

Check It Out! Podcast Transcript
Episode 45
“Serving community with Nate Nehring and Sue Norman”
Sno-Isle Libraries, Oct. 25, 2019



Ken Harvey:	00:00	In this episode of Check It Out!, we spend time with former middle school teacher Nate Nehring who is now the vice-chair of Snohomish County Council.
Ken Harvey:	00:18	Welcome to season two and episode 45 of Check It Out!, the Sno-Isle Libraries podcast for lifelong learners with inquiring minds.
Speaker 2:	00:26	The views and opinions expressed on this podcast may not necessarily reflect the official position of Sno-Isle Libraries.
Ken Harvey:	00:34	We are delighted to be in the studio, our beautiful podcast studio-
Susan Hempstead:	00:40	Downtown Marysville.
Ken Harvey:	00:40	In downtown Marysville. It, I think-
Susan Hempstead:	00:42	Tulalip Tribe.
Ken Harvey:	00:42	... the dimensions of the room are maybe eight feet by 14 feet or something, so it's a cozy little room. But we are very, very pleased to have with us Snohomish County Council member Nate Nehring, who represents District 1, which includes Arlington, Darrington, Granite Falls, Marysville, Stanwood, and the tribal lands.
Susan Hempstead:	01:08	What a beautiful, beautiful area.
Nate Nehring:	01:08	It is.
Ken Harvey:	01:08	Yeah. Welcome, Nate.
Nate Nehring:	01:09	Thanks.
Ken Harvey:	01:09	Thanks for joining us.

(Continued)

Nate Nehring: 01:10 Thank you, I appreciate it and really appreciate the opportunity to be here on the show.

Ken Harvey: 01:14 Well, I actually reached out to Nate maybe a few months ago because I had heard about his being on another podcast or a radio show out of Seattle and a lot of cheerful things that were being said about how well he did with that. I actually listened to it myself and I thought, "Wow. What a well-spoken fellow from Marysville."

Nate Nehring: 01:43 Oh, that's nice of you. Thank you.

Ken Harvey: 01:44 Yeah. And he-

Susan Hempstead: 01:45 And he's just right up the road. Bring him in.

Ken Harvey: 01:47 And he's just right up the road from us, and he represents our area. I think I'd like to have him on the podcast and so for our listeners throughout the service area of Sno-Isle Libraries, Nate is serving on the Snohomish County Council and has been in local government for a few years. We're going to talk about some of that experience he has, but he also happens to be, as I understand, born and bred in beautiful Marysville.

Nate Nehring: 02:13 That's right. That's right. Born and raised in Marysville, lived there my whole life and my wife and I just recently bought a home, so we're living in Arlington now, but really enjoy this area of the community.

Ken Harvey: 02:24 Well, you have, then, been here and seen some changes happening in this area from earliest childhood up now. What are some of the things that you're seeing and experiencing?

Nate Nehring: 02:37 Yeah, absolutely. There's been a lot of changes, both in Marysville and in the greater county as a whole. I think growth is something we're seeing all over Snohomish County and over the Puget Sound region. Watching Marysville grow from kind of a small town into a vibrant community and the second-largest city in Snohomish County has been really exciting to see. I think that growth brings some challenges with it, but it also brings some great opportunities that we see with economic development, a lot of the restaurants that've come into the area, the business growth, and the local economy doing so well, and so it's exciting to see the change.

Susan Hempstead: 03:07 W-

Ken Harvey: 03:08 Well, you know, before my co-host-

Susan Hempstead: 03:10 Sorry.

Ken Harvey: 03:11 ... says anything, I just realized that I forgot to tell the audience that I am joined also with a co-host. Susan Hempstead from Sno-Isle Libraries is sitting next to me and she actually has had opportunity to work with you and knows you much better than I do. And so I thought, "Boy, this is a great opportunity for Susan to be part of this and to chime in and have this conversation with you." So Susan, please.

Susan Hempstead: 03:39 Okay. Well, no, this is a great conversation and I was reflecting when you said you and your wife just bought a house, you're raising your family, you've lived here, you've seen such change and growth, and what does it mean as a growing new family to Marysville at this time in its evolution, its transformation?

Nate Nehring: 03:57 Yeah, it's exciting. As you mentioned, my wife and I just recently bought a home and we have a got a 11-month-old daughter and we're expecting a son in March.

Susan Hempstead: 04:06 Oh, congratulations.

Nate Nehring: 04:07 Yeah, thank you, appreciate it. But it's exciting in this stage where we're starting to raise our family and seeing all the changes in the community and really just interested - I think both of us are - in making sure that we maintain the small-town feel, but also have those opportunities that are available for our family, for our kids, you know, through the schools, the library system that you guys are doing so well with, and just in general, that they're able to grow up in a community that we can all be proud of.

Ken Harvey: 04:33 Well, I'm really interested in the one of the perspectives that I think you can share with our listeners because, number one, you've just acquired a new home. Now, you've moved in?

Nate Nehring: 04:47 Yes. Yep.

Ken Harvey: 04:47 Okay, so you're officially an Arlington resident.

Nate Nehring: 04:50 Yes. A little over a year ago.

Ken Harvey: 04:52 Okay. Were you in a single-family home before?

Nate Nehring: 04:56 No. After we got married, we were living in an apartment in Stanwood and then from there moved into our single-family home which we now live in.

Ken Harvey: 05:05 So I'm fascinated by that just transition from apartment living to single-family household living. What has that been like for you, and what was it that essentially kind of triggered or motivated that move?

Nate Nehring: 05:20 Yeah, that's a good question. I think the decision to live in an apartment was kind of based on convenience. My wife was still attending college at Western and I was working in the Marysville school district. Stanwood was a great central location. We didn't have kids and so there wasn't a need for a whole lot of space and so we decided to live in an apartment and really enjoyed that. And then when we started to plan a family and when our first daughter was born and when we were expecting, we said, "We better buy a home and plan out how we'd like to raise our family there." And so that's why we ended up deciding to move into Arlington. We found a home that we both loved and just decided to go for it.

Ken Harvey: 06:00 I'm just fascinated because the decisions that we make for ourselves for either convenient, well, for various factors can be different as we start to realize that our needs have changed or are changing.

Nate Nehring: 06:20 Absolutely.

Susan Hempstead: 06:21 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ken Harvey: 06:24 What were some of the considerations that your family took or applied as you were thinking about where you might look and where you would ultimately decide to settle down?

