

NEWS RELEASE FROM THE OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

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As Part of Review of 2021 Budget, Mayor Durkan and Police Chief Best Announce Initial Actions to Transform the Seattle Police Department and Reimagine Community Safety

Ahead of 2021 Budget, Mayor and Chief Will Engage Community on Proposed Reorganization and Civilianization, Initial Cuts, and Further Changes

Mayor and Chief Will Oppose Blunt and Irresponsible Council Cuts to the 2020 and 2021 Budget That Compromise Community Safety

SEATTLE (July 13, 2020) – Mayor Jenny A. Durkan and Police Chief Carmen Best have been conducting a thorough review of the Seattle Police Department’s (SPD) budget and the impacts budget reductions would have on services to the residents and businesses of Seattle. On June 18, the Mayor and Chief asked SPD leadership and the City Budget Office to comprehensively analyze the department’s current services. Based off that analysis, the Mayor and Chief today announced early actions to transfer programs and functions currently within SPD out of the department and identified some preliminary reductions to the 2021 budget. In total, these early steps would lead to a \$76 million reduction in SPD’s budget for 2021. Further analysis and community engagement will be done in the coming weeks to reshape the SPD budget moving forward. The 2021 budget will be transmitted to City Council in approximately September 2020. The Mayor and the Chief will oppose any cuts by City Council that would compromise SPD’s ability to provide service and safety to the residents and businesses of Seattle.

“Chief Best and I believe we can build a new model for community safety in Seattle by reimagining our approach to policing and investing deeply in community,” said Mayor Durkan. “This new approach to community safety requires deep community engagement and thoughtful analysis. It cannot be accomplished by abolishing police or by a blunt cut of 50 percent with no alternative plan. While we have identified initial actions to reorganize the department, the responsible way to do this work is to first develop – in partnership with community – a need-based analysis and approach, so that when an individual calls 911, they get the help they need. Sometimes that call requires police to respond immediately, other times a caller may need a social worker, a nurse or firefighter, or family counselor.”

“The Seattle Police Department has been very clear – we are committed to a community-led re-envisioning of what community safety should be,” said Chief of Police Carmen Best. “I know, and the officers know, that there are numerous functions and types of calls that do not need a police officer to do them. Officers are called to these events because they can be both predictably and randomly dangerous and because, too often, other systems have failed. We need to build up community to have the right resources – and yes, some of that support will come from the SPD budget. What we cannot do is risk public safety for everyone by seeing what happens when half the department is eliminated without a plan and the people in place to safely address the issues each of those officers would have responded to the day prior to being terminated.”

As part of a potential reorganization of SPD’s budget, Mayor Durkan and Chief Best are proposing an initial set of SPD civilian functions that will be transferred out of the department. These transfers result in a \$55.7 million reduction to the SPD budget in 2021, however, they do not reduce the City’s overall General Fund budget and some elements will be subject to collective bargaining.

- Management of the Seattle Police Department 911 Call Center, which is already staffed primarily by civilians, will be transferred out of the department. The Call Center currently takes 911 calls for both SPD and the Seattle Fire Department (SFD) and is composed of 140 civilian employees and 12 sworn officers. All 140 civilian employees will be transferred out of the department, and this will result in **\$34.2 million transferred out of the SPD budget.**

- The civilian parking enforcement division will be transferred out of SPD and moved into the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT). The parking enforcement division is composed of 120 civilian employees, and this will result in **\$13.7 million transferred out of the SPD budget**.
- The Office of Emergency Management (OEM) – which prepares for, responds to, and staffs the City’s Emergency Operations Center when a major event occurs – will be transferred out of the police department. This includes 11 civilian employees and **\$3.3 million transferred out of the SPD budget**. The Mayor and SPD will assess if OEM and the 911 call center should remain as standalone departments, be located in other departments, or be combined with a future organization focused on public health and harm reduction responses.
- The Office of Police Accountability (OPA) will be transferred out of SPD. The OPA was already an independent office, but its budget was housed in SPD. This will result in **\$4.5 million transferred out of the SPD budget**.

After an initial analysis, the Chief and Mayor are proposing \$20.5 million in cuts from the 2021 SPD budget. The City is conducting further analysis on SPD’s workforce and specialty units, response times, 911 and arrest data, and overtime practices that could lead to additional budget reductions:

- SPD will not pursue its plan to expand the police force in 2021, and this should result in **at least \$13.7 million in savings**. The Chief will ensure appropriate staff levels to ensure a 24/7 response across all precincts and shifts. Following further analysis of specialty units between now and September, SPD projects another \$10 million in budget savings is possible through a reduction of sworn personnel or transfers to civilian service delivery outside of SPD. Immediate transfer of work currently performed by sworn officers would be subject to collective bargaining and cuts to current personnel would lead to layoffs of newer and more diverse recruits and patrol officers with recent emergency response experience.
- SPD will not fill 40 open civilian staff vacancies, which will result in **\$4.1 million in savings**.
- As SPD further analyzes overtime and reimbursable staffing for special events and sporting events (i.e. Homeland Security), SPD will reduce special events overtime by at least 30,000 hours, which will result in **at least \$2.7 million in savings**.

In the coming weeks, the Mayor and Chief will begin to engage the community on its priorities for SPD and what changes community envisions for policing. Ahead of engagement, the Seattle Police Department is currently analyzing and evaluating:

- Functions of current work at SPD shifted to a public health or harm reduction models;
- All specialized functions of the department to determine what should be civilianized, transferred out of SPD, maintained, right-sized, or eliminated;
- 800,000 calls from the community to 911 and dispatches to 400,000 unique events to determine if new emergency responses are necessary;
- Appropriate staffing models to provide sufficient services across the city, 24/7;
- Booking and arrests data to determine if citations are more appropriate response;
- Transitioning low priority calls to online reporting;
- Expected 2021 retirements and attrition to better determine staffing models;
- SPD’s response to other agencies, including King County Metro and Seattle Public Schools, unless there is a scene of violence, a serious assault, or a substantial theft or property destruction;
- Optimization of SPD’s fleet, facilities, and information technology projects to be consistent with the new approach to public safety;
- Current overtime practices, including necessary staffing throughout the year required to maintain public safety and the presence of SPD at reimbursable special events and sporting events; and
- Expansion of current City programs, like SPD’s Community Service Officers, Health One, mental health workers embedded with SPD, and a dedicated nurse 911 line for shelters, or new resources like additional counselors or behavioral health specialists.

The Mayor has allocated \$500,000 in the 2020 rebalanced budget for community engagement on the SPD budget and citywide work to reimagine community safety. Engagement will begin immediately and will inform the Mayor’s September budget transmittal and any corresponding efforts to restructure the department and 911 response.