

Media Advisory – July 30, 2008

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Reardon vetoes \$163 million tax-increase plan *Executive says justice center levy high priced and too burdensome*

Snohomish County Executive Aaron Reardon vetoed Wednesday the County Council's proposal to institute a tax levy for the construction of a new justice center.

The veto comes following the council's recent 3-2 decision to place a tax levy proposal before voters on the November ballot. Under the council's Amended Ordinance 08-096, the county would raise more than \$163 million in general obligation bonds for the design, remodel, construction and equipping of a new justice center.

"Council should winnow down its proposal and allow more public input on what residents are willing to support before sending a ballot measure to voters," Reardon said. "This proposed tax hike is out of touch with the citizens of Snohomish County."

Specifically, Reardon questioned analysis on proposed staffing levels needed for a new center, indicating that council had offered no plan for funding new positions.

"This proposal assumes that staff operating in our justice center will grow by more than 387 FTEs or 52 percent by 2025," he wrote in his veto letter. "The council engaged in no discussion or debate on whether these assumptions are realistic, or how these staffing increases would be funded."

Reardon acknowledged Wednesday that the county's current justice system facilities are aging, but he urged members of the law and justice community to review current operations and to ensure that facilities are being used in the most effective and efficient way possible.

He also urged the council to take fiscally responsible steps in preparing a new ballot measure.

"The council must ask itself whether it makes sense to ask taxpayers to pay for a facility the county cannot afford to fill," he said.

Reardon said a tighter measure with a smaller burden on taxpayers would be a positive step toward improving the county's justice system.

"I thank all the members of the Justice Center Advisory Committee for their hard work and service," he said. "The Justice Center Master Plan is a good first step that should be refined to address the long-term needs of the Snohomish County law and justice community."

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