**Briefing: 2021 Legislative Session Preview & Agenda Development**

**Background**

The King County Council and the King County Executive coordinate their efforts to develop a legislative agenda that reflects the County’s priority requests for action by the legislature. This agenda is traditionally adopted by unanimous vote of the Council.

**What does the 2021 Legislative session look like?**

* **The 2021 session starts January 11**, 2021 and is a 105-day session. Since it is an odd-year session, the legislature will be writing the budget for the upcoming biennium (2021-2023).
* **Democrats control both chambers** (57-42 in the House; 28-21 in the Senate); election unlikely to flip either chamber.
* **COVID changes everything.** We expect the legislature to conduct at least part of their business virtually, rather than in-person. The House has indicated it will meet virtually, while the Senate is expected to use a hybrid approach, with some in-person floor time and virtual committee meetings. We also anticipate that the legislative buildings will be accessible only to elected officials and their staff.
* The **technological logistics** of even a partly virtual legislative session will undoubtedly further **restrict the number of bills** that successfully land on the Governor’s desk. Committees in ordinary times meet concurrently, with up to 8 hearings happening at the same time (4 in the House, 4 in the Senate), depending on the time of day. With committee meetings moving to an online platform, the bandwidth capacity of the capital campus will likely restrict the number of simultaneous hearings, leaving less time to get bills through the committee process.

**What are the major issues facing the 2021 Legislative session?**

* **Budget:** The pandemic has blown a $4B hole in the state budget through 2023. That number will likely change with the next revenue forecast in November. How the legislature will address the budget deficit will depend in part on whether (or when) Congress passes another COVID response/stimulus package. Legislators have been staking out budget positions throughout the summer, with members on one end of the spectrum looking to bridge the gap with budget cuts, and the other end looking at new revenue sources. The Governor is expected to release his budget in December, which will help set the table for legislative budget discussions.
* **COVID response:** The legislature will spend considerable time on a pandemic response package, including public health, housing, behavioral health and education. The legislature will also look at economic recovery, which will likely include operating and capital budget efforts and programs focused on jobs and economic development.
* **Transportation:** The state supreme court tossed I-976 in October. However, as the litigation was proceeding through the courts, revenues generated by I-976 were collected and essentially put in escrow, and the legislature will likely revisit projects that were paused when I-976 passed. The legislature will also likely spend some time discussing a green transportation package and fish barrier passage.
* **Law enforcement reform:** We expect to see may law enforcement reform proposals in 2021. Legislators have already started to develop draft language on a number of different reforms.
* **Environment:** The legislature is likely to spend time on policies aimed at reducing climate change and mitigating the impacts of wildfires.