

County Executive Aaron Reardon's 2006 budget focused on investing in the future

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*Executive's recommended budget balances
without a tax increase for the second straight year*

Snohomish County Executive Aaron Reardon today delivered a 2006 budget that focuses on investing in the County's future while respecting its past.

"I am proud to present a budget that is balanced and lives within its means," Executive Reardon said. **"It continues the trend we established last year of rebuilding our reserves and eliminating deficit spending. And, again, it does all of this without raising property taxes."**

"Today, we face the exciting opportunity to move forward and invest in a brighter future for the citizens of Snohomish County," Executive Reardon said. **"We will grow our tax base. We will invest our taxpayers' money wisely. Today, our government is leaner, but our County is stronger."**

The 2006 proposed budget totals \$589.5 million. The 2006 recommended General Fund budget is \$187 million, a \$13 million increase over the 2005 budget. The increase in revenue next year comes as a result of the strong job growth in Snohomish County this year, increased sales tax collections and a more favorable return on investments due to Federal Reserve Board interest rate policy changes.

Almost 90 percent of the additional general fund investments in the 2006 budget are directed towards public safety. In fact, public safety now makes up nearly 71 percent of the entire General Fund. **"The General Fund budgets for Human Services, the Health District and all other County services collectively use less than 30 percent of our General Fund resources,"** Executive Reardon said.

Executive Reardon's budget recommends fully-funding ten additional commissioned deputies to focus on combating neighborhood-level crime. The Executive's budget also takes the final steps necessary to establish the Department of Emergency Management as a new County agency, along with additional funding for the new 800-MHz communications system for first responders and laying the groundwork for a new Emergency Operations Center.

"This budget reaffirms our commitment to the safety of our public by increasing our investment in law enforcement and community security."

The 2006 budget submitted by Executive Reardon also focuses on investing in the future by:

- increasing capacity in the County's road system;
- directing funding towards habitat restoration and promoting a healthy environment;

- putting forward a biodiesel initiative that will improve the quality of our environment, reduce our dependence on foreign oil and enhance the economic vitality of our agricultural community;
- adding new parks, ball fields and open space in communities; and
- furthering an already-aggressive economic development agenda.

The 2006 Annual Capital Program for Transportation provides \$39 million for key transportation projects aimed at improving safety, increasing road capacity and shortening travel times. **“These road improvement projects will increase safety and capacity in critical corridors of need around the County,”** Executive Reardon said.

The budget also sets into action a plan that includes the construction of 14 habitat restoration projects, such as culvert replacements, and restoring native vegetation to miles of streams and riverbanks. **“We take pride in our unique quality of life,”** Executive Reardon said.

“It is our quality of life and our natural environment that makes Snohomish County one of the most desirable communities to live in all of Washington. In 2006, the County will install more than 100,000 native plants along streams and riverbanks as well as open 10.5 miles of stream access for fish migration.”

Approval of Executive Reardon’s proposed 2006 budget would also see the introduction of a new biodiesel initiative. **“We are boldly looking forward to the next generation of alternative fuels,”** Executive Reardon said. The initiative’s vision is to use biodiesel fuel grown on local Snohomish County farms. Study is currently underway on a test crop that, if successful, could help local agriculture remain viable.

“This biodiesel initiative builds on our recommendation last year to begin adding hybrid vehicles to the County’s fleet,” Executive Reardon said. **“Farmers win, the environment wins and we reduce our dependence on foreign oil.”**

The 2006 budget also invests in the future by dedicating funding for a variety of new parks around the County. **“This budget adds 16 new baseball, tee-ball and soccer fields to respond to our growing needs,”** Executive Reardon said. **“We are obligated to provide families with clean and safe parks, ball fields and open space.”** Next year will also see the opening of Paine Field Community Park, Lake Stevens Community Park, Martha Lake Park, Whitehorse Community Park and Willis Tucker Community Park.

Finally, Executive Reardon’s 2006 budget will see increased funding for economic development efforts, one of this Administration’s top priorities. **“To make Snohomish County more competitive, we will continue the progress we started last year to reduce red tape, streamline regulations and improve environmental outcomes,”** Executive Reardon said.

The 2006 budget will continue investing in the Agriculture Action Plan, a result of recommendations from nearly 350 farmers, ranchers and growers that attended the County’s Focus on Farming Conference last November. This budget will also allow the County to work more closely with the local biotech and life sciences industries, while also dedicating assistance

to attracting new businesses and growing the operations of existing businesses in the community.

In addition, the 2006 budget is just as much about respecting our past – investing in those who made this community what it is today – by increasing funding for senior centers, veterans and services aimed at this County’s diverse populations. All three of these populations will see a dramatic rise in numbers over the course of the next 20 years.

“We are focusing on tailoring services to our citizens’ changing needs,” Executive Reardon said.

Executive Reardon’s proposed budget for 2006 would restore funding for senior centers that was cut by the Council last year. **“I am restoring that funding again this year because I believe it is critical to the future of our community,”** Executive Reardon said.

Snohomish County remains home to a large number of military veterans as well. The 2000 Census found that nearly 66,000 veterans called Snohomish County home. That number is estimated to have increased by 5 percent in the past five years. That number will continue to rise as our men and women serving in the armed forces return home from Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and Iraq.

“We have a moral obligation to serve those who have served our country,” Executive Reardon said. **“We will continue to explore opportunities to better serve those veterans who have served us so well.”**

The County is also seeing tremendous growth in its diverse populations. Snohomish County ranks third in the state for minority population growth and is within the top 5 percent of all counties nationwide in minority population growth. By the year 2020, it is projected that 15 to 20 percent of all County residents will speak English as a second language or not at all.

“We have a responsibility to ensure that all residents of our County have access to vital services and the opportunity to succeed as a part of our community,” Executive Reardon said. **“Embracing our diversity will lead to countless opportunities for success.”**

This year’s budget will again include an Executive-recommended spending lid. **“Last year, the Council chose not to endorse a similar proposal that I submitted to them,”** Executive Reardon said. **“If the County Council does not believe that the strategies included in this proposal are the ones they can support, I invite them to put forward an alternative of their own.”**

The Executive’s 2006 recommended budget and the text of his budget speech can be viewed in its entirety at: www.co.snohomish.wa.us.

For additional information, please contact:

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