

2016 State of the City
Seattle Mayor Edward B. Murray
February 16, 2016

[Introduction]

Council President Harrell, members of the Seattle City Council, City Attorney Holmes, department directors, residents of Seattle.

It is an honor to once again be here in these chambers for my third State of the City address.

Today, the State of the City reflects the 21st Century dreams of the 1962 World's Fair: a vibrant city driven by technology and science creating jobs and innovation in everything from transportation to health care.

The State of the City also reflects our worst fears from the Great Depression as issues of homelessness and inequity continue despite decades of effort on the part of this City to resolve them.

In his book 'The New Geography of Jobs', Enrico Moretti writes:

“Seattle is a place that mixes a strong sense of community with a contagious entrepreneurial energy and an understated cosmopolitan vibe. Above all, it exudes a quiet confidence about the future, a confidence rooted in one simple fact: Seattle has completely transformed itself from a decaying old-economy provincial town into one of the world's preeminent innovation hubs. In the process, its residents have become some of the most creative and best paid workers in the United States.”

Indeed, our median income is at an all-time high, and is the third highest of any city in the nation.

We are the sixth-most educated city in America: 59 percent of our workforce has a Bachelor's Degree or higher, and we are attracting talent from all over the world.

We created more than 63,000 jobs over the last five years. With an unemployment rate below 3.5 percent, we have been named the best city in the country to find a job.

Seattle is being transformed by an engine of change, fueled by the same large and disruptive forces that are upending social orders all across the globe.

And today we are presented with a fundamental question: Is a knowledge-based, technology-driven economy going to drive equity in this city, or is it going to drive us apart?

Since my last State of the City address, our city's minimum wage has increased to \$13 per hour and we have opened the Office of Labor Standards to enforce it, the Seattle Preschool Program opened its first classrooms to more than 250 three- and four-year olds, we have made the largest expansion in bus transit service since Metro was created in the 1970s, and we have committed to a goal of 50,000 new homes, including 20,000 for low- and moderate-income people over the next ten years.

These are our many answers to this fundamental question.

In my Inaugural Address, I talked about our city's challenges around equity, and expressed my confidence in government's ability to address them.

I did not pledge that government would be the sole solution, but rather would work with the community as an incubator for solutions.

And, during my time as mayor – at a pace the city is perhaps not used to – we have taken a vigorous approach to this.

To returning Council members, I want to thank you for the collaborative model we have developed over the past two years; even though we have disagreed on occasion, we have shown how progressives can get things done.

To the new Council members, while I know we will disagree on some things too, I look forward to partnering with you and continuing to advance policies that reflect our core progressive values.

[Innovation]

For City government to be responsive to our changing city and serve all residents justly and equitably, it must mirror the dynamism of our city.

Where we see disparities arise within our innovation economy, we will drive equity with an innovative government.

And we are doing this by:

- collecting and using data to better understand all City operations,
- using data to set goals and to measure our performance against those goals,
- adjusting our policies and funding models to be more responsive to changes on the ground,
- driving more transparency and accountability, and, ultimately, as a result
- producing more effective projects and better results in people's lives.

In my State of the City address last year, I announced Performance Seattle, an accountability tool to allow the public to measure the success of City government.

On our public website, we posted 86 goals and measurements across our departments:

- Are we repairing potholes quickly enough?
- Are we increasing residential energy efficiency?
- Are we responding quickly to customer calls?

One year later, I'm happy to report that for a full 71 percent of the goals, we are meeting or exceeding our target; and we are close on another 13 percent.

Yet for 16 percent of the goals we clearly have more work to do.

Our task now is to look at goals we are not yet meeting and do the hard work of digging through the data and driving for innovative solutions to make sure we can meet them.

In another innovation, SDOT created a new dashboard of all of its major capital projects, to better monitor budgets, timelines and spending and make appropriate adjustments in real time.

And, we have made the same tool available to the public at capitalprojects.seattle.gov.

Today, I am pleased to announce that I am issuing an Executive Order for all departments to follow a new Open Data policy that was developed by our Department of Information Technology in partnership with the University of Washington, the Sunlight Foundation, and our civic technology community.

