

Reader's Guide

This reader's guide describes the structure of the budget book and outlines its content. The budget book is designed to present budget information in an accessible and transparent manner – the way decision-makers consider the various proposals. It is designed to help residents, media, and City officials more easily understand and participate in the budget deliberations.

A companion document, the 2026-2031 Capital Improvement Program (CIP), identifies expenditures and fund sources associated with the development and rehabilitation of major City facilities/infrastructure, such as streets, parks, utilities, and buildings over the next six years. The CIP also shows the City's financial contribution to projects owned and operated by other jurisdictions or institutions. The CIP fulfills the budgeting and financial requirements of the Capital Facilities Element of Seattle's Comprehensive Plan by providing detailed information on the capacity impact of new and improved capital facilities.

The 2026 Proposed Budget and 2026-2031 CIP can also be found online at the [City Budget Office's webpage](#). In addition to PDF files containing the Proposed Budget and Proposed CIP, the site contains department-specific expenditures and revenues.

The 2026 Proposed Budget

This document is a description of the proposed spending plan for 2026. It contains the following elements:

- **Proposed Budget Executive Summary** – A narrative describing the current economy, highlighting key factors relevant in developing the budget document, and how the document addresses the Mayor's priorities;
- **Summary Tables** – a set of tables that inventory and summarize expected revenues and spending for 2026;
- **General Fund Revenue Overview** – a narrative describing the City's General Fund revenues, or those revenues available to support general government purposes, and the factors affecting the level of resources available to support City spending;
- **Selected Financial Policies** – a description of the policies that govern the City's approach to revenue estimation, debt management, expenditure projections, maintenance of fund balances, and other financial responsibilities;
- **Departmental Budgets** – City department-level descriptions of significant policy and program as compared to the 2026 Endorsed Budget, the services provided, and the spending levels proposed to attain these results;
- **Appendix** – an array of supporting documents including long-range financial plans, summary of cost allocation factors for internal City services; a summary of position changes by department contained in the 2026 Proposed Budget; and a glossary.

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Departmental Budget Pages: A Closer Look

The budget presentations for individual City departments (including offices, boards, and commissions) constitute the heart of this document. They are organized alphabetically within seven functional clusters:

- Arts, Culture, & Recreation;
- Education & Human Services;
- Livable and Inclusive Communities;
- Public Safety;
- Utilities, Transportation & Environment; and
- Administration.

Each cluster comprises several departments sharing a related functional focus, as shown on the organizational chart following this reader's guide. Departments are composed of one or more budget control levels, which in turn may be composed of one or more programs. Budget control levels are the level at which the City Council makes appropriations.

As indicated, the proposed budget appropriations are presented in this document by department, budget summary level, and program. At the department level, the reader will also see references to the underlying fund sources (General Fund and Other) for the department's budgeted resources. The City accounts for all of its revenues and expenditures according to a system of funds. In general, funds are established to account for specific revenues and permitted expenditures associated with those revenues. For example, the City's share of motor fuel taxes must be spent on road-related transportation activities and projects, and are accounted for in a fund in the Transportation Fund. Other revenues without statutory restrictions, such as sales and property taxes (except voter-approved property taxes), are available for general purposes and are accounted for in the City's General Fund. For many departments, such as the Seattle Department of Transportation, several funds, including the General Fund, provide the resources and account for the expenditures of the department. For several other departments, the General Fund is the sole source of available resources.

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Budget Presentations

Most department-level budget presentations begin with information on how to contact the department. The department-level budget presentation then goes on to provide a general overview of the department's responsibilities and functions within City government, as well as a summary of the department's overall budget. A narrative description of the issues impacting the department's 2026 Proposed Budget then follows. The next section of the department-level budget presentation provides a numerical and descriptive summary of all of the incremental budget changes included in the 2026 Proposed Budget, along with a discussion of the anticipated operational and service-level changes that will result. The department-level budget presentation concludes with summary level tables that describe the department's overall expenditures and revenues by type as well as by budget control level and program. All department, budget control, and program level budget presentations include a table summarizing historical and adopted expenditures, as well as proposed appropriations for 2026.

A list of all position changes proposed in the budget has been compiled in the appendix. Position modifications include eliminations, additions, reclassifications, and status changes (such as a change from part-time to full-time status), as well as adjustments to departmental head counts that result from transfers of positions between departments.

For information purposes only, an estimate of the number of staff positions to be funded under the 2026 Proposed Budget appears in the departmental sections of the document at each of the three levels of detail: department, budget control, and program. These figures refer to regular, permanent staff positions (as opposed to temporary or intermittent positions) and are expressed in terms of full-time equivalent employees (FTEs). In addition to changes that occur as part of the budget document, changes may be authorized by the City Council or the Human Resources Director throughout the year, and these changes may not be reflected in the estimate of staff positions presented for 2026. These changes are summarized in the appendix.

Where relevant, departmental sections include a statement of projected revenues for the years for 2026.