

# Making a difference in people's lives



Greg  
Nickels  
became

Seattle's 51<sup>st</sup> mayor in 2002, pledging to make a difference in people's lives— getting Seattle moving, keeping neighborhoods safe, creating jobs and opportunity for all, and building healthy families and strong communities.



Nickels took office during a national recession in the aftermath of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. After making the difficult decisions needed to get the city's finances under control, Nickels guided Seattle through good economic times, building a \$30 million rainy day fund that prepared the city for the next economic downturn. With strong financial discipline, the city has maintained the highest credit ratings on limited-tax general obligation bonds and seen its utility bond ratings rise. In today's difficult economy, Seattle has preserved its core services for public safety and direct human services, distinguishing itself from other cities and government agencies across the country.



During the Nickels administration, Seattle has earned a reputation as an international leader in climate protection. Nickels led the effort to build light rail in Seattle and worked with regional leaders to tackle longstanding problems such as replacing the dangerous Alaskan Way viaduct. Nickels made a strong commitment to public safety, hiring a record number of police officers and upgrading fire stations across the city. As mayor, he promoted investment and revitalized neighborhoods across the city, supporting businesses to create good jobs. And Nickels put a priority on human services, protecting those less fortunate and funding thousands of units of low and moderate-income housing.

## **Transportation: Get Seattle Moving**

*In 2002, Seattle had a serious backlog in its road and bridge maintenance, and the Nisqually earthquake had damaged the Alaskan Way viaduct. Today, Seattle residents have seen the busiest road paving seasons in decades with dramatic increases in pedestrian and bicycle improvements. The city, state and county have agreed on a solution to tear down the viaduct and this summer, the region opened its first light rail line from Tukwila to downtown Seattle.*

**Light rail—a new way to get around.** In July 2009, light rail cars began taking people from Tukwila, through the Rainier Valley, to downtown Seattle. Nickels worked since 1988 to bring light rail to the region and as Sound Transit board chairman, was a key leader in delivering a regional mass transit system. That system is now being expanded to the airport, Capitol Hill, the University District and Northgate. In 2008, the Mayor led the effort to gain voter approval to expand further north and south and across Lake Washington to Bellevue and Redmond.



**Repairing our streets and bridges.** Seattle had fallen significantly behind in its maintenance of roads and bridges, due to declining revenue. In 2006, Nickels took the case to voters who approved “Bridging the Gap,” a nine-year program to catch up on the maintenance backlog and to make important seismic upgrades to vulnerable bridges. In the first three years, Seattle residents have noticed a visible increase in the amount of road construction with crews

paving 74 lane-miles of road. The city also replaced more than 3,000 street signs and for the first time in 21 years, traffic signals at 258 downtown intersections were synchronized and retimed to speed the flow of vehicles.

**A better place to walk and bike.** In May 2009, Mayor Nickels released the city’s draft Pedestrian Master Plan, the first citywide action plan to make walking safer and easier in Seattle. The city also continued implementing its Bicycle Master Plan and is on its way to meeting the goal of tripling bike usage in Seattle over 10 years. Three new bike trail segments were finished in 2008, including the final piece of the Duwamish Trail. In 2008, Seattle officially opened the first phase of a planned six-mile loop around Lake Union for bike riders and walkers, known as the Cheshiahud Lake Union Loop Trail. In his 2009-2010 budget, Nickels funded building the last remaining segment of the Burke-Gilman Trail. “Bridging the Gap” also funded major improvements, including creating 73 miles of bike lanes and sharrows, remarking 2,400 crosswalks and improving school zone signage. Prior to 2002, the city was building an average of nine blocks of sidewalks a year. Under Mayor Nickels, the city built more than 300 blocks of sidewalk, created safe routes to schools and installed dozens of pedestrian countdown signals at key intersections.