Our Open Data policy is closely tied to our City Privacy Program, because we recognize the importance of protecting the public's privacy when releasing data.

This is what a data-driven government and a commitment to transparency looks like.

And this and many of the other incredible services we offer are made possible by our hardworking, dedicated City employees.

[Growth, equity and transportation]

Seattle is among the three fastest growing cities in the nation.

This growth has provided us with a booming economy, but we also see a growing number of cars clogging our streets, and skyrocketing demand for a limited supply of housing driving up home prices.

This spring, I will send to Council my draft Comprehensive Plan, this Administration's vision for how to plan for expected growth in Seattle between now and 2035.

The main goal of the Comprehensive Plan is to guide the physical development of our city.

However, the Plan must promote better access to jobs, transit, education, affordable housing, parks, community centers, and healthy food for all of our residents.

That is why this year's Comprehensive Plan has a new unprecedented emphasis on equity with goals across every element.

But I also know it is not enough to set goals in a planning document.

I have ordered my departments to integrate this Plan with new accountability metrics and policies to work with our most vulnerable communities and make

decisions based on data about existing disparities, so we can respond before displacement pressures become even greater.

I fear that if we wait too long, we will lose our history and will lose our soul.

Last year, we created the Office of Planning & Community Development, to better integrate the planning of City investments – including investments made by our Parks District, and our preschool, transit, transportation and housing levies.

We launched this effort for the first time in Lake City, where last week Councilmember Juarez joined me in announcing a comprehensive community plan for a livable, walkable, vibrant Lake City. I know we share a vision for a better Lake City, and I look forward to working with her on this new approach.

Our approach in Lake City integrates and connects:

- new park space, funded by our Parks District,
- new classrooms funded by the Seattle Preschool Program,
- increased bus service, funded by our transit levy,
- new affordable housing on City lands at Fire Station 39 funded by the housing levy, and
- 20 blocks of new sidewalks, funded by Move Seattle.

I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the current director of this new integrated planning approach, Diane Sugimura.

Diane has been working for the City for 38 years, has served under 6 mayors and has been the director of the City's Department of Planning & Development for the last 13 years.

When I first came into office, she was getting ready to retire from City service, but agreed to stay on during my transition. Then, as I directed our planning department to move forward with a new strategy to grow equitably, she agreed to stay and lead that effort. Then last year, when I announced the creation of a new planning office, she graciously agreed to delay her well-deserved retirement for a third time to get the new department up and running. Diane, I'm pleased to announce I've found yet another major policy initiative that will require you to stay with us.

Just kidding.

Diane, it has been an honor to work with you these last 2 years and on behalf of the City of Seattle, thank you. Would you please stand and be recognized.

Our integrated approach to planning is even more essential after voters approved the largest investment in transportation infrastructure in our city's history.

Growing equitably and sustainably means getting transportation right, and Move Seattle is our biggest tool for this, including building sidewalks, repairing roads and bridges, and creating transit corridors.

With Move Seattle, we are also furthering our commitment to freight mobility and the heavy haul corridor with improvements at Lander and East Marginal Way.

To address the mobility challenges in our downtown core, we are partnering with the Downtown Seattle Association, King County Metro and Sound Transit to develop a comprehensive Center City Mobility Plan, which we will issue this summer.

Last year, by launching Vision Zero, an innovative strategy driven by data and focused on eliminating traffic deaths, we reduced fatalities by 25 percent, reaching an all-time low for the city. And this year, we will continue using education, engineering and enforcement to bring this number down even further.

Like the previous year, 2016 is shaping up to be a big year for transit in Seattle.

The First Hill Streetcar opened last month.

Last week, the Center City Connector Streetcar Project was recommended for a 75 million dollar grant in President Obama's 2017 Budget.

Next month, two new Sound Transit light rail stations will open on Capitol Hill and at Husky Stadium providing an 8-minute trip between UW and Downtown.

This spring, we will see the final installment of our increased bus transit service approved by voters in 2014.

And we will continue working with the region to ensure that the Sound Transit 3 package includes light rail stations from Ballard to West Seattle – and I ask you to join me in ensuring that Sound Transit 3 passes at the ballot this November.

