these efforts will have profound impact on our transportation future.

But there's no denying it: our transportation future will look different without the leadership of Tom Rasmussen on the City Council.

Councilmember Rasmussen has been a part of civic life in Seattle for as long as I can remember.

He's been a champion for seniors, for human services, for civil rights, and for innovative transportation solutions, including our successful transit campaign this past November.

Councilmember Rasmussen, we thank you for your years of dedication to serving the people of Seattle.

[Affordability in housing]

Income inequality is real, and it's growing in Seattle.

In 2013, the income of the top fifth of Seattle households was 19 times that of the lowest fifth.

Everyone who works in Seattle should be able to afford to live in Seattle...

Our strategies to address this challenge have included reinventing our City's utility discount program, where we have seen a 21 percent increase in household enrollments in one year, and are on track to meet my commitment to double enrollments by 2018.

And I look forward to partnering with Councilmember Sawant to continue this important work.

Our strategies have included raising the minimum wage for workers like Malcolm Cooper-Suggs, a 21-year-old fast-food worker.

Malcolm is excited to soon be able to start setting money aside for emergencies his future.

He is doing his part – working hard to make a better life for himself. He deserves a fair wage for a full day’s work.

Malcolm is here with us today – Malcolm please stand and be recognized...

In time, our action on minimum wage will directly impact the lives of over 100,000 individuals like Malcolm working in this city.

Women are disproportionately represented among those who stand to benefit from the rising minimum wage.

And there are steps the City can take to address the gender equity issues among our own employees.

With Councilmember Godden’s leadership, we will move forward on a number of initiatives this year that will help close the gender pay gap and promote women’s participation in the City workforce.

We are also establishing an Office of Labor Standards to educate workers and businesses on how to comply with our new minimum wage law and enforce other important worker protections.

This Office in many ways is the crowning achievement of a remarkable two-decade-long career of service to the people of Seattle.

Councilmember Nick Licata, you have been a voice for the voiceless, and a tireless advocate for a more affordable city.

If, as Jonathan Raban has written, living in a city is an art, then you have brought the vocabulary of art to our ongoing efforts to make this city a better place for all...

Our next great challenge to affordability, of course, is housing.

Seattle now has the fastest growing rents among all major cities in the country.

To address this massive challenge, I worked with Councilmembers Clark and O’Brien to establish an advisory committee to take action.

As with our minimum wage task force, we have brought together people with very different perspectives who often do not agree, to work together on a definitive proposal just as rigorous as the solution we developed on the minimum wage.

Their recommendations, due in May, will help ensure people – and especially families – can live in this city no matter their income.

People including the mother I met who works downtown and lives in South King County, but spends hours a day commuting.

Hers is a common story that is often lost, but experienced by thousands of other workers across Seattle. These stories represent the true cost of a lack of affordability in our city.

I have made it clear to the members of the committee – and will reiterate here today – that we are not going to get there with a single tool.

To address our affordability challenges, everyone must play a part: from developers to landlords to nonprofits to employers to the construction industry... to City government.

That's why I am committing 35 million dollars of City resources to enact the recommendations of this Advisory Committee.

[Education]

As we grow as a city, we cannot allow the opportunity gap between white students and students of color to persist.

Nearly 90 percent of Caucasian third graders are meeting math and reading standards in this city, compared to approximately half of African American students.

About one-quarter of African American and Latino students do not graduate on time, compared to 8 percent of Caucasian students.

We can no longer allow so many of our children to leave school unprepared for college, for work or for life.

The City has partnered with Seattle Public Schools for 20 years through the Families & Education Levy.

Thanks to the leadership of Council President Burgess, we are deepening our partnership through the Seattle Preschool program.

And there are still more opportunities to partner.

Building a school system that works for all of our children is not the responsibility of the school district alone.

It is the responsibility of all of us.

This fall, I will be convening an Education Summit to re-envision how a 21st Century urban public school system can work successfully for all students.

The City, the school district, the state, the private sector, teachers and parents – all must engage in frank and honest conversation, and unite around a shared vision.

Together, we will close the opportunity gap in our public schools.

[Economic development]

Seattle is home to one of the most unique business environments in the country.

We have a diverse economy that is creating jobs and keeping unemployment low.

