

# Mitzi Johanknecht, King County's new sheriff, selects command staff, sets priorities for her new term

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King County Sheriff-elect Mitzi Johanknecht swaps out the captain's badge on her hat for her major's badge. (Alan Berner/The Seattle Times)

"If you think about it, public safety is a team sport," says King County's Sheriff-elect, Mitzi Johanknecht, who has been involved in athletics all her life. She's risen through the ranks over three decades and is now preparing to lead the 1,000-person law-enforcement agency.

By Sara Jean Green  
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When King County Sheriff-elect Mitzi Johanknecht takes the oath of office Tuesday, she expects her new commanders to also swear to uphold the Constitution and enforce the laws of Washington.

It will be a symbolic gesture to denote the kind of unity and healing Johanknecht wants to bring to a Sheriff's Office bruised by sexual-misconduct allegations leveled at Sheriff John Urquhart and scarred by what several deputies say has become a toxic work environment.

"The night of the election and in the days after that, as things became more clear I would be sheriff-elect, there was a deep sigh in the organization," Johanknecht said of her November upset in unseating Urquhart, who was first elected sheriff in 2012.

## New sheriff in town

This is where King County Sheriff-elect Mitzi Johanknecht stands on major law-enforcement issues:

- Supports Initiative 940, a proposed statewide measure that requires specific mental-health training, de-escalation training and rendering first aid. It also removes the word malice from applicable state law and defines good faith in order to reform police prosecutions when wrongdoing occurs.
- Opposes safe-consumption sites, saying that all deputies should be equipped with overdose medication and more "on-time" treatment be available to those in need or crisis. Concerned that the law-enforcement role around consumption sites is not clear and worries persons using the sites may be victimized before entering and upon leaving the sites.
- Supports equipping deputies with body cameras, while acknowledging that work with the ACLU and community is important to successful programming.
- Wants more in-service scenario-based training for deputies in dealing with people in crisis. Plans to equip patrol deputies with more less-than-lethal tools like "beanbag" rounds in an effort to reduce lethal-force situations.
- Opposes having deputies ask about immigration status because it has a chilling effect on crime reporting.

In the weeks since the election, Johanknecht — whom Urquhart promoted to major in 2015 — has been juggling her responsibilities as commander of Precinct 4 in Burien with assembling a transition team and command staff, meeting with other elected officials and creating a blueprint for her first six months in office so the rest of her four-year term can be spent delivering those changes.