[Housing affordability]

I cannot think of a deeper value among Seattleites than the notion that Seattle is a place for all. We cannot allow it to become a place affordable only to the affluent and the privileged.

We have to get housing affordability right. This has been a centerpiece of my Administration.

I know it is an important issue for Council as well, including Councilmember O'Brien who has helped move this issue forward, and Councilmember Johnson, who will play an important role as the new Chair of the Council's Planning, Land Use, & Zoning Committee.

There is no single way to accomplish this, but the innovative approach we have developed together is, I believe, a model for the nation for how to grow affordability in a growing city.

Our approach means that for the first time ever, we will require all new development in our urban villages to contribute to affordability. All multifamily residential buildings and all commercial development must build or pay for new affordable housing. And in exchange, we will allow an extra floor or two of height. This is the Grand Bargain.

Our approach means that we are working with the legislature to create an incentive for landlords to preserve affordable rents in existing buildings. This will help working families stay in their homes instead of having landlords raise their rents and displace them.

Our approach means improving tenant security, which is why we are working with Councilmember Sawant to strengthen protections for renters with landlords who allow their properties to fall below acceptable standards.

Our approach means that through our Utility Discount Program, low-income families should receive a 50 percent discount on their bills. In my first months in office, I committed to doubling enrolments in this program to 28,000 by 2018.

Today I am pleased to announce that, through a first-of-its-kind partnership with the Seattle Housing Authority, we will auto-enroll over 10,000 tenants by mid-year, bringing us past our ambitious goal a full two years ahead of schedule.

Lastly, our approach means renewing and expanding the Seattle Housing Levy. This is the most important step we can take this year on housing affordability.

I am working closely with Councilmember Burgess to double the levy in order to build more affordable housing for people like Al Korpela, who has lived on Capitol Hill for decades.

Al was a caregiver, caring for those who were dying of HIV-AIDS. He never made much money, but he was committed to a career in service to others.

When Al retired, he was lucky enough to find a home in an affordable building for seniors in the neighborhood he loves. But shortly after he moved in, the building was put up for sale. He worried a new landlord would renovate the building and raise the rent, pricing him out of his new home.

He and his fellow tenants successfully urged Capitol Hill Housing to use Housing Levy funds to purchase the building. And now, these affordable apartments for seniors will be preserved for the next 50 years.

Al, thank you for sharing your story with us. Please stand and be recognized.

[Affordability and equity]

Part of our affordability agenda is ensuring all people get paid fairly. As a first step, we committed to increasing our minimum wage, which in particular will help woman and people of color who are disproportionately represented among low-wage workers.

Also, we know that having a secure schedule of hours helps workers plan their budget, plan for childcare, enroll in school or take a second job – and we know schedule predictability will most help low-wage hourly workers.

This year, we will work with labor, our community of progressive employers, and this Council, especially Councilmembers González and Herbold, to provide new guidelines for secure scheduling for larger employers.

We also need to ensure equal pay for equal work. In America, women earn 78 cents to every dollar a man earns – and these gaps are bigger for women in the Seattle region.

I am proud to say that the City is partnering with the Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and the Woman’s Funding Alliance in the “100% Talent” initiative, a regional effort to identify best employer practices to reduce gender inequity. Thanks to funding through our Office for Civil Rights, the initiative will include a special emphasis on addressing inequities faced by women of color.

And even as we partner regionally, we can look to improve our own practices as an employer, both on pay equity and on our recruitment, retention, and training practices to ensure greater success for all City employees. To that end, we are working with Council to evaluate all strategies, including extending parental leave, flexible scheduling, and family leave.

As a first step, this year I will fulfill the promise I made in my Executive Order to ensure greater transparency by publishing City pay data online.

[Equity and livability]

Affordability is not just a household issue – it is a neighborhood issue, faced by the small businesses and cultural spaces that are so important to the vibrancy and identity of our communities.

We must take steps to address the affordability challenges of both.

We will create a Commercial Affordability Advisory Committee to recommend strategies focused on the needs of Seattle’s small business owners.

This expert committee will advise the City on how to encourage the development and preservation of commercial spaces for small businesses, and keep our neighborhood commercial districts diverse and vibrant.