Nate Nehring: 06:42 Yeah, great question. Well, both my wife and I were born and raised in Marysville and so we've got a lot of connection to the community and to this area in north Snohomish County, so we really wanted to stay local. You know, the Marysville, Arlington, Stanwood area, north Snohomish County. I think cost is always something that is taken into consideration when new families are looking to purchase a home and that was certainly something that was on our minds. And then just finding somewhere that was safe, had a great community feel, and had access to different things. We're kind of in between where both of our parents live, so we're close to family, but we're also close to the shopping center in Smokey Point, close to-

Susan Hempstead: 07:19 The library.

Nate Nehring: 07:19 Yeah, the library. That's right.

Ken Harvey: 07:20 That's right.

Nate Nehring: 07:20 And the new-

Susan Hempstead: 07:21 That new library.

Nate Nehring: 07:22 ... library in Smokey Point. And then we're also kind of in between the North Arlington Library and then the Marysville Library as well. So we've got lots of great opportunities to visit a library.

Susan Hempstead: 07:31 So family and your family tradition is important for the history of this region as well, but also to you personally, and I think everyone would love to hear about how you and your dad are navigating this joint elected family tradition that you have.

Nate Nehring: 07:49 Yeah. Yeah, no, it's very interesting.

Ken Harvey: 07:51 Well, and I should just jump in, so all of our listeners know-

Susan Hempstead: 07:54 Oh, thank you.

Ken Harvey: 07:55 ... your father is also in local government.

Nate Nehring: 07:59 Right.

Ken Harvey: 07:59 All right, so tell us a little bit about him and then tackle the rest of Susan's question.

Nate Nehring: 08:04 Yeah, definitely. So my dad serves as the mayor of Marysville currently and he's been in that role since 2011. So that makes for some interesting dinner time conversations. But when I was young, he ran for city council while he was in marketing, he was in private business. Ran for city council and was successful and I remember as a boy, going out and-

Susan Hempstead: 08:25 Doorbelling.

Nate Nehring: 08:26 ... doorbelling with him and I had a lot of fun with that. And then in 2011, ran for election as mayor and ended up being successful. I remember when I was in high school, thinking about politics, and I would get asked all the time, "Are you going to follow in your dad's footsteps?" And I'd say, "No, I don't think

so," because I saw a lot of the divisiveness at the national level or at the state level and I thought, "That doesn't sound like a really fun career path to go down. I'd rather go into a field where I have the opportunity to maybe make an impact on the lives of others," which is why I decided to go into education.

Nate Nehring: 08:57 But the more I got to have some deep conversations with my dad and others in local government, I really came to this realization that in local government, if your heart's in the right place and you're willing to serve the people, you really can make a positive difference in the lives of others, much like you can in education. And so I think that's what it all comes down to and both my dad and I being in local government is special because I think local government is where the rubber really meets the road and where you're dealing with issues that are the closest to the people. You're kind of more further away from that partisan politics or that divisiveness you maybe see in other areas of government, and so I've really enjoyed it and it's exciting to be in a career field that I can share with my dad as well.

Susan Hempstead: 09:41 Well, that's fantastic. And I think you're right about local government and the impact it has. People see you at the grocery store. They see you-

Nate Nehring: 09:48 Right. At the library.

Susan Hempstead: 09:49 ... at the library.

Nate Nehring: 09:49 Yep.

Susan Hempstead: 09:50 And there's this immediate feedback mechanism that both you and your dad are able to receive in the positions that you hold. And to that point, you both have this wonderful Norwegian tradition and this summer you had an opportunity to kind of expand and learn more and introduce it to your daughter. I was wondering if you'd like to share with everyone about that experience.

Nate Nehring: 10:14 Yeah, that was really special. So my dad is about half Norwegian, but my mom was actually born in Norway and she immigrated here when she was 18. And so growing up as kids, we would have the opportunity to go to Norway maybe every other year, every two, three years. That was really special, to get to know my family over there. Grandparents and lots of cousins. We had a big family. But my wife and then obviously newborn daughter had never been there before.

Susan Hempstead: 10:36 Oh, wow.

Nate Nehring: 10:36 And so this last summer we got to all go back for a family reunion at a family farm back in Norway and introduce everybody. That was really special for us as a family.

Ken Harvey: 10:45 So how many people were at the reunion, do you figure?

Nate Nehring: 10:47 There were over 40. So it's a, yeah, big family.

Ken Harvey: 10:49 So a nice-sized gathering.

Nate Nehring: 10:50 Yep. Yep. Yeah. It was a lot of fun.

Susan Hempstead: 10:53 Working farm? Or retired farm?

Nate Nehring: 10:55 It is a working farm, yes.

Susan Hempstead: 10:56 Okay.

Nate Nehring: 10:57 My mom's cousin is kind of managing the property and doing the working farm. Most of the relatives are living in other areas of the country now, but...

Susan Hempstead: 11:03 A lot of great experiences.

Ken Harvey: 11:04 So having been to a few family reunions of my own, I have to ask, was there anything on the menu that you just absolutely loved and it surprised you how much you liked it, and anything you refused to eat?

Nate Nehring: 11:19 You know, I think I'm so used to it because I've been to Norway a few times and so I've gotten used to kind of the quirky foods that they have. They're known for some of their desserts and the baked goods, so that was great, but my wife definitely had that feeling where it was like some of this stuff was, "Oh, this is awesome. I've never tried this." And then other things, you know, you can kind of see her take a look at it and say, "Oh, I'm not going to try that."

Ken Harvey: 11:42 No way.

Nate Nehring: 11:43 Yep.

Ken Harvey: 11:45 Well, you have been in local government now for how many years?

Nate Nehring: 11:50 Almost three years. Coming up on three years in January.

Ken Harvey: 11:53 And was running for council your first entrée into local government?

Nate Nehring: 12:01 The first public, the first elected position, I should say. I did get involved with the Stanwood Planning Commission when we lived in Stanwood. I was appointed by Mayor Kelley to serve on that just because I wanted to get involved in my community and that was one way of doing it, but this is my first elected position.

Ken Harvey: 12:17 Well, planning commissions are amazing opportunities-

Nate Nehring: 12:22 Absolutely.