Amazon continues to grow before our eyes. Weyerhaeuser is moving to Pioneer Square. Juno had a very successful initial public offering.

But we as a City lack a more focused approach to economic development.

Too often, we have rested on our luck and our geography.

In the coming months, we will be asking our local business owners:

What do we need to do to make the task of running a local business easier?

What can we as a City do to help businesses thrive?

Over the last year, we have taken some initial steps...

We held an industrial and maritime summit to explore ways to build upon Seattle's strengths as a manufacturing center, and as a trading hub.

As a result, my budget invested in a Heavy Haul Corridor in Sodo, an essential step to help boost the competitiveness of our industrial freight sector.

And we will continue this engagement to create a longer-term vision for the role of manufacturing, maritime, and trade in Seattle's economy.

We are building our strategy to attract foreign direct investment.

We are expanding access to broadband to support start-up businesses.

Our Office of Economic Development launched an effort to help restauranteurs navigate the City, County and State regulations necessary to open and run a restaurant in Seattle.

And, we are making investments in business retention for medium-size business in growing industries.

All of these elements and more will be part of the conversation as we develop a shared strategy with the business community for how the City can play a more active role in nurturing our business environment and in creating jobs.

[Government performance]

A rapidly changing city requires a City government that can adapt right along with it.

If Seattleites are to have confidence that City Hall can meet today's challenges they must be able to measure the City's performance.

In September, as part of my budget, I made a promise to provide greater transparency into City government, and make more information and data accessible to the public.

And we have some results to share.

Today, we are launching a new tool called Performance Seattle, an interactive website found at performance.seattle.gov

Currently, nine of our departments are contributing data about how well they are meeting their goals, such as reducing traffic fatalities, reducing our carbon footprint and responding quickly to fires.

In the coming months, all City departments will set performance targets and report regularly to the public on their progress.

Today, we are also launching OpenBudget, another interactive website that presents budget data for the entire City government.

Located at openbudget.seattle.gov, it is a leap forward in budget reporting for our City.

Taken together, both of these resources will help us as a City achieve better goal-setting, better tracking, better use of data, and better outcomes.

These sites also highlight the great accomplishments of our hardworking City employees, who confront and manage complex and contentious issues each and every day.

I want to highlight the strong leadership of Christopher Williams, a long-time Parks employee who served as acting superintendent for more than four years, and is returning to his deputy role.

Christopher saw the department through a difficult time in the economy, and today, because of him, our department is stronger than ever.

Thanks to his leadership, and the leadership of Councilmember Bagshaw, we were able to secure long-term funding for Seattle's parks and community centers.

[Public safety]

Last year in this chamber, I committed to using a data-driven approach to address our city's complex and ongoing challenges in public safety, the paramount duty of local government.

Under Chief O'Toole, in August the Seattle Police Department launched the Seastat program, which uses data and community input to identify spikes in crime, address them, and evaluate police response.

In the fall, after a rash of robberies on Capitol Hill and in the Rainier Valley, we coordinated precinct and department-wide resources in the hardest-hit areas.

These focused efforts resulted in a 25 percent drop in robberies on Capitol Hill and a 40 percent drop in the Rainier Valley.

And after a spike in car thefts and car prowls last year, these same smart policing techniques led to a 12 percent drop in car thefts and a 16 percent drop in car prowls.

They also led to a 26 percent drop in burglaries.

This is good police work, and is the result of the dedicated efforts of our Seattle police officers.

These are early steps in addressing our public safety challenges, but they are positive steps in the right direction.

To build upon this momentum, I have set ambitious crime reduction goals for the Police Department, which are featured at Performance Seattle.

We will continue to grow and expand these strategies as we develop the best model for urban policing in the nation.

As I committed in these chambers last summer, I will provide the Council with a fuller presentation in late spring, consistent with our work to...

...ensure a safer built environment,

...foster more active public space and

...generate more economic opportunity for youth.

[Youth employment]

The fact is, the City can reduce youth crime and violence through a robust youth employment program.

In Chicago, for example, young people from high-crime neighborhoods were nearly half as likely to be victims of violent crime when they had summer jobs.

This year, we will create a Mayor's Youth Employment Task Force to build the most vigorous youth employment program this City has seen in decades.