**Reclaiming our waterfront; replacing the dangerous Viaduct.** Mayor Nickels, King County Executive Ron Sims and Washington Governor Christine Gregoire solved one of the region’s most pressing transportation problems, signing an agreement to replace the aging and damaged Alaskan Way Viaduct. A bored tunnel



under First Avenue will reconnect Seattle with the waters of Elliott Bay, creating a new public waterfront that will serve as a front porch to the city. The solution includes building a new surface street along the waterfront, replacing the deteriorating seawall, handling future growth through increased transit and improving east-west corridors to give communities good access to the tunnel.

**Fixing problems that have frustrated drivers for years.** Construction has begun on the Spokane Street viaduct, a crucial corridor for freight and West Seattle residents. Crews are doing utility work, building a new Fourth Avenue ramp, and will soon begin widening the street to I-5. After years of debate, the city of Seattle is also moving ahead to fix the “Mercer Mess” and transform Mercer Street into a two-way boulevard. For more than 40 years, drivers have had to navigate the “Mercer Weave” to Fairview and then Valley for traffic exiting I-5. Phase I of the Mercer Corridor Project will extend from Fairview to Dexter Avenue. In 2008, the City Council, by a vote of 8-1, approved initial funding for a new Mercer Street: \$140 million is in place and the city just applied for a federal stimulus grant for the last \$50 million. Phase II will extend from Dexter Avenue to Elliott Way West. Seattle is poised to make a long-awaited, critical connection across town.

**Building a streetcar network.** Mayor Nickels proposed the city's first modern streetcar line -- a 2.6 round-trip route connecting thousands of new housing units and major employers in South Lake Union with downtown Seattle. Approved by the Council in 2005, the streetcar project began construction in 2006 and took just 18 months to complete. In the first year, ridership was 30 percent over projections with more than a half-million riders riding the streetcar by its first anniversary. Funding is in place for the next streetcar line to serve Capitol Hill, First Hill and the International District.



**Call the Pothole Rangers!** When Mayor Nickels took office, he encouraged drivers to report potholes to 684-ROAD and he set a goal of repairing reported potholes within 48 hours. Since then, the Pothole Rangers have filled more than 446,000 potholes.



## **Keep our Neighborhoods Safe**

*Coming into office after the World Trade Organization riots had shaken confidence in public safety, Nickels recognized that keeping our neighborhoods safe was the paramount duty of city government. The city increased its force to a record number of patrol officers and experienced some of the lowest crime rates in 40 years. After visiting Kobe, Japan and learning about the fires that started after that city's earthquake, Nickels returned to make the case to voters that Seattle's fire stations were not prepared to withstand an earthquake and would not be in a position to respond to fires that would break out afterward. Today, Seattle is rebuilding and upgrading fire stations across the city, and has a new state-of-the-art Emergency Operations Center.*

**More police officers—where they're needed, when they're needed.** In 2007, Mayor Nickels unveiled a Neighborhood Policing Initiative, with a goal of adding 105 new officers by 2012. Since Nickels started adding officers in 2005, by 2012,



there will be 154 new officers on the streets—a dramatic 25 percent increase in the patrol force. Today, there are more patrol officers on the police force than at any other time in the history of the Seattle Police Department. To provide a faster and stronger approach to protecting neighborhoods, shifts will be changed in spring 2010 to deploy officers where they're needed most and during the busiest times, namely late morning and on Friday and Saturday nights. The city has put cameras in patrol cars, expanded police advisory councils and implemented improvements to a three-pronged police oversight system suggested by an independent panel appointed by the mayor in 2007.

***Making downtown parks safer.*** In 2008 Park Rangers began patrolling Center City parks. The rangers have been trained in customer service, laws and regulations relating to the use of parks and public space, crime prevention, community relations, personal safety, basic First Aid and CPR, human services, public health resources and providing information about parks.



***State-of-the-art facilities for our firefighters.*** Concerned that many of the city's fire stations would not withstand an earthquake, Mayor Nickels led the effort in 2003 to pass the \$167 million Fire Facilities and Emergency Response Levy, which is upgrading, renovating or replacing fire stations in neighborhoods across Seattle. The city now has new fireboats, neighborhood emergency supply caches, a new training facility for firefighters and a new emergency operations center and fire alarm center. Six more fire stations are currently under construction and nine more stations are in design or out to bid.

