

*For immediate release – Friday, May 21, 2004*

# Reardon exercises first veto of his administration

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*Snohomish County Executive vetoes ordinance that strips citizens' and cities' role in Snohomish County Tomorrow*

Snohomish County Executive Aaron Reardon today issued the first veto of his administration, rejecting a County Council-approved Ordinance that flies in the face of the state's Growth Management Act by severely restricting citizens' and cities' roles on a county-wide planning board.

The Ordinance, 03-069, was approved by the County Council on a straight party line 3 to 2 vote on May 5.

"I am taking this action because I believe the relationship established between the County and its cities over the past decade provides a foundation for the future," Reardon said. "For more than a decade Snohomish County Tomorrow (SCT) has allowed the County and its cities to cooperatively work out their differences on key growth management and planning issues.

"This ordinance undermines this important relationship."

Reardon continued, "This ordinance is also contrary to the state Growth Management Act and I cannot support legislation that is unlawful." The County Executive, referring to several recent cases in which the Central Puget Sound Growth Hearings Board has overturned unlawful ordinances passed by the County Council, added, "Clearly, this is not the venue to challenge state law."

In an April 8 letter to County Councilmember Jeff Sax, the most outspoken backer of the Ordinance, Reardon wrote that he could not support the changes to SCT as proposed and wanted to negotiate with the Council to avoid a veto. Reardon's offer was dismissed.

"I do not wield this veto lightly," Reardon said, noting that it comes within his first five months in office. "I am very disappointed it had to come to this. I offered to compromise very early in this process, but the majority on Council did not want to negotiate."

Reardon noted that the Ordinance itself was approved by the County Council without any support from cities. In fact, 10 cities, including Mill Creek, Everett, Marysville, Monroe, Mountlake Terrace, Woodway, Snohomish, Bothell, Arlington and Edmonds, offered critical comments or opposed the Ordinance outright.

Reardon said that the County's ability to plan for and accommodate growth in the next decade demands active participation from its citizens and cities: "We need to strengthen the partnership between cities and the County - not destroy it. "This ordinance gives the County Council unilateral authority to dictate growth management and planning decisions and force them on our cities."

In the veto message to Snohomish County Council Chairman John Koster, Reardon wrote that the ordinance:

- Is contrary to the state Growth Management Act;
- Would impair the effective delivery of services to citizens; and,
- Is contrary to the spirit of cooperation and policy direction that has guided growth management in Snohomish County for the past 10 years.

"The timing of this ordinance could not be worse from cities' standpoint," Reardon said. "It comes at a time when the County's population and employment base is shifting dramatically toward them. Which begs a question: Why is the County Council majority insisting on a measure that so harms our relations with the cities?"

"After all, city residents are going to be asked to bear a large percentage of the burden of growth during the next 10 years. City taxpayers are going to be asked to pay for infrastructure and other services. So it's essential that cities have a strong hand in determining growth management policies that decide where people live and where jobs are created in this County."

In order to override a veto, an ordinance must have the support of four County Council members. Republicans John Koster, Jeff Sax and Gary Nelson voted for the Ordinance. Democrats Kirke Sievers and David Gossett opposed the Ordinance.

Reardon continues to extend his hand in partnership.

"I believe we can work out our differences before I have use my veto and I am committed to doing that," he said.

In twelve years as County Executive, Reardon's predecessor, Bob Drewel only vetoed three ordinances. Drewel's first veto came in 1995. It was a "friendly veto" at the request of the majority of the County Council after an error was noted in the 1995 budget. The last two vetoes came in 2002 and 2003, the last two years of his third term. These were the first two years of the current Republican majority on the County Council. In December of 2003 Drewel did not sign the Council's budget, writing in his budget message that he was concerned with the current climate on the County Council.

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