In 2014, we launched the Arts District program to preserve and expand existing cultural spaces in the city. There are currently two arts districts in the city, including the Historic Central Area Arts & Culture District, which is using the arts to rebuild, expand and preserve the identity of the Central District as the cultural anchor of Seattle’s African American community.

And today I'm announcing a new exciting move that can help both arts and commercial affordability in this city.

SDOT and our offices of Economic Development and Arts & Culture have worked together on a plan to make the currently-empty upper floors of King Street Station available as new public space for Seattle's arts and culture community, and affordable space for our small businesses.

Not only does this create more opportunities for our local artists, it gives thousands of commuters, neighbors and visitors access to Seattle's arts scene and local businesses in a completely new way.

The Urban Parks Activation Partnership has also been working to reactivate open space in our urban core.

Working with the Alliance for Pioneer Square and the Downtown Seattle Association, this partnership has revitalized Occidental and Westlake parks, which, after years, are once again safe and vibrant places to gather whether you work in an office or are struggling with homelessness.

I am pleased to announce that we are making investments to expand this initiative, and this May, the City will partner with more community organizations in up to ten additional urban parks.

[Sustainability]

Our work to build thriving urban villages that combine both density and livability with affordable housing and increased transportation is some of the most important work we can do to address climate change, one of the great issues of our time.

We simply cannot manage growth and expect to reduce our carbon output unless we take these important steps to build an affordable, equitable and livable Seattle.

But there are more steps we must take.

Buildings and transportation are the two biggest sources of greenhouse gas emissions in Seattle.

Earlier this year, I transmitted legislation that will improve building energy efficiency through more transparency and improved operations of our buildings.

This legislation continues Seattle's tradition of pioneering innovative strategies to increase energy conservation.

This year, I look forward to working with Councilmember O'Brien to identify steps to make transportation across the city cleaner and more efficient.

Pollution in our air is a direct result of our dependence on fossil-fuel-powered vehicles.

The time is right for us to spread the benefits of our clean, carbon neutral electricity to Seattle's transportation sector.

This year we will commit to a cleaner transportation system that protects our climate, cleans our air and strengthens our economy.

[Public safety]

Public safety is an area where we have made significant progress, yet still have significant challenges. Crime is falling, but not all crime is falling.

Under the leadership of Chief O'Toole, crime fell 7 percent city-wide in 2015, including a 30 percent drop in auto thefts and a 20 percent drop in crime in Southeast Seattle.

The department is using new and innovative strategies, including one to address chronic crime and drug dealing downtown, using a combination of focused enforcement, changes to the physical space, and services for those who struggle with chronic addiction – which has resulted in dropping crimes rates in our city's downtown core.

The police department is now developing ways to duplicate this and other strategies to address drug and criminal activity in other neighborhoods.

A large percentage of calls the police receive is to respond to people in crisis. In fact, the Seattle Police Department predicts that in 2016 it will handle 10,000 calls related to people experiencing a mental-health- or addiction-related crisis. As a result, the police department has expanded the Crisis Response Unit, pairing more

trained officers with mental health workers to de-escalate these crisis situations. And this training is working.

In fact, initial data shows that officers are using force against individuals in crisis less than two percent of the time. And, when they do use force, 80 percent of the time they use the lowest level of force – even in high-risk situations.

The Seattle Police Department has also implemented a strategy to address several disturbing acts of violence and intolerance directed at the LGBTQ community. The Department has partnered with businesses throughout Capitol Hill and the City to promote awareness of hate crimes and provide Safe Places for victims of harassment until officers arrive.

I am announcing today that we are also partnering with Seattle Public Schools to make all schools available as Safe Places as well.

Our recently-convened Chinatown/International District Public Safety Task Force will help us identify new and innovative ways for us to address public safety.

In seeking to reduce crime, we face a paradox: Seattle has one of the lowest rates of violent crime in the country, yet we struggle with relatively high rates of property crime – in particular, car prowls and burglaries. I have heard from residents that they no longer report many crimes because they do not believe the police department will respond.