Ken Harvey: 12:23 ... to really learn about, not just learn about the community, but learn about what really makes community community in terms of how land is used. What would you say to someone who may be interested in doing something at the local level in a small town or a small city about opportunities like planning commissions?

Nate Nehring: 12:50 Yeah, that's a great question, and I would highly encourage anybody who has an interest, even if it's just a slight interest, to look into those opportunities, because I know as a county, and I'm sure most of the cities in our county as well, there are several opportunities available for things like planning commission or different boards and committees that are available and do different things. And so we're always looking for people to volunteer and serve on these boards and committees. I think it's a great opportunity for people to serve their community, learn a little bit more about the process, but also it helps us all with the more public participation we have from residents.

Susan Hempstead: 13:24 Well, and as Ken said, planning commission are really the bellwethers for growth and what's occurring and what's forecast to come to a community, so they're the first group to really get a sense of what developers are looking toward and what's coming next. So when you were in that role for Stanwood and looking to the arc of where Stanwood is today in their planning and their economic development work, what are you noticing now that you first heard about as a planning commission member and has that evolved even given the economic conditions?

Nate Nehring: 13:59 Yeah, that's a good question. I think you hit the nail on the head that growth is a hot issue everywhere in the county, in Stanwood, Marysville, everywhere, and those issues come to the planning commission first, who will take a look at the land use and the different policies which are related and ultimately will make a recommendation either to the city council, or if it's the county, to the county council. And so I think some of the issues, and it's difficult for me to remember really specific issues in Stanwood a few years back, but I think the general issues around growth and land use decisions, where are we going to put the growth, how is this going to affect other things like traffic congestion and economic development, those are still around today and I think we'll be looking at those issues for the foreseeable future.

Ken Harvey: 14:44 You may not know that earlier in my career I worked for a city, but not in this particular area. But one of the things that I learned was that, as Susan mentioned, especially around planning commissions and the elected council members, those individuals often have an opportunity to see what's coming over the horizon, because oftentimes, housing projects, neighborhood housing or economic buildings that are for retail or commercial, they don't just spring up overnight.

Nate Nehring: 15:25 Right.

Ken Harvey: 15:26 Someone is thinking about those, planning for those, oftentimes years or decades in advance and they are then trying to work to create a roadmap of going from the concept to actually open the doors to serving-

Susan Hempstead: 15:42 Through the governmental process [crosstalk 00:15:43]-

Ken Harvey: 15:43 ... through the governmental process. So I'm thinking about, as I saw you trying to think of a specific example, I remember a resident from the Stanwood Camano area telling me about years and years ago, there was interest and some early deliberation around actually doing a regional airport out in the Stanwood area because there was a lot of land available and there was space for it. A lot of the [crosstalk 00:16:20]-

Susan Hempstead: 16:20 Don't write to Ken Harvey. That's not happening.

Ken Harvey: 16:22 It's not happening today.

Susan Hempstead: 16:23 Don't happen. Please don't.

Ken Harvey: 16:23 But this was like, I think maybe a decade or more ago. And so that conversation came to the planning commission and there was a lot of community, I should say, community interest in it and ultimately it didn't happen because the community or a lot of the residents were not in favor of it. But it could be something as large as an airport suddenly being across the street from you or it could be as simple as someone just building a house that has four floors on it-

Nate Nehring: 17:02 Right.

Ken Harvey: 17:03 ... in the lot next to you and suddenly it affects you.

Susan Hempstead: 17:07 Your neighborhood is different.

Ken Harvey: 17:08 Yes.

Nate Nehring: 17:09 Right. Well, I think to your point, there's a couple of considerations, both at planning commission and then for the legislative branch as well, for the councils. One is whether it's permissible legally or whether it abides by code, but then there's another question of whether it's something the community wants, so even if it passes the test of having potential or complying with city or council codes, you still have the question, well, where's the public out on this? And that's where that public input is so crucial and we get that input at council meetings often and it can be very helpful, but a lot of people don't know that those planning commission meetings are also public meetings where you can come and provide public testimony and kind of get involved early in the process.

Susan Hempstead: 17:49 And that public involvement is a really key piece that has followed you from the planning commission to the county council and I'm reflecting upon when you were appointed and that very next day, when you walk into the Snohomish County Council floor, you take the elevator up and you walk in, what was that experience like for you?

Nate Nehring: 18:11 It was really special. Because this isn't something I had planned on or really been seeking out. As you mentioned, it was an appointment process, and so it kind of came out of nowhere and I ended up going for the appointment and was successful in being appointed. So it was a big learning experience. A lot of people will say if you start a new position, it's drinking out of the fire hose-

Susan Hempstead: 18:32 Right.

Nate Nehring: 18:32 ... and that's exactly what it was. But a lot of great people at the County, and not just at the County, but throughout the community as well. Sno-Isle and Economic Alliance, a lot of different organizations that are doing great work. And so having the opportunity to sit down with individuals within county government and outside of county government and learn a little bit more about what they do and how all the work that we do is inter-related was very helpful. And I continue, to this day, to learn and I think however long I serve on the county council, I'll always be learning, because there's just so much going on and so much great work to be done.

Susan Hempstead: 19:03 So I remember we walked in for our initial meeting with you and your terrific legislative aide, Russell Wiita, and you had these candy dishes in the middle of your table and you had said that your mom had dropped them off for you and I just thought that was such a touching way to continue this theme of bringing family with you and family connection as you made this next transition to your role on the county council.

Nate Nehring: 19:29 Yeah. Right. No, I think when my mom came and saw the office for the first time, she thought, "Oh, this probably needs a little bit of touching up or decoration or whatnot." And so she dropped those off and they've been a good touch. Anytime Ken Klein comes up or some of the other council members come and meet in my office, all of a sudden, all of the candy's gone.

Susan Hempstead: 19:47 You're the go-to spot.

Nate Nehring: 19:47 That's right.

Susan Hempstead: 19:47 See, your mom knew. You always have food, people will show up.

Nate Nehring: 19:50 Yeah.

Ken Harvey: 19:50 Did you say whenever they come, then suddenly the candy is gone?

Nate Nehring: 19:54 That's right.

Ken Harvey: 19:54 Okay.

Susan Hempstead: 19:56 That's exactly right. Well, through these past couple of years, when people ask you, "Nate, what are you, county council. What does the county council do?" How do you respond to that, given how vast Snohomish County government is? How do you

break it down for people to understand the role of the county government?

