



Snohomish County

“The Future We Choose”

Dave Somers, County Executive

Economic Alliance of Snohomish County

Xfinity Arena Conference Room

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- **Thank you for those kind remarks, Mr. Governor.** And thank you for all of the work you’ve done to support Snohomish County. You have been a very good partner.
- It’s **good to see so many friends and colleagues.**
- Before I make a few remarks, **I would like to show you a video** that we are debuting today. Lights please!
- [Show video]
- What do you think? It is one of our many tools we’ll use to help put Snohomish County in the spotlight. If we aren’t selling the county, no one else will.

- Edmonds fish story
 - Building artificial reef in Edmonds in the early seventies.
 - Sank bundles of car tires.

- Went down next day and little Rockfish had taken up residence. Staring me in the eye...
 - I rolled the tires to new location....kicking up clouds of sand and silt.
 - Those little fish followed me.
 - He had found a good place to live and was not going to lose it.
 - We had built a good place to live for that fish.
 - He knew a good thing when he saw it and was not going to give up on it.
 - Each and every day I ask myself: What can we do to make Snohomish County better?
 - Snohomish County government.
 - Snohomish County as a place to live and work and play.
 - How do we together create the future – our home – THE FUTURE that we choose and create together. Not the future that happens to us.
- Three areas I want to talk about
 - Economic Development
 - Transportation and infrastructure
 - Fiscal health

Economic Development

- We have a **diverse history, a diverse economy, and a diverse future.**
 - Ancestral homeland of Tulalip and Stillaguamish Tribes.
 - Beautiful place.

- Ivar was still singing about his acres of clams.
 - 405 was two lanes.
 - The Boeing 747 plant was new.
 - Everett was dominated by smoking towers of the paper mills.
 - At Tulalip there was a little smoke shop and a rickety old wooden bridge over Quilceda Creek.
 - The flats south of Marysville were covered with strawberry fields.
 - Log trucks with giant logs still dominated our roads.
 - The river and estuary were a sea of log rafts, representing jobs and life of hard work.
- Yesterday you may have seen the Seattle Times article
 - Snohomish County is the 2nd fastest growing county in the nation, right behind Pierce County.
 - **We now live in a globalized world**, where you will be left behind if you aren't competing. As a region, we need to do better in the competition for global investment dollars and business opportunities.
 - Our economy runs the gamut from high tech aerospace to equally high tech but more traditional agriculture.
 - Our job as public officials is to make sure we have planned ahead well enough to maintain our diversity and expand opportunities where we can.
 - We have a well-trained work force, a base of good jobs, and the best quality of life. Our region stacks up very well against any in the world.

- Snohomish County is expecting an additional **200,000 people to move here over the next twenty years.**
- That means **more people on roads, more pressure on the housing market, more people needing good jobs.**
- **We must prepare for that future, the future we choose, or be subject to the future that happens to us.**
- As of January, the **unemployment rate in the county was 4.2%.** We are second behind only King County in the state.
- If we want to maintain that level of employment, we must be looking ahead to create jobs that will sustain our current levels of economic activity.
- Of course there **are significant uncertainties.** Washington, D.C. has turned into a nearly unrecognizable place. We can't predict what may come next. Massive cuts to HUD or HHS? Trade wars? This uncertainty makes it more difficult to plan ahead.
- Also, we are seeing a **shift in the aerospace industry** with the development of systems that are moving much work to automated construction rather than human workers. We expect some of our major employers to continue to shed jobs over the coming years.
- In other words, we have our work cut out for us. We must do all we can to encourage economic growth, foreign investment, tourism, and jobs.
- All this makes it even more imperative that we work together in partnership within the county, the region and the state.
- Last year, I launched an **economic development initiative.** We established nine specific sectors and assigned a lead within Snohomish County government for each sector. These sectors span the range from:

- Timber, fisheries and agriculture
- Energy and clean tech
- Military and defense
- Aerospace
- Education, life sciences and global health
- Technology/trade/business
- Recreation and tourism
- Energy and sustainability
- Arts and culture
- This initiative gives us the ability to target specific areas of opportunity.
 - Identify county role in development of each of these sectors.
 - Identify staff within the county to develop strategies around each sector.
 - Promote these sectors.
 - Partner with others locally, nationally and globally.
- But we also have other areas of job creation and opportunity, particularly among small businesses.
- **In a few weeks, we will be holding a regional economic development summit**, in conjunction with the County Executives from King and Pierce County, bringing together chambers of commerce from across the Tri-county region. These are primarily chambers from our diverse communities, those anchors of the local economy and engines for employment. Opportunities for collaboration and innovation don't happen just by chance. We want to facilitate those discussions.
- We are looking for ways to make our county and region more competitive globally.
- One other area that has been important to the county is the prospect of finally having **commercial air service at Paine Field.** I

know that some of the neighbors have legitimate concerns about increased air and road traffic. We are committed to ensuring any commercial air service meets the highest possible standards and minimizes impacts. Ultimately, the two dozen or so flights into and out of Paine Field each day will have a tremendous effect on our ability to attract businesses and expand local opportunity.