This program will help our young people – especially youth from our most underserved communities – develop the skills necessary to compete in the 21st Century economy.

We know what a successful program looks like.

Shawnteal Turner was in and out of juvenile detention when she attended a career fair and learned about the Youth Green Corps, a partnership between our Seattle Parks and Goodwill.

She liked learning about the environment and wanted help forming her life goals.

Shawnteal completed the program, and because of her dedication, passion and hard work, she is now working with both Seattle Goodwill and Seattle Parks & Recreation.

Shawnteal is here with other members of Youth Green Corps.

Shawnteal, please stand and be recognized...

We want to provide more opportunities like Shawnteal's.

Our immediate goal is to double the number of summer youth served to 2,000 this year.

Additionally, Seattle was selected to receive a significant grant from Bloomberg Philanthropies.

The staff hired with these new resources will first focus on addressing the disparities affecting young African Americans, particularly men, in Seattle.

We will align our participation in national efforts to address youth violence – including Cities United and President Obama’s My Brother’s Keeper – with our local efforts, such as the Seattle Youth Violence Prevention Initiative.

In the spring, we will convene a Youth Opportunity Summit, working with African American and other community-leaders, experts in academia, the non-profit and private sectors to eliminate the educational opportunity gap, increase long-term employment and reduce juvenile crime rates.

[Police accountability and police reform]

Every community deserves to be served well by its police service.

Our efforts to reform the Seattle Police Department remain a top priority of my administration.

This City will continue working with the federal judge and the Civil Rights Division of the United States Department of Justice to address patterns of excessive use of force.

That is non-negotiable.

While we still have far to go, we need to acknowledge when progress occurs.

For the first time, the federal monitor has commended us for our progress. All officers are receiving consistent training. And, we are now collecting consistent, reliable, court-approved data for all uses of force.

Last year, I worked with Councilmember Harrell, the Community Police Commission, the Office of Professional Accountability and City Attorney Pete Holmes to develop reforms that will bring greater fairness, independence and transparency to the police discipline and accountability process.

Chief O’Toole and I have already implemented some of these reforms to ensure that disciplinary appeals are handled properly and efficiently.

This spring, I will introduce legislation to implement the remaining reforms.

All together, our comprehensive efforts will change the experience between our police and our community, and rebuild public trust.

They include...

...improved recruitment of a more diverse police force...

...significant training in de-escalation tactics and bias-free policing...

...extensive reporting and data-collection to identify potential misconduct...

...a streamlined complaint process for Seattleites to report issues ...

...increased civilian oversight of every aspect of the police discipline and accountability system...

...and significant new transparency to instill public confidence and ensure that incidents of misconduct are not swept under the rug.

These changes are essential elements in our ongoing effort to create the best model for urban policing in the nation.

[*Conclusion*]

This is a historic moment in America and in Seattle as we confront the issue of race.

We must acknowledge how far we have come, but this is the side of the mountain, not the summit.

The poet Maya Angelou said:

“History despite its wrenching pain,
Cannot be unlived,
and if faced
With courage,

need not be lived again.”

It will take courage to address the deeply troubling issues of policing and race in this country.

It will take courage to acknowledge that the police are often at the receiving end of the failure of other systems to address race...

...failure in our education, criminal justice, foster care, mental health and political systems.

On the night of the Ferguson Grand Jury decision I pointed to the results of those failures.

... African Americans are incarcerated at nearly 6 times the rate of Caucasians...

... Homicide is the leading cause of death of young African-American men ...

... 40 percent of African Americans will fail to graduate on-time from our high schools -- or at all -- ...

...the numbers for Latinos, Pacific Islanders and Native Americans are hardly better.

To the young people here, everything I have spoken about today, everything we have accomplished this past year...

...pre-k, the minimum wage, transit, priority hire, parks and community centers, police reform, summer youth employment...

...they are the response of the people of this City to addressing the issue of race and inequality.

But much work remains and it will not be easy. It is time to begin again to climb that mountain.

It is time for Seattle to talk with each other about how we heal the wounds of race.

Maya Angelou goes on in her poem to say.

“Lift up your eyes upon
this day breaking for you
Give birth again
To the dream.”

Thank you.