- Nate Nehring: 20:16 Yeah. It's a good question and it can be difficult to break down, because as you mentioned, there's so many different components. I think maybe the easiest way to explain it is that we're the legislative branch of the county, so similar to how a city council operates in the legislative branch, taking votes, making policy changes, law-making, and the biggest responsibility of the county council is adopting our county's budget each year. And people are often surprised to find out our budget's over a billion dollars in total-
- Susan Hempstead: 20:43 Wow.
- Ken Harvey: 20:44 Wow.
- Nate Nehring: 20:44 Yeah, and we pass that on an annual basis. And so-
- Ken Harvey: 20:46 So that's with a B, not an M.
- Nate Nehring: 20:47 That's right. With a B. Yeah. Yeah. So the budget's a big one, but then there's a lot of areas we get to get involved with, whether it's looking at addressing homelessness, whether it's traffic congestion, a lot of the growth issues that we're seeing, bringing jobs and economic development to our area. And so there's a wide span of areas that we're able to work in as county council members and I enjoy that.
- Ken Harvey: 21:11 So that budget approval process that you go through, and correct me if I'm wrong, the budget, as it's developed, is meant to ensure that core services are provided to the residents-
- Nate Nehring: 21:27 Yep. Right.
- Ken Harvey: 21:27 ... and those who come in through Snohomish County, but also to focus on priorities that the council sets.
- Nate Nehring: 21:36 Right. Yep.
- Ken Harvey: 21:38 And so I think I just heard you mention some of those priorities then, around economic development and jobs and-
- Susan Hempstead: 21:46 Safety.
- Ken Harvey: 21:47 And safety. Which immediately, for me, kind of opens up several questions. One is around one of the new jewels of our

region, which is the Paine Field and air travel through Paine Field.

Nate Nehring: 22:03 Yeah. Paine Field is, it's a beautiful airport, if anyone's had the chance to go out there. It's just stunning. And the really unique thing about Paine Field - I think it's one of a kind in our entire country - is it's the result of a great public-private partnerships. The county owns the land and leases the land, but Propellor Airports came in and invested over 40 million dollars of private money into the airport and they operate the airport and we've got two airlines, Alaska and United, doing 23 flights in and out, per day, out of Paine Field across the western United States and now into Spokane, we just found out about a month ago. Just a beautiful airport.

Nate Nehring: 22:38 I think it's really important because as a council member, when I go out and talk to businesses and I have an opportunity sometimes to talk with businesses who are in other areas of the country and who are seeing about whether they can relocate to Snohomish County or expand into Snohomish County, one of the biggest barriers that they'll bring up is the traffic congestion between Snohomish County and Seattle, and having an airport in Snohomish County and Everett where they can, you know, a tech company from Silicon Valley can fly in, do their work, and fly right out the same day or the next day is a huge asset for our county. We've already seen some great job growth as a result of that. And besides that, it's also a great opportunity for passenger service for folks who live inside of Snohomish County. I know I'm excited, when I'm traveling along the western part of the United States, to not have to battle traffic down to SeaTac, but I can drive right into Everett, fly out of Paine Field, and it's five, 10 minutes until I'm through the gate and in my seat. So a really great opportunity for Snohomish County.

Susan Hempstead: 23:36 When you look at the map of Snohomish County, we have more, what I'll call urban areas of the county and more rural areas and your district certainly straddles more the suburban and the rural.

Nate Nehring: 23:48 Mm-hmm (affirmative). Right.

Susan Hempstead: 23:49 What are you hearing around economic development in those communities? We're a very trade-dependent county, so that access to markets beyond the local farmer's market is really important for a lot of our agriculture businesses. So what are you hearing from your constituents in the more northern part of the county around economic development priorities or issues they're facing with the county?

Nate Nehring: 24:16 Yeah, that's a great question. I think one of the main themes of north Snohomish County, the district I represent, is when you think about living, working, playing, we've got great places to live. We're generally more affordable in the northern part of the county than in the southern part of the county or getting into King County, Seattle. Some great opportunities there. For play, we've got some wonderful parks and recreational opportunities. Wenberg Park was just renovated. Kayak Point, Whitehorse in Darrington. Wonderful outdoor activities in the northern part of the county.

Susan Hempstead: 24:46 Great school districts.

Nate Nehring: 24:47 Exactly. But what we've been lacking are those job opportunities, so a lot of people travel to King County to work. A lot of people travel down to Boeing, which great. We've got Boeing, which is a wonderful employer in the county. What we'd like to have are more local jobs in north Snohomish County so that people live here and raise their families here have the opportunity to work in their community as well with a living-wage job. I think the cities in the northern part of the county have done a great job with the Cascade Industrial Center, which was just designated recently by the Puget Sound Regional Council-

Susan Hempstead: 25:19 Regional council.

Nate Nehring: 25:19 ... and there is the potential for over 25,000 high-paying jobs by 2040, I think is the stat, in that area. I think that's a great opportunity for north Snohomish County and it's a big asset for the entire Puget Sound region where we can potentially see some great job opportunities coming.

Susan Hempstead: 25:36 And I think a lot of people would prefer not to be sitting in traffic or sitting in their car or on the bus heading south and being exported to other places.

Nate Nehring: 25:45 Exactly.

Susan Hempstead: 25:45 I think people would want to work. So when we look at, you know, worker recruitment is a challenge, jobs are a challenge, and there's a shortage of skilled workers and it impacts many sectors of our county. And how has that informed your work around the Regional Apprenticeship Pathways program?

Nate Nehring: 26:04 Great question. When I'm talking with businesses in the county, the number one obstacle that comes up is workforce

development and Snohomish County is, as we all know, growing very rapidly. I heard a stat that there are more cranes up in our area in the Puget Sound region than in Los Angeles and New York combined.

Susan Hempstead: 26:21

Lynnwood has them know.

Nate Nehring: 26:22

Right.

Susan Hempstead: 26:23

The mayor has a crane watch in Lynnwood.

Nate Nehring: 26:24

Wow. So we're just seeing a ton of construction growth, but what we're missing are people to come in and fill those jobs, those skilled trade jobs. And it's a big gap, because those are high-paying jobs with great benefits, but unfortunately, we aren't having the students coming through or the people who are trained to take on those jobs. And so we put together a stakeholder group consisting of school districts, of labor and industry folks and of government and economic development folks to talk about how can we bridge that gap. I think we've done a good job of providing some opportunities for students to go to four-year college, which is a great option, but we haven't done as great on providing opportunities to go into the skilled trades, to go into some of these high-paying, good wage jobs. And so how can we bridge that?