***Common sense gun rules; protecting our children.*** Nickels has been a strong advocate for common-sense gun laws such as keeping firearms away from mentally ill individuals and closing the gun show loophole that allows criminals to buy weapons without background checks. After a shooting at the Folklife Festival, Nickels pushed policies to require organizations that lease city facilities for public events to prohibit firearms. He also proposed prohibiting firearms at public locations where children gather such as playgrounds, community centers and swimming pools.

## **Creating Jobs and Opportunities for all**

*After coming into office during a recession with only \$2.5 million in a rainy day fund, Mayor Nickels ensured that the city built a \$30 million rainy-day fund during good economic times and made strategic investments to create jobs. Policy changes to grow the life sciences sector, encourage green jobs and investments in neighborhoods like Northgate and South Lake Union helped reduce the impact of the 2008 downturn. Now, the city is poised to take advantage of an economic recovery and has new opportunities to build thriving transit-oriented communities with the arrival of light rail.*

***Bringing communities together in South Park and Southeast Seattle.*** Nickels led efforts in these communities to create action agendas that guided investments and initiatives. In South Park, the city came together in an intensive process with community leaders, businesses, youth, non-profit organizations and others to build trust and partnerships. Together, the community worked hard on improving public safety, the environment and youth programs. Today, South Park also enjoys a new library and park, as well as new pavement and sidewalks along 14th Avenue South. In addition, new stormwater drainage improvements will be completed in 2010. In Southeast Seattle, the arrival of light rail has brought new opportunities for a transit-oriented community. The city assisted businesses during the construction of light rail, promoting investment in housing, parks, trails and community facilities, and supporting livable wage union apprenticeships and other construction jobs.



***Transforming neighborhoods, creating jobs.*** The rebirth of Northgate as one of Seattle's vibrant urban centers was made possible in 2003 after Nickels sought to break a long-standing political logjam. In an effort to transform Northgate from an aging mall to a vibrant urban village, the city invested \$56 million in key public improvements, including a new library, community center, sidewalks, two new parks, and the Thornton Creek Channel – a 2.7 acre natural drainage system. The city's efforts sparked private investment totaling more than \$265 million, including 700 new housing units and more than 850 permanent jobs." Meanwhile, South Lake Union has been transformed into a new biotech and life sciences hub. With major employers like amazon.com, the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, University of Washington Medicine, Seattle Biomedical Research Institute and many others, the city now expects more than 20,000 jobs will be created by 2012. With open space and new housing for people of all incomes, thousands of people from across the region have been attracted to South Lake Union as a place to work, live and recreate.

**Putting new life into our communities.** The University of Washington is Seattle’s largest employer and for years its growth was restricted by laws limiting the amount of space it could lease in the community. To increase job opportunities and revitalize University Avenue, Nickels succeeded in removing the “lease lid” in 2004. Nickels also led the city investment effort on Capitol Hill, improving Broadway’s appearance to encourage economic development, and creating the Capitol Hill Chamber to keep the momentum moving forward.



**Creating more jobs, more quickly.** With a national recession beginning in 2008, Nickels announced “Seattle Jobs Forward,” an initiative to accelerate projects and put people to work quickly. He implemented a coordinated strategy by the city of Seattle to secure federal stimulus funding, with the city receiving more than \$50 million as of September 2009. As president of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, Nickels urged direct investment in cities by the federal government to create jobs and stimulate the economy. In his leadership role with the Conference, Nickels was instrumental in conceiving the original idea of a federal plan for a local energy-efficiency program to create clean energy jobs. Seattle will receive \$6 million from

the U.S. Department of Energy through the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) for energy-saving programs in homes, businesses and transportation.

