

# Snohomish County Executive **AARON REARDON**



**Priorities in Action**



**Latest News & Upcoming Events**

**Friday August 15, 2008**

[www.snoco.org](http://www.snoco.org)

## **Reardon defends courthouse veto**

*Op-Ed printed in the Everett Herald, August 14, 2008*

*By Aaron Reardon*

My decision to veto the County Council's \$163 million property tax increase was easy. The \$163 million property tax proposal to ask voters to pay for a new government building was simply too large, too expensive and ill-planned.

Public officials have an obligation to be thoughtful and use care to protect the public's money from poor investments. Unfortunately, history demonstrates a pattern of decisions that have placed an unnecessary burden on the backs of Snohomish County taxpayers.

Several events in recent years lead me to this conclusion:

- In 2004, the County Council purchased more than 200 acres in South Everett known as the Cathcart property for \$31 million. The council purchased this property with the hopes of selling it to a developer to make a windfall profit. After five years property values have dropped, the property still has not been sold and there is no prospective buyer. While the intent of this purchase was understandable, it is costing taxpayers more than \$100,000 a month in loan payments.

- Beginning in 2004 the County Council directed the Snohomish Health District to spend its reserves for ongoing programs against the warnings of the health officer, Dr. Ward Hinds. Dr. Hinds informed the council that this action would lead to devastating cuts in front-line public health services by 2009. As promised, the district is facing a \$4

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### **How are we doing?**

Did you know that you can track how well the County is meeting its performance goals?

The SnoStat system tracks how well the County is delivering services, the costs of those services, and the efficiency and effectiveness of service

million shortfall, significant layoffs and elimination of public health services.

- In 2005, the County Council voted to increase its pay and the pay of other county elected officials by more than 16 percent. I vetoed this proposal because it was out of line with the cost-of-living adjustments being given to front-line county service providers.

- In 2006, the County Council approved a budget that increased staffing levels and annual spending to unsustainable levels. Despite warnings from my office and county financial experts that projected revenues could not support their spending plans, the council passed the budget unanimously and without my signature.

- In 2007, in the face of a cooling national economy and slowing revenue projections, the County Council again added more county employees and increased county spending to unsustainable levels. We cautioned the council to take a more measured approach that would not leave our financial house vulnerable to a slowing economy and a declining housing market. The council passed this budget unanimously over my objections and without my signature. Just as with the Health District, unsustainable spending at the direction of the County Council will require deep cuts that were entirely predictable and avoidable.

- During 2008, despite quarterly financial meetings that consistently showed a slowing economy and reductions in revenue, the County Council has added more staff, which increases the projected deficit. To curtail this uncontrollable spending, I have vetoed legislation adding more staff only to have the council override this veto, unanimously. And, I imposed a hiring freeze, restrictions on spending and out-of-state travel for every department, only to have the County Council weaken these cost-saving measures through an emergency ordinance.

This summer, as the national economy slows and the cost of food and gas have soared, people are spending less; meanwhile, Snohomish County government faces a \$9 million projected shortfall and the County Council proposes a \$163 million property tax increase for a new government building.

delivery.

Simply visit our [SnoStat website](#).

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Or, [send me an email](#).

And please be sure to [visit me on the web!](#)

Sincerely,



Aaron Reardon

The courthouse proposal continues a "money is no object" mentality that is out of touch with the residents of Snohomish County. The building size assumes that the staff operating in our courthouse will grow by more than 387 employees, or 52 percent, by 2025. This projected increase represents a rate of government growth nearly twice the projected population growth in our county's Comprehensive Plan. It is unrealistic from a planning perspective, and from a financial perspective.

As your countywide elected executive, I take seriously the responsibility vested in me by the public. I believe this government should treat our taxpaying public with respect and we should never ask for more unless it is absolutely necessary or in time of an emergency. This proposal is too big, too expensive, ill-planned and out of touch with the taxpaying public.

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### **County's DEM urges wildfire prevention measures**

Recent hot weather combined with dry land has increased the threat of urban wildfires this weekend, especially throughout Snohomish County and the Puget Sound, says Snohomish County's Department of Emergency Management (DEM).

DEM is encouraging individuals and families to take steps to prevent fires near their home and when they're out. Following the "Three C's" of "campfires, catalytic converters and cigarettes" can be enough to stop wildfires from happening here.

Out-of-control campfires can be the culprit behind a wildfire. Residents are asked first to be sure campfires are allowed, and then they are encouraged to take precautions for having one. Keep fires small and be sure to have water nearby should a campfire expand beyond control.

It only takes one spark to start a wildfire, and catalytic converters on automobiles and motorcycles can generate enough heat to start one. Always park in designated parking areas, and when you are parked, turn off the engine as soon as possible.

Cigarettes also are a leading cause of roadside wildfires. Tossing butts out of car windows is illegal and fines are stiff. Properly dispose of cigarettes after making sure they are no longer smoldering.

“Simple preventive measures can mean the difference between a dangerous fire and a safe weekend,” said John Pennington, DEM’s director. “Working together with neighbors to reduce the threat is also a good step to take.”

### **Going Beyond the Three C’s**

Homeowners and business owners also can take steps to minimize damage should a wildfire occur in the area.

The roof and exterior structure of dwellings should be constructed of non-combustible or fire-resistant materials such as tile, slate, sheet iron, aluminum, brick or stone. Wood siding, cedar shakes, exterior wood paneling and other highly combustible materials should be treated with fire retardant chemicals.