Nate Nehring: 27:13

What we came up with kind of organically as a group was this Regional Apprenticeship Pathways program, and what that is is basically putting hands-on training for the skilled trades back into the high schools. Basic safety, tool identification, applied mathematics, just those basic things which are needed in order to go onto an apprenticeship and then eventually into a career in the skilled trades. We worked together on establishing a curriculum for that. The school districts, Everett Community College, and several other groups were very helpful in putting that together. Then we went to the state legislature to ask to have it be funded in north Snohomish County and were successful. Representative Mike [Cells 00:27:53] from Everett did a lot of the heavy lifting on that in getting that request through. So we got the funding and at Marysville Pilchuck High School this year, just a couple of weeks ago, it started. We've got our first class of students.

Susan Hempstead: 28:03

Oh, terrific.

Nate Nehring: 28:04

Yeah. So we've got 27 students-

Ken Harvey: 28:05 Congratulations.

Nate Nehring: 28:05 Thank you.

Ken Harvey: 28:06 That's wonderful.

Nate Nehring: 28:06 And they're very excited, and I'm excited, as well, to have this program going. I think it's a great opportunity. When a student graduates from the program, they'll earn their high school diploma, a college credential which has been built specifically for this program by Everett Community College, and then they'll have preferred entry opportunities into existing state-certified apprenticeship programs post-high school, so you can go directly into making money right after high school.

Susan Hempstead: 28:30 So if a student or a family are interested in more information, should they contact the Marysville school district? Where's the starting spot if someone's interested?

Nate Nehring: 28:38 The Marysville school district is a great point of contact and you can also contact my office as well at Snohomish County.

Susan Hempstead: 28:44 Great. We'll publish that too.

Ken Harvey: 28:45 We will. We'll have information on several of these things that our council member's talking about on the show notes page for this episode, so please take the time to take a look at those.

Ken Harvey: 29:01 One of the things that I was reminded of as we were preparing to sit down with you was that you stepped into the role of vice chair of the county council this-

Nate Nehring: 29:15 Right.

Ken Harvey: 29:15 That was this year, right?

Nate Nehring: 29:16 Yes. Yep.

Ken Harvey: 29:19 And one of the things that really jumped out at that was that it was described as the first time in a decade that, essentially, the leadership of the council has been with a person that's a Democrat and a person who's Republican. Why would that be significant?

Nate Nehring: 29:43 Well, I think it's significant because, and we talked a little bit about it earlier, when you look at national politics or even at the state level sometimes, it's just so divisive, and I think your

average person isn't a big fan of that. They want to see things get done. They want to see government operating efficiently and doing the people's work. Looking at local government, in Snohomish County in particular, I think by working in a bipartisan manner, we've got three Democrats and two Republicans on the county council, but we all work very well together. 99% of the issues that we deal with are nonpartisan issues. We're filling potholes, dealing with county clerks, dealing with safety traffic. These don't have a partisan label.

- Nate Nehring: 30:23 I think it's important that we work together and we set an example for how governments should be operating, and so that's why I think it's significant to have two members of different parties working in leadership together.
- Ken Harvey: 30:36 Well, typically, when we think about conservative versus progressive or less conservative, there's a split around taxes.
- Nate Nehring: 30:53 Right.
- Ken Harvey: 30:55 Do we have enough taxes or not?
- Susan Hempstead: 31:00 Or enough investment in programs.
- Ken Harvey: 31:00 Or enough investment in our programs. And so there's typically divide that really reflects different perspectives. How do you think it's going with Snohomish County in terms of, with a leadership that you and our chair, Terry Ryan, are providing of really helping ensure that there's a civil and bipartisan. Partisan. I said to myself I wasn't going to use that word. But kind of a bipartisan approach to looking at-
- Susan Hempstead: 31:34 Governance.
- Ken Harvey: 31:35 ... at what the investment is that's needed.
- Nate Nehring: 31:38 Right. Yeah, that's a great question. There's always going to be some areas of disagreement, and those aren't even always on partisan lines. It can be members of the same party disagreeing on a particular topic. I think the important thing is that those things are handled civilly. We can hold opposing views but be respectful of one another and engage in dialogue with each other and try to find compromise where we can, and that's the important thing. And I think that's what the citizens of Snohomish County want to see, because I think people understand that there's always going to be those issues where there's two sides and people won't always line up on the same

side, but as long as we're working together and we have that same goal in mind of moving the county forward and doing the best work we can, I think that's what's important. So that's what we try to do.

Susan Hempstead: 32:20 Well, thank you, and modeling that civil discourse is so important. I think a lot of the inability to hear or to generally listen is what we see when communication moves to the digital space and you have done a remarkable job and I was wondering if you could speak to it a little bit, bringing your social media acumen, engagement, still communicating what's going on, but in a civil manner.

Nate Nehring: 32:47 Yeah, absolutely. I've got a Facebook page called Friends of Nate Nehring and I'm on Twitter as well and what I try to do when there's a hot button issue in the county, or even if it's not a hot button issue, but just updates that are going on. I try to regularly provide information through social media and through other means on those sorts of issues and really just kind of provide, you know, if I take a particular vote on something, provide my rationale for it or what I've heard from different groups of people who I've spoken with, and that way people can hopefully understand where I'm coming from and they also have the opportunity to get back to me and let me know what their thoughts are. And that's very valuable for me, because I serve at the pleasure of the constituents of north Snohomish County in District 1, so it's really helpful for me to get that feedback and kind of know where people are at on some of these different issues.

Susan Hempstead: 33:32 And I think one of the side benefits, but it actually might be the core benefit, is you're giving everyone a view and a lens into the work that you're doing as a county council member. So in a sense, when you post a picture when you're at the fair and supporting the investment that the county makes at the state fair in Monroe, people can see. That's just an example. A recent example I saw online. But people can start to visualize and see where the county is investing and what they're doing and how you are representing them in those activities.

Nate Nehring: 34:05 Absolutely.