Even with the progress we have made in the past year, much more needs to be done to address property crime. And in response, we have formed a dedicated team focused on bringing down property crime rates.

We inherited a 911 response system that is in need of updating to respond to our growing community. I have directed the police department to overhaul our customer responsiveness and bring our 911 system into the 21st Century. I look forward to working with Councilmember González on this.

Although the Seattle Police Department is larger than it has ever been in its history, our police force is still strained. When I came to this office, I committed to hiring 100 more officers over attrition during my first term.

We are on track to meet this goal, and with a significant increase in diversity among recruits. Last year, 30 percent of the department's hires were people of color.

But I recognize that we need more officers for better visibility throughout our city. Today, I am announcing that we will add 100 additional officers to my original goal, for an overall goal of 200 net new officers.

This increase will not be free, and I will soon be sending Council a proposal to pay for it.

While we increase the number of officers by 200, we will be smart about it, ramping up gradually between now and 2019 to ensure that our officers have the necessary guidance, support and training they need to succeed.

The Seattle Police Department has launched a new online dashboard where Seattleites can find unprecedented levels of access to crime information for every neighborhood in the city.

Safe communities are not provided by government alone. They are achieved through a collective sense of trust – and we all have a role to play.

[Consent decree]

This collective sense of trust has been weakened in many communities of color all across the nation, *who should never have to insist that black lives matter.*

Let me be clear: the very need to recognize Black Lives Matter is the result of systemic, institutional failures to address racism in our society.

Even in progressive Seattle, we inherited a police force under a federal consent decree because of patterns of constitutional violations in use of force and serious concerns about racially biased policing.

When I arrived in office, we immediately entered into a collaborative approach with the Federal Monitor and the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice to develop best practices to meet and exceed compliance with the consent decree.

Compliance with the 2012 Consent Decree is imperative, and we have reached initial compliance in eight of the nine formal assessments by the Federal Monitor.

In assessing public trust, the Federal Monitor Merrick Bobb wrote that the Seattle Police Department “has not only fully embraced a community-oriented policing approach, but has demonstrated . . . a willingness to engage and join with the community in an effort that is impressive in focus and shows early signs of success.”

And later today, the Monitor’s assessment of our crisis intervention efforts will find the City in initial compliance, with the Monitor concluding “there has been a real, tangible and objective change in the way Seattle police are interacting, compassionately and with an eye toward treatment, with those in crisis.”

Attorney General Loretta Lynch and President Barack Obama have praised Seattle for being at the forefront of police reform and for becoming a model for law enforcement agencies around the country.

We are pleased with this recognition, but there are still challenges ahead.

We must – and we will – ensure that all our patrol officers are equipped with body cameras. I would like to thank Council President Harrell for his pioneering leadership on this issue.

We must – and we will – continue to improve the way the police department analyzes and uses data on a daily basis.

We must – and we will – continue to work to build trust between the police department and all of Seattle’s diverse communities.

[Youth opportunity and violence prevention]

But fair, compassionate, constitutional policing alone will not protect our young fathers, sons and brothers of color.

Like safe communities, success in the lives of our young people is not a provision of the government alone, but is achieved with our community partners, like the United Way of King County and their ‘Reconnecting Youth’ effort, and the Seattle Foundation’s ‘Communities of Opportunity’, as well as national initiatives such as

My Brother's Keeper, the National Forum on Youth Violence Prevention, and Cities United.

For the City's part, we are taking a new approach.

Last year, I announced that Seattle was one of 14 cities selected to participate in Bloomberg Philanthropies' Innovation Teams program, which aims to enhance the capacity of City Halls to solve intractable urban problems and improve the lives of residents.

My first charge to the team was to focus on assessing and addressing the disparities faced by African American and East African males ages 14 to 24.

The team began not by developing policies or designing programs, but by going out into the community and talking with those who live with these issues every day.

The innovation team asked: What is important for you to hear from City government?

A simple question. But what we heard from young black men was profound:

- That we are not the other.
- That we are not a problem to be fixed.
- That we are fathers and brothers and sons.
- That you see us, and value us, and need us.

Through these conversations, the innovation team struck upon a powerful truth: the health of black men is essential to the health of society.

