



Snohomish County
County Executive's Office

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Aaron Reardon
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“Snohomish County: Back on track and in the black”

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County Executive Aaron Reardon presents balanced 2005 budget
that eliminates \$13.4 million gap without raising taxes

Snohomish County Executive Aaron Reardon today presented a Priority-based 2005 budget that stresses protection, prevention and preparation for the future even as it closes a multi-million dollar budget gap.

The Executive's recommended total budget for all County funds for 2005 is \$662.2 million - \$3 million less than 2004 – and:

- Eliminates a \$13.4 million gap in the general fund;
- Foregoes any tax increase, including a property tax increase allowed by law;
- Maintains 256 commissioned positions in the Snohomish County Sheriff's Office;
- Finances the County's expanded jail out of existing revenues;
- Expands opportunity for low-income children by creating nearly 50 new openings in the successful pre-school Early Childhood Educational Assistance Program (ECEAP);
- Establishes a liquidity reserve of 8.5 percent that will be available to smooth out irregular County budget cash-flow cycles; and,
- Lays the groundwork for an emergency reserve.

The Executive's 2005 recommended budget and the text of his budget speech can be viewed in its entirety at: www.co.snohomish.wa.us.

Executive Reardon, making the annual budget address in the County's new Courtyard Plaza, said this morning that he is keeping a promise made when he was elected to office last November: Producing a balanced, no-new-taxes budget.

"We kept that promise despite a budget deficit of more than \$13 million," the Executive said. "We kept that promise despite a sluggish local economy that has lagged behind the national recovery. We kept that promise despite having to finance an expanded County jail entirely out of existing revenue. We kept that promise despite unfunded mandates from the state and federal governments that cost local taxpayers \$1 million per month.

"And we are keeping that promise because we take seriously the message sent by our citizens in the form of tax-cutting Initiatives 601, 695, 747 and 776."

Executive Reardon acknowledged that his administration had to make difficult decisions to balance the budget. There are net staffing reductions in 14 of 21 departments financed out of the County's general fund. About 80 positions are expected to be eliminated. Nonetheless, total employment at the County is expected to increase by nearly 30 positions, reflecting the need to fill almost 70 additional corrections posts when the new jail opens in mid-2005.

Executive Reardon noted that the 2005 budget was balanced despite having to absorb the entire cost of an expanded jail without additional taxes, a development that keeps faith with citizens who twice voted against raising their own taxes to pay for the facility. And this was achieved, he added, without reducing the number of commissioned officers who work for the Snohomish County Sheriff's Office.

"Remarkably, we do this without taking a single Sheriff's deputy off our streets," Executive Reardon said. "My budget includes funding for 256 commissioned Sheriff's officers. Let me be clear – not a single commissioned officer in the Sheriff's Office has been eliminated. Keeping our communities safe is not only a top priority of our citizens, it is a top priority of mine."

Executive Reardon said the total portion of the general fund budget now allocated to law enforcement and justice is at a record high – above 70 percent for the first time in County history.

In the human services portion of the budget, Executive Reardon announced a significant increase in County spending on pre-schooling for young children. The 2005 budget funds nearly 50 more slots in the Early Childhood Educational Assistance Program (ECEAP).

"I believe government should support families and parental responsibility," he said, acknowledging the presence of several children in the County's early childhood education program who had been invited to attend the speech. "ECEAP rewards parents who work hard and play by the rules. It is not a handout – it is a hand up. It gives

children a better start in life and it helps our parents by giving them additional tools to raise their children. This is an investment well worth making.”

The portion of the general fund budget allocated to non-law enforcement and justice areas of the general fund budget fell below 30 percent for the first time, to 29.1 percent. Included in that figure are allocations for Human Services, including the Snohomish Health District; Infrastructure and Development, which includes Planning and Development Services and Parks and Recreation; and, Financial and Central Services.

Executive Reardon also announced he is recommending the first increase in County solid waste disposal tip fees in 12 years – a \$5 per ton increase that works out to a 41 cents increase per household per month. The Executive is advocating the increase to begin to close a budget deficit in the Solid Waste budget that has developed over the past two years. It also gives County officials more time to examine how they want to proceed with a surplus property sale at the Cathcart Landfill.

Executive Reardon said that his 2005 budget is just one of several initiatives his administration is taking to make Snohomish County the most effective service delivery system in the entire nation.

“As soon as we – the Snohomish County Council and my administration – agree on a final product, my administration will begin working on a plan to improve efficiencies, coordination, service delivery and performance,” Executive Reardon said. “Because of this process, we have identified several areas where we can truly break down the silos and transform Snohomish County from its post-World War II industrial model into a more streamlined, networked and innovative operation.”

In 2005 Reardon said his administration would focus on enhancing *SnoStat*, an on-line program citizens can access to monitor performance of County programs; the creation of an internal Economic Development Team to target specific industry clusters for future growth; investment in new technologies to allow citizens greater access to County services; aligning County services with schools; and, lobbying for a expanded higher education opportunities, including a four-year university.

“In the best sense of the word, the 2005 budget is a foundation on which my administration and Snohomish County will build for 2006 – and for the years to come,” the Executive said.

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