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**2008
Council
Budget
Address**



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**Snohomish
County Council**



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This Budget Is About Leadership

Before final adoption of the 2008 budget I'd like to take a moment to speak to what this budget will mean to the people of Snohomish County.

This budget is about leadership – mature, thoughtful leadership that provides workable solutions to complex problems.

Leadership to make tough choices;

Leadership to make decisions that are responsible rather than merely popular;

And most importantly, the leadership needed to look beyond today in order to lay a solid foundation for the future of Snohomish County.

The priorities represented in next year's budget carry forward the county council's responsibility to map and provide for our future. It is indeed an ambitious agenda.

It will be achieved, as always, with a balanced budget

It will be achieved without borrowing money to pay our debts.

It will be achieved with less staff than the proposed budget.

It will be achieved with less spending than the proposed budget.

And it will be achieved because of this council's long standing commitment to fiscal responsibility. That's the bottom line.

Central to that commitment to sound fiscal management was the council's decision in the 1990s to establish by motion substantial reserves. Preparing for cyclical economic downturns is part of good business planning and the council's 11 percent reserve rate is one of the highest in Washington

Establishing such a high reserve level was what allowed Snohomish County to weather the recession following the 9/11 attack. And today, in line with the council's prudent approach to budgeting, we are securing this important policy in the county code – in the law.

Past fiscal management is important because it has set the stage for the strong financial state of the county today. We have created the financial environment that gave the County Executive an opportunity to offer a 1% cut in the general fund property tax.

This council has not increased the general fund property tax since 2002. And we are pleased today to adopt a property tax reduction.

Sound fiscal management must be continued into the future. And that means you pay your debts. Borrowing to make debt payments is just like using a Visa card to make payments on a MasterCard.

Absent a responsible payment plan in the recommended budget, the council once again took the lead and budgeted for next year's loan payment of 1.8 million dollars for the purchase of the Cathcart property.

Finding these dollars was not easy, but it was necessary.

Leadership also means planning for the future. As everyone who has been stuck in traffic knows, transportation is our single biggest infrastructure problem.

In fact, our county faces a looming infrastructure deficit totaling almost 500 million dollars in unfunded transportation projects through 2025.

Leadership will be necessary to solve this problem. The county council is looking for and finding solutions. County financial resources may be limited, but our resourcefulness should not be. Just the opposite.

Today, the council approved a fast-track, 130-million-dollar construction program to deal immediately with critical road and pedestrian safety improvements in Snohomish County's most congested areas.

And we will do this without raising taxes.

The council's program allocates about 40 million dollars to transportation and safety improvements in the 164th Street corridor. The remainder of the funding will be directed to transportation projects where other congested arterial roads are quickly approaching critical capacity.

But as important as this step is, it is only a first step. A deficit of over \$300 million still remains.

Leadership requires more than standing on the sidelines and hoping everything will work out for the best.

Our traffic problems will not be solved by putting together lists of funding options without regard to their feasibility, and failing to recommend necessary – but unpopular – steps to make sure the money to build important projects is there.

Strong leaders lead by example. The proposed capital improvement program lists an annual 1% property tax increase as one strategy for partially filling our transportation deficit, but such an increase was not included in the budget. Nor was any other solution proposed.

Leadership requires making tough decisions that are right, not merely popular.

Today, the council made such a tough decision by approving a 1% increase in the county road tax to be used towards building the roads, bridges and intersections that

are needed for a growing population. This is not an easy decision and it is one that may not be popular, but it is the right choice for the county. This is leadership.

Our infrastructure needs are not limited to major transportation projects, however. Neighborhoods also need smaller infrastructure projects.

In 2007, the council identified funds for neighborhood infrastructure projects. The idea was to build on the council neighborhood improvement program established in 2001.

In response to a 2007 council request, Public Works recommended an array of projects that neighborhoods might like to see the county undertake. In 2008, the council will partner with the community to increase the quality of their neighborhoods.

Capital needs in the public safety arena have not been ignored in our budget. The budget we approved today sets aside 11 million dollars toward a Regional Justice Center.

Until today, the only plan for paying for this important need was to increase general fund property taxes. This council is committed to continuing to look for ways to reduce or eliminate having to ask the voters to raise their property taxes.

Also related to our public safety needs is the need for improved campus security. Campus security is vital to the safety of the public we serve and our dedicated employees.

But the proposal as submitted has an office structure that is top heavy with administrators. Instead, the council has adopted a plan today that eliminates administrative positions in favor of more security marshals.

We also recognize the need to capitalize on the expertise of the security professionals in the Sheriff's Office.

For this reason the council has placed the security unit under the administration of the Sheriff's Office – in collaboration with the facility security committee.

Sitting here today in the Robert J. Drewel building, I am reminded of how great things can happen when leadership comes together.

The Campus Redevelopment Initiative that Bob Drewel and the county council conceived and implemented resulted in \$181 million in necessary improvements to this campus – all without an increase in taxes.

These were built with hard work and sound fiscal management.

Leading the county requires cooperation and open communication, and remaining ever mindful of providing effective and efficient public services.

The priorities represented in the 2008 budget express the county council's leadership to deal with infrastructure needs, public safety, and quality neighborhoods, and meets our commitment to conservative fiscal policies.