**Supporting maritime and manufacturing workers.** To keep important family-wage jobs in the city, Nickels launched his Action Agenda in 2004 to grow manufacturing and maritime jobs, which contribute an estimated \$18.5 billion in revenues to the local economy and more than \$100 million in tax revenues to the city. As part of this effort, the city hired an industrial permit liaison to work directly with the industries and created the Seattle First program in partnership with the Manufacturing Industrial Council to help retain and grow these businesses. In August 2007, Nickels launched an Industrial Jobs Initiative, which focused on new land-use recommendations that maintain existing businesses and jobs while encouraging new industries.

**An affordable place to call home.** In April 2009, Mayor Nickels released his proposal to renew for another seven years, the Seattle Housing Levy, which expires at the end of 2009. . He proposes using the \$145 million levy to help Seattle’s most vulnerable populations, such as people coming out of homelessness, seniors and people who are disabled, and people who need emergency rental assistance. He also wants to take advantage of real estate market conditions to make strategic purchases of land and buildings to preserve or convert to affordable housing, and provide loans to first-time homebuyers. The 2002 levy provided affordable housing for more than 2,000 households creating and preserving more than 1,800 affordable rental units, helping more than 211 first-time home buyers and providing emergency rental assistance to

more than 500 households. In 2008, Nickels proposed expanding the “Homes Within Reach” tax incentive from 17 to 39 neighborhoods to encourage builders to create more than 1,500 affordable units for workers earning less than Seattle’s median income. He also expanded the “Workforce Housing Incentive Program,” which requires developers receiving height and density increases to set aside between 15 and 17.5 percent of the additional square footage for housing affordable to low- to moderate-wage workers.

**Meaningful change in race and social justice.** Shortly after taking office, Nickels led the creation of the Race and Social Justice Initiative, with a long-term goal of eliminating race-based disparities in the city and community. Throughout city government, the initiative resulted in significant changes to every day operations from budget analysis to public engagement policy. In 2002, Mayor Nickels created the Contracting Development and Competitiveness Center to provide training for, and increase, the competitiveness of women and minority contractors. In 2008, contracts worth \$24.8 million (\$22 million of which were non-City contracts) were awarded, compared to \$10 million in 2007, \$11.8 million in 2006, \$10.1 million in 2005, and \$9.7 million in 2004.





**Helping neighborhood businesses.** More than 1,100 businesses have received assistance from Seattle's business ombudsman, created to help small and mid-sized businesses with city permitting and regulatory processes. Since 2003, more than \$1 million in Neighborhood Business District Funding Awards have been granted to 108 business organizations for a variety of projects, including business district promotion, and physical improvement and enhancement projects, such as sidewalk cleaning, tree pit improvements, winter decorations and banners.

**Nurturing Seattle's soul and spirit.** Seattle's vibrant arts and culture scene contributes much to our quality of life. In 2008, by investing in 264 artists and arts and cultural organizations, Seattle supported nearly 5,000 events, classes and community festivals which featured 13,961 artists and served an audience of more than 900,000. Mayor Nickels launched the "City of Music" to support live music, the music business and musicians as well as increase music education for children. As part of this effort, Nickels implemented an admissions tax exemption for live music venues and created a Seattle Music Commission to develop a 12-year strategy to ensure Seattle remains a city of musicians, live music and music businesses.

## **Build Strong Families and Healthy Communities**

*When campaigning for mayor in 2001, Nickels noticed significant racial disparities in how Seattle residents felt about city government serving their interests. With his Race and Social Justice initiative and his immigrant and refugee initiative, Nickels pushed the city to reach out and engage all communities. During difficult economic times, Nickels preserved funding for direct human services to residents most in need. And he tackled the most challenging issue of homelessness, by backing "Housing First," one of the nation's most innovative programs to help get chronically homeless individuals off the streets and into permanent housing.*

**Saving our young people.** Deeply concerned about incidents of youth violence, the mayor started the Seattle Youth Violence Prevention Initiative, a fundamental change in the way the community deals with youth violence. The initiative set up three neighborhood networks and Nickels called on parents, community leaders, principals, members of the faith community and others to shape and participate in the effort. With \$8 million appropriated by the City Council, the initiative is using new techniques and outreach to stop the violence before it escalates, seeking out young people most at risk of perpetuating violence or becoming victims: repeat offenders, those who have been arrested and released, truants, students suspended for violent acts, and victims of violence who may think about retaliating.