- **Arlington Manufacturing and Industrial Center:** We have worked hard in partnership with our cities and our regional partners to promote the designation of a new manufacturing and industrial center around the Arlington Airport. This proposal is winding its way through the regional process, but I am certain of its success. This makes all the sense in the world from so many perspectives:
 - **Close to I-5.**
 - **Between major population centers of Arlington, Marysville and Everett.**
 - **Served by rail and air.**
 - **Natural north/south regional growth pattern.**

- **Southwest Urban Growth Area corridor:** We are developing both transportation and growth strategies for the SW UGA.
 - **Major growth area.**
 - **Legacy transportation problems.**

Transportation and Freight Mobility

- Two other areas that affect our economic potential and quality of life are transportation and freight mobility.

- One of the signal achievements of last year was **the passage of the ST3 plan**. This system will transform how we move people around central Puget Sound.
- Along with Paul Roberts and Dave Earling, I am proud to have fought hard to **ensure Paine Field was included in the final route**. There was significant resistance to the plan on the Sound Transit Board, since it added costs, but we felt strongly that our largest employment base demanded access to our regional light rail system.
- It is critical that the future light rail system in Snohomish County serves our future needs, not just be a way to stream people into Seattle.
- We were successful in **securing key stations along the light rail route, and a provisional station at 99 and Airport Road**. One of our tasks will be to work hard to make that provisional station a reality.
- While some have wondered why we are putting stations in some areas that aren't yet developed, we are planning for a future where **transit oriented development** will help us focus some of our density along the light rail corridor. That is planning for the growth centers of the future.
- We also had to fight hard to **shorten the timeline for the Link Light Rail line to Everett**. We quickly executed an agreement between Snohomish County, Lynnwood, and Everett to ensure expedited coordination for land use permitting.
- As Chair of ST's Board, I am initiating an effort along with CEO Peter Rogoff to streamline and improve ST business practices. ST is a large agency poised to get even larger. It is critical that we improve business practice, streamline process, eliminate wasted time and effort, and improve customer service.

- We must ensure that every precious, hard-earned tax dollar be spent wisely.
- I have also launched an **initiative to address congestion relief and pedestrian safety in the county.**
- There are too many choke points throughout the county. We will partner with the State wherever and whenever we can to finish some of the critical points in our county including 522, Highway 9, and the much-needed but very expensive Highway 2 trestle.
- We are also planning for our **East/West corridors in the SW UGA** to ensure we are preparing solutions for these crucial, congested links.
- For the Maltby area, we are planning for the future.
- We will be proposing ongoing investments in pedestrian safety throughout the county.

Fiscal Responsibility and Financial Health

- I believe strongly in being accountable and maintaining budget discipline.
- **The county has a systemic problem because expenses outpace revenues.** To do the same things next year that we did this, we'd have to increase our budget by at least 5%. However, our revenues don't usually grow by that much. Therefore, every year, we have to find savings. Since 76% of our general fund budget is for law and justice agencies, including our sheriff's department and corrections, they necessarily bear the brunt of the cuts.
- **The budget we passed for this year was a responsible and appropriate response to the needs of Snohomish County.** We made public safety a priority, invested in necessary infrastructure, both physical and technological, and we increased reserves. The

county budget is on far sounder footing today than it was a year ago.

- Also, **our budget process was open and transparent**. We didn't try to hide anything. We just set about making the best decisions possible. I am proud that we had a unanimous vote for the final budget in the county council and will try hard to make that happen again this year. Thank you Council members for your partnership in this budget process.
- I believe we are nearing resolution on the **courthouse project**.
- I have sent a proposal to the County Council to renovate and add to the existing courthouse.
- Our renovation will save the taxpayers of Snohomish County about \$80 million and extend the useful life of the existing courthouse by 50 years. This decision is the right one in light of our finances and the right one for our future.
- I am asking our Council to approve this recommendation.
- To the Council I say, "Please do your due diligence but act soon. Delay is money. Interest rates are increasing, construction costs are escalating. More delay means a more expensive project."
- One area of reform that I will continue to champion is adapting **LEAN principles** into the county. I launched an initiative—**STEP for Service Technology Excellence Program**—and we are starting to see some results.
- Our reform efforts have also had some positive impacts on our economic development agenda.
- **We have been able to consolidate offices**, to make us more efficient, improve processes, and cut red tape.
- Another example of an early success is that we have expedited the final plat process by more than 50%. We continue to make more services available online and next week will roll out a new

streamlined single family residential application process for basic permits. This will save folks from having to make unnecessary trips to county offices. These types of process improvements make the county both more efficient and more responsive to community needs.

- As part of this process, **we are making customer service our top priority**
 - **The public are our customers and our bosses.**
 - **We will be rolling out elements of our customer service initiative over the next year, and we're sure that those who use our services will notice a difference for the better.**

Closing Remarks

- There are many topics I have not even touched on that are of vital importance to our citizens and our communities.
- I wanted to give you a few highlights and leave time for questions.
- I am happy to discuss anything that is on your mind.
- We have a rich and wonderful past we should remember and learn from.
- We should all be grateful for the gifts we enjoy today as one of the most prosperous and beautiful places in the world.
- We must Plan and create the FUTURE we CHOOSE – good jobs, healthy communities, local government focused on public service, and a healthy environment.
- This FUTURE WE CHOOSE can only happen if we work together in partnership within the county, the region and the state.

- Like that little Rockfish, we have a good home and we should make sure we don't lose it....

Thank you

- Thank you for listening. It's always a pleasure to see you.
- **Now, I'm happy to take your questions.**