Ken Harvey: 34:06 Well, we have about 10 minutes left. I'd like to take just a short break here for a promotional message and when we come back, spend the last few minutes that we have talking a little bit in kind of a split between two areas, one fairly serious and one a little more light-hearted. The serious area, and this is to give you an opportunity to prepare for it, is what you're seeing in

terms of issues and implications around homelessness in our county and the attention around the opioid epidemic and drug use and related issues. And then we'll also ask you some questions about any library stories and family stories you're willing to share with us.

- Nate Nehring: 34:57 Perfect. Look forward to it.
- Ken Harvey: 34:58 Okay. Back in a minute.
- Speaker 5: 35:01 Want to get the latest business news and solid financial advice from the experts, for free? You can, with your Sno-Isle Libraries account. Library customers can download the latest news and advice from publications like Entrepreneur, Kiplinger's, Fast Company, and Inc. You'll find feature stories around the business of technology, leadership, innovation, the stock market, retirement planning, and achieving financial success. All of that with a library card, just waiting for you online at Sno-Isle Libraries.
- Ken Harvey: 35:33 If you live in Snohomish or Island County, we'd like to invite you to stop by your closest library or visit the library online. You'll find thousands and thousands of titles of classic and popular books, music, movies, and a surprising number of digital resources just waiting for you, plus you'll have opportunity to enjoy our friendly, helpful librarians. Check us out today.
- Ken Harvey: 35:54 So coming back from the break, we had mentioned that we were going to chat just a little bit about some very serious issues within our area around homelessness. What is happening and what are the thoughts at the county level in terms of the seriousness of this and the need for investment to find some solutions?
- Nate Nehring: 36:34 Yeah, it's a great question. When I go out and talk to people in Snohomish County, this is the number one issue that comes up: some form of homelessness or drug abuse or mental health or public safety or a combination of a few of those. Since I joined the council in 2017, that's probably been the number one issue that I've been working on or that we at the council have been working on, and I think what really opened my eyes was when the city of Seattle in King County and the Health Department down in King County made the decision to bring two safe injection sites, one into Seattle and one into unincorporated King County. That was a little alarming to hear about, but I took the opportunity to go with an Everett City council member, Scott Bader, to visit one of these sites, which was operating in Vancouver, BC in Canada. Went to the site and talked with the

individual behind the counter who was working there and he explained to us how they'll hand out needles and tourniquets and different supplies to individuals and then they have medical professionals which oversee them injecting themselves with heroin or sometimes other drugs. And then they had what was called a chill room with laptops where the individuals would go and be on when they were finished with injecting themselves.

Nate Nehring: 37:52

So it was really disappointing to see, I think, from my perspective, that. And of course, this wasn't in the US. This was in Canada. But that tax dollars were being used in that manner. But what really shocked me about the trip was not the inside of the facility, but how it affected the greater community outside. We parked about a mile away from the facility and just in that mile walk from our car, from where we parked to the site itself, there were hundreds of people out in the street with needles in their arms, laying out in front of businesses where families would have to go if they wanted to access those businesses. And it's really heartbreaking to see. I mean, nobody wants to see that. It just breaks your heart to see all these people who are suffering in this way and who are in such a place where they have needles in their arms and are laying out all day.

Nate Nehring: 38:38

So I think there's this narrative going on sometimes in the Seattle area and maybe in other parts that the compassionate thing to do is to just let these people live the way that they are and I entirely reject that idea. I think that the compassionate thing to do is to put our resources, our limited resources into ensuring that these people can get the help that they need to get back onto a healthy and sustainable lifestyle. I don't think it's compassionate to tell someone that, to drive them into a life where they're just continually living on the street, shooting up heroin. I think we have opportunities to put them into resources like detox and medicated assistant treatment, housing, job training so they can get back on their feet and get back to a healthy and productive lifestyle. I think that's just so important and I think that that message has resonated.

Nate Nehring: 39:23

In Snohomish County, I put forward a land use ordinance to ban those sites from Snohomish County and that passed unanimously last year. But in conjunction with that, we have been taking some positive steps forward to try to address this issue. One of the things we've done is our Law Enforcement Embedded Social Worker program, and what this does is it teams up police officers with social workers from our Human Services Department, and this team goes out into homeless encampments and makes contact with individuals who are

struggling with drug addiction or mental health or homelessness, whatever it is that they're dealing with, and they work to connect them with existing services. So they get them into detox, they get them into treatment, housing, job training.

- Nate Nehring: 40:01 We started out with a goal of, I think, over the first two years, trying to get 25 people graduated through a treatment program and we're a little over a year into it now - this is through Marysville and Arlington and the County - and over 70 people have already graduated through a treatment program. And so we've had some great early success stories, and I think that's just so important to highlight, about some positive steps that are being taken in the right direction. By no means does that mean that we've solved the issue or we're done with homelessness. I think we'll be dealing with this issue for the foreseeable future, but I think it's important that we make policy decisions and take steps that bring us in the right direction to get people the help that they need.
- Susan Hempstead: 40:36 And what is the county's role, aside from creating partnerships or allocating financial resources or securing them from the federal government or zoning, planning, land use, public health and safety. How do you boil that down, what the county's role is in addressing?
- Nate Nehring: 40:53 Yeah, I'd say all of the above.
- Susan Hempstead: 40:55 Okay.
- Nate Nehring: 40:55 I mean, there's a policy role for sure. The biggest one is probably, like you mentioned, the resources. For example, with the Law Enforcement Embedded Social Worker program in the northern part of the county, each city funds a police officer from their police department and then the county has a sheriff deputy and then the county and the city split the cost for two social workers from the county's Human Services Department. So it's those partnerships that are so critical to make that happen and I think that's where we can make progress, when we partner together.
- Ken Harvey: 41:22 Well, in an earlier podcast that we did, episode, we had Allison Warren-Barbour from United Way of Snohomish County as a guest and spent some time with her chatting about essentially the power of collective impact and the core, what are they called? The core-
- Susan Hempstead: 41:43 Collaboratives.

Ken Harvey: 41:43 Collaborative, yeah.

Susan Hempstead: 41:44 Excuse me, yes.

Ken Harvey: 41:44 Core collaboratives that they've been working on and Sno-Isle Libraries is part of-

Susan Hempstead: 41:49 Two.

Ken Harvey: 41:49 ... two of those efforts and I think in-

Susan Hempstead: 41:51 Stanwood, Camano.

Ken Harvey: 41:52 ... Stanwood and-

Susan Hempstead: 41:54 Darrington.

