

Item 6:

2026 SCA Legislative Agenda

DISCUSSION

SCA Staff Contacts

Aj Foltz, SCA Senior Policy Analyst, aj@soundcities.org (206) 849-3056

2025-2026 SCA Legislative Committee Members

Council President Vanessa Kritzer, Redmond; Mayor Dana Ralph, Kent; Mayor Troy Linnell, Algona; Mayor Mary Lou Pauly, Issaquah; Regan Bolli, City Manager for the City of Covington

Discussion

The SCA Legislative Committee met several times in September and October to develop the draft 2026 SCA Legislative Agenda and the new draft 2026 SCA County Priorities.

At the November meeting, PIC will review and discuss both documents and offer initial feedback. Amendments can be proposed during the November meeting and over email between PIC meetings for consideration and possible approval by PIC at the December meeting.

The agenda will be considered and recommended for approval at the December 10 PIC meeting. The SCA Board of Directors is expected to formally adopt the agenda at their December 17 meeting.. SCA cities are encouraged to share their respective cities' legislative agendas with SCA policy staff as they become available.

2026 State Legislative Agenda

The Legislative Committee opted to keep the 2026 State Legislative Agenda brief and pointed for the Legislature, due to state budgetary concerns and the upcoming short legislative session. The legislative agenda includes the following topic areas:

- Fund & Support Indigent Defense Services
- Expand Access for Public Safety Local Options
- Support Local Housing Priorities
- Invest in Local Climate Action
- Fund & Support Local Transportation Priorities

The document will also include the following Legislative Guiding Principles, which have not changed since last year.

SCA supports legislation that aligns with the following guiding principles:

- Advance racial equity and social justice
- Improve the social safety net
- Make no unfunded mandates to cities
- Preserve local decision-making authority

PIC members may suggest amendments or additional topic areas to include in the legislative agenda.

2026 County Priorities

The County Priorities document is a new venture for SCA and is intended to suggest ways for cities and King County to strengthen their existing partnerships. With the broad theme of improving the County's communication and collaboration with cities, each topic area focuses on city issues and provides suggestions for improvements. The other function of this document is to direct SCA staff to work on these priorities at the county level throughout the next year.

The following topics are included in the County Priorities document:

- Collaboration on Levy Development
- Siting County Facilities and Infrastructure
- Public Safety Funding
- Long-Term Solid Waste Disposal Strategy
- Utility Rates Affordability

PIC members may suggest amendments or additional topic areas to include in the County Priorities.

Timeline & Next Steps

Amendments to both documents will be accepted over email until **December 1, 2025**. SCA staff will present formatted versions of both documents for review by PIC at the December meeting.

The Sound Cities Association (SCA) urges the Washington State Legislature to adopt a balanced and equitable approach to policymaking that empowers cities to meet the varied and unique needs of communities in King County.

Fund & Support Indigent Defense Services

Cities require sustained state funding, workforce development, and guidance to meet the new indigent defense caseload standards, which are expected to significantly strain local budgets and operations. The projected cost increase for surveyed SCA cities is nearly 700% over ten years, with local funding models disproportionately impacting cities with the most indigent defense cases.

SCA supports:

- State funding for most—if not all—public defense to ensure equity and stability; and,
- Policies that strengthen the public defense workforce.

Expand Access for Public Safety Local Options

SCA cities support a range of state funding sources for public safety and the flexibility to allocate funds based on local priorities. While cities appreciate HB 2015's criminal justice sales tax, restrictive requirements limit cities' ability to access and use the funding effectively.

SCA supports:

- Easing restrictions on eligibility for the HB 2015 sales tax; and,
- Increasing support for public safety workforce and alternative crisis response programs.

Support Local Housing Priorities

Cities request adequate time to implement existing housing regulations before new policies are introduced, along with flexible funding tools to meet both state and local housing goals.

SCA supports:

- Prioritization of incentives over mandates and allow locally tailored approaches that focus on outcomes rather than prescriptive methods;
- Increasing the HB 1590 revenue allocation to cities for housing and behavioral health services from 40% to 50%; and,
- State engagement with cities throughout the legislative process and aligning regulatory efforts, including environmental regulations, with a broader strategy to expand housing supply.