#### **Other steps include:**

- Clean roof surfaces and gutters of pine needles, leaves, branches to avoid accumulation of flammable materials.
- Remove tree limbs extending within 10 feet of any stove opening or chimney.
- Maintain a screen constructed of non-flammable material over the flue opening of every chimney or stovepipe. Mesh openings of the screen should not exceed 1/2 inch.
- Landscape vegetation should be spaced so that fire cannot jump to surrounding vegetation.
- Store gasoline and propane tanks in approved containers away from occupied buildings.
- Garden hoses should be connected to outlets for quick use during a fire.
- Each home should have at least two different entrance and exit routes.

- Always call 911 when spotting a wildfire.

For further information on urban wildfire prevention, please contact the Snohomish County Department of Emergency Management at 425-388-5060 or [dem@snoco.org](mailto:dem@snoco.org).

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 **Reardon: Council hiring freeze welcome,**  
*expresses concern about Council weakening other spending controls*

Snohomish County Executive Aaron Reardon welcomed Wednesday's hiring freeze passed by the County Council but criticized members for not taking action sooner.

The Council ordinance follows steps enacted in June by the Executive's Office and Finance Department to stop county hiring. Since then, the Executive's Office has been successful in keeping open more than 160 county positions, saving money to make up a projected \$9 million revenue shortfall.

"I'm glad they now see the need for a hiring freeze, but they could have come alongside this office in June when we asked for their support," Reardon said. "We've spoken for months about the importance of freezing positions and shoring up finances for next year's budget. Wednesday's council action comes a little late."

On June 29, the Finance Department ordered county departments to gain its approval first for new positions. The County Council moved such authority from the Executive's Office to the Finance Department in 2007. Finance has mostly limited its approval of new hires to uniformed officers.

Reardon followed the Finance Department's steps July 25 with an Executive Order, which also put a stop to out-of-state travel, multiple county employees attending the same conference and other cost-saving steps.

The emergency ordinance passed Wednesday by Council weakens the hiring freeze and many of the cost-saving steps initiated by Reardon.

It also fails to take into account new staff positions created by the Council after the Finance Department requested a hiring freeze. Council overrode Reardon's veto of a funding package to create four new Council analyst positions, three of which were filled this summer.

"I would like to think the Council is serious about its efforts to curb county spending, but it's hard to see that based on previous actions," Reardon said. "I hope today's decision is a step toward the direction the Executive's Office already is taking."

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### **Fair picks winner in storefront decoration contest**

John L. Scott's Monroe office was selected as this year's Best of Show for its storefront decorations related to the 2008 Evergreen State Fair theme "Celebrating 100 Years of Fun . . . That's What It's All About!"

The Evergreen State Fair revived an old tradition in 2006 where local businesses decorate their storefronts to the Fair's theme for the year. This year, participating businesses were asked to highlight the Hokey Pokey using Fair mascots from the past six years.

The John L. Scott office, located at 14815 Chain Lake Road, was selected as "Best in Show" while the Monroe Chamber of Commerce off Main Street won a First Place ribbon. Also receiving honors were The Buzz Inn Steakhouse (Second Place) at Highway 2 and the Monroe Post Office (Third Place), located near Main Street. Judging was based on originality, creativity and use of theme.

As the grand prize winner, John L. Scott will be honored during the 2008 Evergreen State Fair Opening Day Luncheon at noon Thursday, Aug. 21, and will receive the winner's trophy during the Fair's Opening Day Ceremony at 2 p.m. that same day on the Comcast Courtyard Stage. The company's name will be added to a perpetual plaque displayed year round at the fairgrounds.

This year's fair begins Aug. 21 and runs through Sept. 1. Tickets are available now for individual shows. For more information on events, go to [www.evergreenfair.org](http://www.evergreenfair.org).

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## **Movies in the Park continue through August 28**

Don't miss "Evan Almighty" on Thursday, August 14 as Movies in the Park at Willis Tucker Community Park continues.

Sundquist Homes, in partnership with Snohomish County Parks, sponsors the summer movie series held at Willis Tucker Community Park and the Evergreen State Fairgrounds through Aug. 28.

Open seating begins at 7:30 p.m. for each movie at Willis Tucker, and seating is on the grass. Families and individuals should bring low-back lawn chairs and blankets for comfort.

Admission to all movies in the series is free. Popcorn and soda are available for purchase.

Only 2 weeks. Starting times are approximate.

### **Evan Almighty**

Rated PG-13

8:45 p.m., Aug. 21

### **Happy Feet** (rescheduled from Aug. 14)

Rated PG

9:30 p.m., Aug. 28

For more information visit [www.snocoparks.com](http://www.snocoparks.com).

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## **Bob Strickland Group to jazz up final concert on the plaza**

Enjoy classic Jazz standards at the final Music on the Plaza concert series with The Bob Strickland Group, Wednesday, August 20th. The concert runs from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. in downtown Everett.

The lunchtime concerts are free to the public and are located at the campus amphitheater located at Rockefeller Avenue and Wall Street. Burgers and Brats hot off the grill, kettle corn and fresh cut flowers also will be available during the concert.

For more information, contact Wendy Becker, Cultural and Economic Development Officer, at 425-388-3186 or visit [www.snohomishcountyarts.org](http://www.snohomishcountyarts.org).

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