



## **OneEastside Economic Outlook Summit 2026: Regional Leaders Gather to Gain Insight on the Year Ahead**

On January 21, business, civic, nonprofit, and community leaders from across East King County gathered at Microsoft Commons in Redmond for the **8th annual OneEastside Economic Outlook Summit**. The morning brought together decision-makers from healthcare, financial services, retail, nonprofit, and local government to better understand the economic forces shaping 2026 and how organizations are already responding.

The program opened with a timely and data-driven **2026 Economic Forecast** from economist **Matthew Gardner, Principal & Chief Economist at Gardner Economics**. Gardner described the current economy as a “reset cycle” following years of inflation, rapid interest rate increases, and market volatility. Rather than returning to pre-pandemic norms, he emphasized that businesses and households are now adjusting to a higher-cost, higher-rate environment that is likely to persist longer than many expect.

Gardner highlighted several key trends: slowing consumer spending, continued cost-of-living pressures, workforce realignments, housing affordability challenges, and uncertainty in commercial real estate—particularly office markets. Despite these pressures, he noted that many organizations are operating from a position of strength, with cautious optimism driven by disciplined investment, stabilizing inflation, and long-term regional growth.

Following the forecast, a **regional outlook panel** moderated by **Don Baker, Publisher of the Puget Sound Business Journal**, brought a local perspective

to the data. Panelists shared how economic shifts are being felt on the ground and how their organizations are adapting in real time.

- **Meghan Altimore, CEO of Hopelink**, spoke about growing demand for services, particularly related to housing stability, food access, and transportation, and the importance of cross-sector collaboration to meet community needs.
- **Chris Bredeson, Chief Operating & Strategy Officer at EvergreenHealth**, discussed workforce pressures in healthcare and how operational innovation and technology are helping the system remain responsive and resilient.
- **Denise Moriguchi, President & CEO of Uwajimaya**, reflected on changing consumer behavior, supply chain realities, and the value of long-standing community relationships in navigating uncertainty.
- **Ryan Zilker, EVP & Chief Growth Officer at Sound Credit Union**, shared insights into small business and consumer financial trends, noting both caution and opportunity as households and entrepreneurs adapt to a new economic landscape.

Together, the panel underscored a common theme: while the environment remains complex, organizations across the Eastside are finding ways to innovate, collaborate, and plan strategically for what's ahead.

The Summit concluded with a strong sense of connection and shared purpose, reinforcing the value of coming together to gain insights and outlook, learn from one another, and prepare for the future.

**Thank you** to our speakers, sponsors, partners, and attendees for making this year's Summit a success. We look forward to continuing the conversation in 2027.