Ken Harvey: 41:54 Yeah. Stanwood, Camano, and Darrington. How does the county view those types of efforts and how those things can be harnessed to really kind of get at breaking the cycle of homelessness?

Nate Nehring: 42:13 I think it's very important. We've got a lot of different community groups in the county, whether it's Sno-Isle or within cities who have different community organizations, sometimes there's faith-based organizations. And I think everybody's trying to do good work, trying to move the needle on these issues, but the more that we can come together and work together on it so that we're not duplicating what others are doing and maybe being less efficient than we could be, the more that we can bring people together and just combine those efforts and move forward, I think, the better.

Ken Harvey: 42:47 Yeah, I think one of the phrases that was used when we were meeting and chatting with the executive director from the United Way of Snohomish County was leveraging the mutual resources.

Nate Nehring: 43:00 Right.

Ken Harvey: 43:01 So it's amazing how you have the multiplier effect when you leverage all those resources and bring them to bear. Hey, we only have a minute or two left. Before I hit you with the final question, which is your favorite story or a recent library experience, in looking at your background, one of the things that we noted from earlier in your career was a lot of community service. Do you want to talk a little bit about that or

how you feel about encouraging others to serve in their community?

- Nate Nehring: 43:35 Absolutely. I'm glad you brought that up. I think community service is just so important and we see a lot of great people within Snohomish County, within the communities we have that give back in several different ways, whether it's coaching a sports team or volunteering to help in schools, helping out with the homelessness issue. A lot of people giving back their time. I think it's important that we instill that sentiment into the younger generations and ensure that people grow up knowing how important it is to give back to your community. That's something I feel very strongly about.
- Nate Nehring: 44:06 There's an effort underway right now led by the YMCA in Marysville. J.J. Frank, who directs the Y, came up with a great idea. It's called the Marysville-Tulalip Family of Volunteers. What it is, it's trying to bring people together, trying to bring families together in the Marysville-Tulalip area, but I'm sure anybody would be welcome, if you're outside that area, centered around volunteer projects so that families can come together, spend time together, but also be giving back to their community.
- Nate Nehring: 44:32 We had one event where we were helping out with a dog park in Marysville. Our next event, we're going to be doing some upgrades for the Marysville school district at a couple of their schools. I'll be happy to provide some more information on that.
- Susan Hempstead: 44:45 Great.
- Nate Nehring: 44:46 I just think it's so important that we encourage people, especially younger generations, to give back, and so community service is a great way to do it.
- Ken Harvey: 44:52 We'd love to include that as a link on the show notes for this episode.
- Nate Nehring: 44:57 Perfect.
- Susan Hempstead: 44:57 I would also like to honor that even with the busyness of your public role, you are an immense public steward and volunteer, and I just want to thank you for volunteering to help us open the Lakewood Smokey Point Library. You helped us with the ribbon-cutting and you were on the panel that we hosted on the Marysville Library with your dad, Mayor Nehring, really focused

on jobs of the future. So you're busy, and we really appreciate the time that you invest in helping organizations like ours.

- Nate Nehring: 45:30 Well, thank you. I appreciate that. And if I could just say a quick word, I think that the work that Sno-Isle does is just critical. I had the opportunity to come be a part of that panel and was just very pleasantly surprised at what you guys are doing throughout Snohomish County, holding those panels on issues that matter to people who live in the county and I just think it's a great way to get the word out about what's going on and give the public an opportunity to come in and provide input, so thank you for the work you do.
- Ken Harvey: 45:53 Oh, thank you. So, favorite library story or memory.
- Nate Nehring: 45:59 Favorite library story. I think, you know, when I was younger, grew up in Marysville, I would always go to the Marysville Library. I remember getting my first library card and going down and I think would pick out like 10 or 11 books. It was over the amount of books that I should be getting.
- Susan Hempstead: 46:14 You can take-
- Nate Nehring: 46:14 Right.
- Susan Hempstead: 46:14 ... what you can carry.
- Nate Nehring: 46:14 Exactly.
- Susan Hempstead: 46:15 If you can carry it, you can have it.
- Nate Nehring: 46:17 So I remember lots of times, especially during the summer, going down and going with parents and doing that. And now I am really excited about the opportunity to look forward with my daughter now, who's almost one year old, and then with a son on the way-
- Ken Harvey: 46:30 Congratulations.
- Nate Nehring: 46:30 Thank you. Really looking forward to being able to take my kids to the library, whether it's the new library in Smokey Point or in North Arlington or the Marysville Library, and get to share those experiences with them as well.
- Ken Harvey: 46:40 Well, your family really represents an area of the community that we are very focused on. We want to make sure that

children like yours are not just prepared for school, but come to school with a love of reading already developed-

Nate Nehring: 47:02 Right.

Ken Harvey: 47:02 ... and an excitement around the discovery process of what you can find when you open a book or listen to an audiobook or whatever. We're excited for your family.

Nate Nehring: 47:18 Yeah. And it was really cool to see, I had the opportunity to come when you all opened up the new library in Smokey Point and I came with one of the classes from the Lakewood school district-

Susan Hempstead: 47:27 School district.

Nate Nehring: 47:27 ... and seeing those-

Susan Hempstead: 47:28 Public library day. It's fantastic.

Nate Nehring: 47:29 Yeah. And seeing those kids' eyes light up when they walked in and the different opportunities you had set up for them was just really cool to see. It's great to see kids being engaged by Sno-Isle.

Susan Hempstead: 47:38 And them getting their first library card.

Nate Nehring: 47:39 That's right. That's right.

Susan Hempstead: 47:40 And being introduced to their pathway forward.

Ken Harvey: 47:42 Well, I just want to tell you how delighted we've been to have you with us for this episode. We've been talking with Nate Nehring, who is the vice chair of the Snohomish County Council. Nate has been serving our community and our region for some time now in various roles and he's part of what continues to make us very, very excited about, this is a wonderful place to live. To live, to play, and to work.

Susan Hempstead: 48:08 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Nate Nehring: 48:08 That's right. Thank you. I really appreciate it. And thanks for the opportunity.

Ken Harvey: 48:13 Enjoying this episode of the Check it Out! podcast? Head over to the iTunes store, Google Play Music store, or most other podcast stores to subscribe, rate the podcast, or leave a review.