**Recognizing Middle School Scholars.** Now in its 10th year, the Mayor's Scholars Awards has honored more than 200 outstanding Seattle middle school students for service to their schools and their communities.

**A new strategy to break the cycle of homelessness.** Determined to take a new approach to ending homelessness, Nickels has been a strong advocate for "Housing First," an innovative approach to take chronically homeless individuals off the streets and give them a permanent place to stay without preconditions. Under Nickels' leadership, 450 Housing First units have been built, providing individuals with safe, decent housing where they can benefit from in-house medical and mental health services. In 2009, the city organized hundreds of volunteers for a one-night assessment of the needs of unsheltered homeless people to give them a voice and to better understand the challenges they face and the services they need.



***The Seattle Promise: From early learning to high school and beyond.*** With too many students in Seattle Public Schools failing to graduate, Nickels changed the focus of the city’s Families and Education Levy to close the achievement gap, supporting students who were not performing at grade level or who were at risk of not graduating. He expanded the levy to make sure low-income children had opportunities to attend pre-school and enter kindergarten ready to learn. The levy, renewed by voters in 2004, also funded health clinics in schools, family support and out-of-school activities to keep children focused on learning. The Seattle Promise continues through middle- and high-school to keep teens engaged and prepare them for post-secondary education.

***Supporting immigrants & refugees.*** By 2010, it is expected that almost 20 percent of Seattle residents – roughly 120,000 people – will be foreign-born. To strengthen how city government serves this growing community, Mayor Nickels released his Immigrant and Refugee Action Plan in 2007. Examples of actions the city has taken includes providing interpreters for residents with limited English proficiency who call the city’s customer service line seeking information or services, and translating emergency preparedness information and vital documents. The city has also created citizenship tools, translating them into the seven primary non-English languages spoken in our community, and established a 15-member Immigrant and Refugee Advisory Board to advise the mayor and City Council about issues of concern to immigrant and refugee communities.

***Protecting our water, creating new open space.*** After September 11, Mayor Nickels proposed replacing Seattle’s uncovered reservoirs with underground concrete structures to improve security and the quality of the city’s water supply. The covered reservoirs will also create the opportunity to create more than 70 acres of prime neighborhood parkland on top. Parks on top of the new Myrtle and Beacon reservoirs will open in 2010; construction is currently under way for West Seattle and Maple Leaf.

***Celebrating Seattle’s history & heritage.*** In February 2008, the city of Seattle purchased the historic King Street Station from Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway and is restoring its historic character and transforming it into a modern transportation hub that will serve Seattle for the next hundred years. In 2007, Centennials were celebrated in Southeast Seattle, Ravenna, Columbia City, South Park, Ballard, and West Seattle. In 2006, the City invested \$3 million in our local museums, supporting expansions of the Nordic Heritage Museum and the Wing Luke Asian Museum, and construction of the Northwest African American Museum. And the city partnered to present the centennial celebration of the Alaska-Yukon Pacific Exposition that put Seattle on the map in 1909.



***Building community spirit.*** Thousands of residents have participated in weekend “Clean and Green Seattle” events, which the mayor launched in 2002. City workers and more than 14,000 volunteers have joined forces to clean up parks and streets at more than 100 events. They collected more than a half million pounds of litter and debris, planted more than 12,500 plants and flowers and made Seattle a brighter, cleaner place—one neighborhood at a time. Since 2002, the city has awarded about \$18 million for more than a thousand neighborhood projects aimed at building better communities. And to further build that spirit, Nickels partnered with United Way of King County in 2009 to enlist 10,000 new volunteers in the community.