Invest in Local Climate Action

SCA cities ask the state to collaborate more directly with cities to support local climate action. While cities have developed robust climate resilience plans, funding remains a major challenge.

SCA supports:

- Investment in local sustainability efforts; and,
- Providing transparent communication about Climate Commitment Act funding, including outcomes, impacts, and future resources.

Fund & Support Local Transportation Priorities

SCA cities ask the state to provide flexible options for funding local transportation. SCA cities in King County face a major transportation funding gap: the Puget Sound Regional Council's Regional Transportation Plan shows a 45% shortfall for cities compared to much lower gaps for counties and WSDOT.

SCA supports:

- Sustainable state transportation revenue that provides funding for local preservation, maintenance, operations, and safety improvements;
- Implementing a Road Usage Charge with a more balanced revenue distribution than the current gas tax; and,
- Instituting flexible funding options to address growing infrastructure demands.

For the benefit of the County, the region, and the residents of our cities, members of the Sound Cities Association (SCA) seek to strengthen King County's partnerships with local governments. By strengthening this partnership, cities and the County can build a solid foundation for consistent communication and collaborative action on countywide priorities, including those outlined below.

Collaboration on Levy Development

Ensure early and ongoing engagement with cities throughout the levy development process.

Enhanced collaboration between King County and its cities is essential to ensure the effective allocation of funding and the sustained delivery of vital programs and services for our shared residents.

SCA supports:

- Coordinating with cities on levy timing to reduce tax fatigue;
- Early transmittal that provides sufficient time for discussion and potential changes;
- Incorporating or addressing input from city staff and elected officials during development;
- Equitable distribution of levy revenues, including transparent reporting of the geographic distribution.

SCA will continue to emphasize increased communication between our member cities and SCA appointed members already engaged in levy development processes.

Siting County Facilities and Infrastructure

Communicate effectively with all cities, including small cities, on land use decisions. SCA cities face financial and logistical challenges when properties are purchased by King County within city limits without prior coordination. Strengthened coordination and transparency between King County and its cities will advance effective planning and facilitate streamlined, regionally integrated decision-making.

SCA supports:

- Early engagement with cities on siting facilities, including collaboration in identifying potential properties;
- Increased collaboration concerning land use near schools, residential areas, and on adjacent unincorporated lands;
- Discussion on the potential environmental and quality of life impacts of planned facilities; and,
- Supporting cities in communicating with their residents regarding land use decisions.

Public Safety Funding

SCA cities request greater involvement in decision-making related to public safety funding to ensure they are consistently engaged in and adequately prepared for any potential changes.

SCA supports:

- Engagement with cities during the public safety contracting process to ensure mutual communication of potential rising costs and city priorities;
- Providing advance notice of court and other fee increases to ensure cities have adequate time to adjust their budgets accordingly;
- Incorporating a phased-in approach for cities to implement rate changes; and,
- Aligning city and county public safety funding priorities and usage of HB 2015 funds.

Along with these priorities, SCA cities wish to remain actively engaged in broader public safety discussions, including the Regional Safety Task Force implementation, with increased representation and a more prominent role in shaping policy decisions.

Long-Term Solid Waste Disposal Strategy

To address the region's long-term solid waste disposal challenges, **King County should recognize the growing concerns of its cities** and work collaboratively to develop solutions that reflect shared priorities and city input. Solid waste disposal involves not only waste management but transportation concerns.

SCA supports:

- Providing a comprehensive traffic analysis on the impacts that waste export by rail would have on cities with rail lines.
- Analysis of the impacts of a potential waste-to-energy facility on communities surrounding potential sites

Utility Rates Affordability

Following the 2025 Regional Utility Rate Summit, **SCA cities remain committed to ongoing dialogue and engagement to ensure utility rates remain sustainable and equitable for residents.** Cities are particularly interested in mitigating rate increases since utility rates are tied to overall affordability in this region and are a key piece of equity and cost of living.

SCA supports:

- Assistance in communicating county rate changes to our shared populations;
- Coordinating local and county-wide rate increases, when necessary, to ensure local infrastructure and capital needs for utilities continue to be funded adequately; and,
- Engagement between cities and King County on supporting low-income residents who are impacted by rising utility rates.