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- Ken Harvey: 48:40 I am very glad that we had an opportunity to speak with Nate Nehring.
- Susan Hempstead: 48:44 It was great to have some time to sit down and talk with him, given how busy he has been the last few years. Oh, my goodness.
- Ken Harvey: 48:49 Well, we forgot to, or at least, I forgot to ask him what generational group he would place himself in-
- Susan Hempstead: 48:55 Oh, that's a great question.
- Ken Harvey: 48:56 ... because when he first became part of Snohomish County government, I heard a lot of conversation around him being, I think at the time, the youngest member of the county council ever. I don't know if that was true, but maybe people perceived it to be true, and I'm not hearing that anymore because I think if that was meant in any way to be pejorative at the time, he has certainly proven himself.
- Susan Hempstead: 49:25 He has certainly earned the reputation that he has as being thoughtful about governance and the issues that our county is facing and working with all stakeholders to try and find solutions that can help our county thrive with jobs, economic development, public health and safety. And for me, I really enjoyed listening to him talk about his family, the cultural traditions that they have, and how they are the next generation of Marysville and Arlington.
- Ken Harvey: 49:54 Yeah. Well, I really appreciated that he was willing to share about the thoughtful process that he and his wife went through as they were looking at moving from apartment living to finding a stick-built home and what went into that. And then you asked him the question that kind of led into the Norway family reunion, which I thought was pretty interesting.
- Susan Hempstead: 50:21 Well, it's very special, and what a great legacy for both his dad, his family, and for Nate to be on this journey together in public governance and stewardship.
- Ken Harvey: 50:29 Well, I think the only thing that I was disappointed in - and it was just a little thing - was I really wanted to know what it was that his wife refused to eat-

Susan Hempstead: 50:36 Eat at the...

Ken Harvey: 50:37 ... at the family reunion. But maybe I'll get that from him some other time.

Susan Hempstead: 50:41 We'll bring him back again.

Ken Harvey: 50:42 You know, the account that he shared near the end of our time with him about taking the trip down to the safe injection site.

Susan Hempstead: 50:55 Yeah, in Canada. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ken Harvey: 50:56 Was it?

Susan Hempstead: 50:57 Vancouver. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ken Harvey: 50:57 Oh, in Vancouver. Okay. I was thinking it was in Vancouver, Washington, but you're saying Vancouver, BC.

Susan Hempstead: 51:03 Correct.

Ken Harvey: 51:03 British Columbia.

Susan Hempstead: 51:03 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ken Harvey: 51:05 That was really thought-provoking and it reminded me that I had actually heard him being interviewed by a Seattle radio station about that issue and the compassion in his voice as he was relating that and the intensity of his commitment to try and do whatever possible to break that cycle of dependency was just really clear.

Susan Hempstead: 51:30 We see it in the libraries every day. People are struggling. People need help. And what are the solutions that the county government can offer to provide and find pathways forward for individuals who either have a dependency, a health issue, whatever it might be? These are complex issues to navigate at a public policy level, let alone at an individual neighborhood level.

Ken Harvey: 51:56 Yeah. And for me, even more, it just really caught my attention, how he discussed the potential negative effects of the cycle happening in people's lives that you can see within neighborhoods, whether they're business neighborhoods, retail or family neighborhoods. And it did remind me how wonderful it is to have individuals in leadership, in local government and within our communities who are concerned about the quality of

life of individuals and all those within the community and are really committed to working towards solutions.

- Susan Hempstead: 52:43 Absolutely, and council member Nehring is one of five county council members who work so hard to serve our county every day and we really hope to invite his colleagues on the county council in for a conversation as well. We are very lucky in this region to have really thoughtful public leaders at the helm.
- Ken Harvey: 53:02 I agree.
- Ken Harvey: 53:11 Coming up next, a spotlight on a library volunteer.
- Sue Norman: 53:19 My name is Sue Norman and I am an active volunteer with the Oak Harbor Friends of the Library. I've been on Whidbey Island for 29 years and I've probably been active with the Friends for about 25. My mother was a schoolteacher. My father was a newspaperman, a reporter, and then an editor. I think I'm proud to say we were the last people on the block to get a television. I was an English major. That's not surprising. And I got married fairly young, but I did finish my college degree. I went to three different schools, two in California, and ended up graduating from the University of Connecticut. We moved to Oak Harbor in 1990 and had our own business, so the English major became a bookkeeper receptionist person who did the permits for the business and libraries a wonderful source. This was really before the internet was being used a lot to give you information.
- Sue Norman: 54:29 I kept thinking, "Gee, I want to get involved in the library some way." And so I went to a luncheon that was kind of an end of the year at the president of the Friends' home and got roped in pretty quickly to be an office holder. I think I've been vice president for membership, vice president for programs, treasurer and president pretty much for the last 15 to 20 years. Also, the Sno-Isle Foundation has the Trudy Sundberg lecture series and I am on that committee. I also participate on the Whidbey Reads committee. If you know about Nancy Pearl, it's what if everyone read the same book in your community.
- Sue Norman: 55:22 Our town does have a naval air base, Naval Air Station Whidbey Island, and that means we have a lot of young children. And the story times, the baby story times, the toddler story times, and then as the children get older, the summer reading programs, which are really important. I was in a summer reading program as a child. That's a resource and we have other resources for families. Primetime in the evening. That's a big resource for the families. I just think there's so many activities. We're having comic, it's not called Comicon any more, WhidbeyCon come up,

which is a Comic-Con type event. The first year we had a thousand people. The second year, about 1100. This year we're expecting 1500 people. This is what kind of brings the community together.

Sue Norman: 56:20 Well, I was kind of surprised to it. I was invited down to this event honoring volunteers and it was down at the service center and I was given the governor's award for volunteerism. I never did it to receive an award, but it was a nice accolade. I appreciated that. Someone asked me once, "Well, why are you such a supporter of libraries?" And I guess I said, "Because I have such a reading habit, I could never afford to buy them all."

Ken Harvey: 57:01 This podcast has been brought to you by our legacy sponsor, Sno-Isle Libraries Foundation. Your private tax-deductible gift to the Library Foundation provides seed money to expand and foster extra early learning and lifetime learning opportunities through Foundation grants for innovative library classes, activities, and civic engagement events. Type Sno-Isle Libraries Foundation into your web browser to find out more about how your donation can change the lives of preschoolers, third-graders, teenagers, and lifelong learners like you or someone you care about.