In fact, I believe that when young black men are at their best, Seattle is at its best.

My vision is that in 10 years, *all* of Seattle's young people will have the opportunity to enjoy the benefits that come with a growing city and a growing economy.

But this vision can only become a reality *if our young people themselves have a vision of a future Seattle that includes them*, if their expectations include graduating from high school, and working at Amazon or at the Port or creating their own start-ups.

From the innovation team's work, we are taking five important steps today to help us realize this vision.

First, I am challenging Seattle's employers to help us build a national model for youth employment and empowerment.

Last year, we connected 2,000 young people (ages 14 to 24) with paid internships and jobs during the summer, a doubling of the previous year.

Our goal is to double again the number of opportunities to 4,000, and expand the program beyond just the summer, and into the school year:

- 4,000 young Seattleites to develop a strong foundation upon which to build their careers,
- 4,000 young people to better position themselves to thrive in an economy that is experiencing increased income inequality and racial inequity,
- 4,000 lives to be enriched by learning essential skills, having the chance to contribute, and experience the kindness of mentors and coworkers.

To the business leaders in this city, there is no shortage of opportunities you can provide. Not only will you be helping young people, but you will be supporting the future of your company by training tomorrow's workers.

Second, we will work with Council to direct an additional 200,000 dollars to Career Bridge – a proven, community-driven program that will put more young black men, ages 18 to 24, on a path to success, through job readiness training, education, social services and community support.

Career Bridge began as a partnership between the City and community organizations like the Urban League, and has brought new hope to the lives of many, including Cary Carver.

Cary struggled to find direction and break from gang affiliations in the Central Area. But this 24-year-old father wanted a better life for his son.

In 2014, Career Bridge provided the training, the inspiration and hope he needed to apply for an apprenticeship with Ironworkers Local 86. And when Cary could not afford new work boots, Career Bridge helped him get what he needed for his first day on the job.

Cary now is earning a living wage and working hard to build a better life. Cary, would you please stand and be recognized?

Third, we will work with Seattle Colleges to improve college attainment and skills for our young people by creating a “College for Working Adults,” which will offer low- and moderate-income adults the opportunity to increase their earnings, embark on a new in-demand career, and improve their skills so that they can succeed in Seattle’s economy.

Fourth, I am directing our Office of Economic Development to coordinate our City’s efforts with the White House’s TechHire initiative to connect women and communities of color with accelerated training and local tech employers.

Lastly, we will use a data-driven approach to improve the City’s youth violence prevention services, and to better coordinate them with community needs.

Crime data tell us the majority of youth violent crime involves young adult males 18- 24 years old, but these individuals are not currently being served by our existing youth violence prevention services.

Which is why we will partner with the Center for Children & Youth Justice in South King County to implement a DOJ, evidence-based model of intervention that will train street outreach workers to engage these young men and offer them a positive choice by linking them to school, or to a job or to training or to other services they need to succeed.

And because we found that 40 percent of youth-violence cases actually involve violence against a family member, we will create a first-of-its-kind culturally-responsive program providing trained workers who can work with the youth – and with their family – to address these violence issues at home; often without ever having to go to court or spend a day in youth detention.

[Education Summit]

Perhaps the greatest challenge we face in addressing the opportunity gap is the persistent disparities in our public schools.

If we began our process to increase the minimum wage in my first year, and began addressing our housing affordability crisis in my second year, let us make this year's great equity challenge finding new ways to close the opportunity gap in our education system.

We have already taken positive steps.

We have created the cabinet-level Department of Education & Early Learning, and we are pleased to have a true change-agent as its first permanent director. Dwane Chappelle was responsible for driving incredible outcomes as the principal at Rainer Beach High School, and is already invigorating our new department.

We have launched the Seattle Preschool Program, a program we know will drive better equity outcomes in k-12.

And today we are joined by teachers and administrators of the first 15 classrooms of this effort. Please stand and be recognized.

As I have stated before, the opportunity gap our young people face in our public schools is not just the responsibility of the Seattle school district.

These children are all of our children. The responsibility is the responsibility of all of us, and we must not fail them.

