

Media Advisory – Oct. 29, 2008

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Department switch saves county jobs slated for cuts

Innovative and collaborative efforts between Snohomish County departments and the Executive's Office will save the jobs of nearly 25 county employees.

In May, the county's Planning and Development Services Department (PDS) expected mid-year cuts to claim nearly 25 positions. But through an agreement with the county's Public Works Department, those employees were loaned to Public Works to assist on a backlog of road and surface-water projects.

The program worked so well that the county intends to do it again during the 2009 budget cycle, County Executive Aaron Reardon said Wednesday.

"This is a positive for many individuals who initially were told they would lose their jobs," Reardon said. "It shows collaborative efforts by county departments, and it has garnered support from members of the County Council."

The county will move almost another 25 employees from PDS to Public Works through a mixture of new positions recommended by Reardon in his proposed budget and the creation of additional loaned positions. The County Council has approved the switch.

The move will allow Public Works to accelerate its transportation improvement program and mandated requirements for surface-water management. But more importantly, the switch will reduce the number of positions being cut from PDS in 2009 from 85 to 60.

"Layoffs are never easy and this is a way to reduce those numbers," said PDS Director Craig Ladiser. "We're excited to be able to save these jobs."

PDS has been hit exceptionally hard by the nationwide economic downturn. The county department funds the majority of its positions from permit fee revenues, but a lagging building industry has seen those revenues drop by about 40 percent.

The planning department is working with other county departments to see if more PDS employees can be moved to safer positions. The county airport is in negotiations for at least one position.

"We are proactively moving forward with assistance to employees impacted by cuts proposed in the 2009 budget," Reardon said. "This is one example of efforts that have led to additional stability and job security in two of the largest county departments."