## **Protecting our environment**

*In recent years, the city of Seattle has gained national recognition for its foresight in addressing global warming. As a leader in the U.S. Conference of Mayors, Nickels began an effort to enlist mayors across the country to pledge to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, meeting the standard of the Kyoto Protocol. The U.S. Mayors Climate Protection Agreement now boasts more than 970 cities, representing more than 84 million Americans. Seattle has made tremendous progress in protecting the climate, from engaging residents and businesses in grassroots climate action, to extensive efforts to electrify transportation and encourage conservation.*

**Climate Action Now.** Nickels launched "Seattle Climate Action Now," a grassroots effort to give everyone the tools to protect the climate by taking action at home, at work and on the road. Seattle Climate Action Now is a city-led effort, but is grounded in partnerships with businesses, organizations and individuals across the city committed to protecting the climate—whether it's adding insulation at home or planting trees in the neighborhood.

**Changing small habits, saving the planet.** In 2009, Nickels announced that Seattle set a new city record for recycling in 2008, with 50 percent of the city's residential, commercial and self-haul waste being recycled



instead of going to the landfill. The city of Seattle's diversion rate dipped to 38.2 percent in 2003, prompting Nickels to push the city's goal to divert 60 percent of its waste through recycling and composting by 2012. The recycling rate has climbed steadily each year as the city greatly expanded its solid waste programs. In 2009, residents put compostable food scraps into yard waste containers instead of garbage cans, and were no longer required to sort recyclables. Today, all paper, glass and plastic recyclables go into a single bin. Nickels also moved to ban Styrofoam cups and containers in food service businesses and raised awareness about reusable bags, noting that Seattle residents throw out 360 million plastic and paper bags every year.

Grocery and retail stores participated in the new program with Seattle Public Utilities, donating more than 50,000 reusable shopping bags to low-income families through local food banks.

**Making our buildings green.** Nickels challenged Seattle to become America's Green Building Capital, increasing energy efficiency in buildings and developing healthy communities that promote walking, cycling and transit use. Nickels convened the Green Building Task Force to provide guidance on new policy proposals, including meeting a target of 20 percent increased energy efficiency in Seattle's new and existing building stock. The city also launched the Seattle Climate Partnership, a voluntary program for businesses and institutions that want to take a serious look at their carbon footprint and reduce it over time. To date, more than 145 organizations have joined the partnership.

**City Light: From financial crisis to stability to a leader in conservation.** Following the 2001 California energy crisis, Nickels put Seattle City Light on a path to financial recovery and cut its debt to capital ratio from 85 percent in 2003 to 63 percent today. After the largest rate reduction in 35 years, the utility boasts some of the lowest electric rates in the nation. Meanwhile, City Light has fully offset all its greenhouse gas emissions and is the only electric utility in the nation to achieve carbon neutral operations. In 2008, the mayor launched a five-year energy conservation program that will save money for customers and create more than a thousand clean energy jobs.

**Keeping the Emerald City green.** The city now has an Urban Forest Management Plan, which establishes a goal of 30 percent tree canopy cover, and includes a broad range of actions from more tree planting to improved maintenance of city-managed trees and community engagement. Many other programs have engaged thousands of residents in improving the city's environment. "Seattle reLeaf" brings neighbors together to grow the city's tree canopy. The city, the Cascade Land Conservancy, and Seattle's residents have joined together to form the Green Seattle Partnership, working to restore 2,500 acres of forested parkland by 2025. Nickels also launched the "Restore our Waters" strategy to protect and enhance our creeks, lakes, the Duwamish River and Puget Sound.



**Getting around town—on clean electricity.** Nickels recognized that a big part of reducing our carbon footprint lies in reducing car trips and converting our transportation system from oil to clean electricity. His vision includes the construction of light rail and a street car network. Nickels pushed a green fleet for the city, including hybrid and plug-in hybrid electric vehicles, and led efforts to make Seattle a launch city for electric vehicles. This year, the federal government issued a grant to the Electric Transportation Engineering Corporation to establish up to 2,550 charging systems for electric vehicles in the Seattle area.