I am excited about the level of partnership we have built with Seattle Public Schools in recent years, and I want to thank Superintendent Larry Nyland and School Board President Betty Patu.

And we have more work to do.

It is time for a citywide conversation about education, and the school district has agreed to join us. This year, I will convene the first citywide Education Summit since the Rice Administration more than 25 years ago, which resulted in the Families & Education Levy.

We will bring together teachers, administrators, parents, students, community partners and businesses to build and unite around a common vision for what urban public education can be, with the goal of building both equity and excellence.

Let us ensure that all students enter kindergarten prepared for success, achieve academically throughout their k-12 experience, and graduate prepared for college or their careers.

I believe Seattle is ready to make this happen.

[Homelessness]

In recent months, this city has been engaged in a conversation about the growing challenge of homelessness.

It has been a major conversation, and – because of the incredibly complex nature of the issue – a difficult one.

But we have not let the difficulty of this challenge prevent us from taking dramatic action.

We have declared a state of emergency with King County.

We have joined with West Coast mayors to place this issue on the national agenda.

We have made major reforms and committed significant new funding for services and shelters.

I have said many times before that we cannot solve this challenge alone, but I do believe the steps we are taking can still change lives for the better.

I want to thank this Council for its quick actions, and in particular I want to recognize the leadership of Councilmember Bagshaw.

Yet we limit our effectiveness to help those struggling on our streets when we are divided.

Our citywide discussion has taken on a divisiveness that I believe adds to the already overwhelming challenge.

As President Obama said last month in his State of the Union address, “democracy does require basic bonds of trust between its citizens. It doesn’t work if we think the people who disagree with us are motivated by malice. Democracy grinds to a halt without a willingness to compromise or when the basic facts are contested, or when we listen only to those who agree with us. Our public life withers when only the most extreme voices get all the attention.”

I have presented what I believe is a middle way forward to addressing homelessness, but I readily admit that I do not have all the answers.

I ask that this city heed the President’s call not to question each other’s motivations, but to listen to each other even when we disagree, to step back from extremes and be willing to compromise.

I remain hopeful that by working together, we can make progress on this crisis.

[Race]

In closing, twenty years ago I took the oath of office for the first time as a member of the Washington State Legislature.

It was for me, the people I represented, and many across the state a moment of great sadness since the reason for my swearing in was the tragic death our state’s first out elected official; Cal Anderson from AIDS.

Over these last twenty years we have shared moments of great defeat and even greater victory.

What was impossible became possible. Possible in face of unrelenting opposition.

But the greatest challenge before us today as a City and as a nation is racism. Particularly the painful racism experienced every day by the African American community.

While the ways that institutional racism manifests itself are perhaps less visible than they were 50 years ago – they are no less destructive or divisive.

On the night that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, Senator Robert Kennedy gave a speech on the streets of an African American neighborhood in Indianapolis that in many ways speaks to our challenges today.

He said:

“Martin Luther King dedicated his life to love and to justice between fellow human beings. He died in the cause of that effort. In this difficult day, in this difficult time for the United States, it’s perhaps well to ask what kind of a nation we are and what direction we want to move in.

“We can move in that direction as a country, in greater polarization -- black people amongst blacks, and white amongst whites, filled with hatred toward one another.

“Or we can make an effort, as Martin Luther King did, to understand, and to comprehend, and replace that violence, that stain of bloodshed that has spread across our land, with an effort to understand, compassion, and love.”

Everything we have done as a City, from pre-k to transit funding, from police reform to equity in the environment, and the new proposals I announced today are tools to reduce the barriers of institutional racism.

The challenge of racism is so great we know that more is required of us. The conversations we must have, the change we must be part of will continue to be difficult and painful.

The question today is the same as a half a century ago: Will we move towards greater polarization or will we attempt as Dr. King urged us to understand, comprehend, to approach this great divide with compassion and love.

I believe as a City if we choose the latter we can contribute to this nation’s long journey out of its racist past.

Robert Kennedy who, gave that speech just a few weeks before he was assassinated, ended it by reminding us the goal of that journey is to “make gentle the life of this world.”

Two years ago I said “Let us begin” the next stage of that journey.

In the next two years, let us continue.