

Media Advisory – Oct. 22, 2008

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Council scraps biennial budget, proceeds with layoffs

The Snohomish County Council voted 4-1 Wednesday in favor of an emergency ordinance returning the county to an annual budgeting process. The move followed a letter signed by the Council Chairman on Tuesday that told departments to begin notifying employees of potential layoffs.

Snohomish County Executive Aaron Reardon said Wednesday there's no reason a budget can't be finished by Nov. 5 now that the County Council has scrapped biennial budgeting.

In previous years, the Council has averaged 53 days to pass an annual budget following an executive's proposal. The Executive Recommended Budget was delivered 48 days ago on Sept. 4.

"There is no reason for paralysis and no benefit from delays," Reardon said Wednesday, echoing statements made last week in testimony before and letters to the Council.

Reardon again called for the budget to be passed following the Council's Nov. 5 budget hearing.

During the Council's public meeting last Thursday on budget revenues, Reardon advised Council to inject humanity into the process of making staffing cuts and to quickly pass a budget.

Following Reardon's recommendations, the Council told county departments Tuesday to move forward with reductions proposed in the Executive Recommended Budget and additional cuts proposed by departments at a 9-percent level. On Wednesday, departments began notifying employees in positions that will be eliminated under the Council proposal.

Reardon noted that until the budget is finalized, uncertainty will remain. "The council has taken an important first step, but I'm urging them to press forward quickly and pass the budget," Reardon said. "Our employees and county residents need to know with certainty what cuts in service will occur and how they will be impacted."

The current Council schedule provides for the budget to be adopted at the end of November.

In an Oct. 15 memo to Council, Reardon said, “The business-as-usual approach of waiting until late November to pass a budget – giving employees only a month’s notice of a potential layoff – is unacceptable.”

The county’s Human Resources Outplacement Services group has been activated to assist employees. However, some employees and elected department heads have been reluctant to participate in these services without direct action on the 2009 budget.

“Only with an approved 2009 budget can we begin to return normalcy and stability to our government operations and instill a renewed confidence in our county residents and employees,” Reardon said.

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