



NEWS RELEASE

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Council Concludes First Briefing Priorities Of Government

[Everett, Wash.] The Snohomish County Council held its first public meeting today on priority based budgeting. Presenters included State Auditor Brian Sonntag and Bob Williams of the Evergreen Freedom Foundation.

“The Council would like to thank Auditor Sonntag and Bob Williams for outlining the priority based procedure for us, and also to those elected official who participated, including Sheriff Bart, Prosecuting Attorney Janice Ellis and County Clerk Pam Daniels,” stated Council Chair John Koster. “While this process has been around for sometime, Snohomish County will be the first local government in Washington State to undertake this form of budgeting.”

Auditor Sonntag cautioned the group as they move forward to use a system of cooperation and respect in order to be successful and to look to other elected officials, department heads and front line employees for input. Both Williams and Sonntag stated that during the state’s priority forming stages, some groups were left out of the process, including front-line state employees, the Legislature and the general public.

“Citizens expect and demand more than a closed door meeting to decide the future of our county,” state Councilman Jeff Sax. “We will work to ensure that we are inclusive as we move forward, talking to the public, department heads and elected officials making our priorities based shift completely transparent.”

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The audience of nearly sixty was comprised equally of members of the public with county employees, elected county and city officials. Upon completion of Auditor Sonntag and Bob Williams' formal presentation, the group compiled a list of suggestions for priorities within the county. Their priorities included:

- Public Safety
- Business friendly Environment / jobs
- Reduce Crime
- Manage Growth
- Public Health
- Transportation
- Efficient Government
- Housing
- Waste Management
- Airport
- Technology
- Parks
- Justice
- Frontline Security

When asked to narrow the list to three top priorities, the group chose: public safety transportation, and jobs.

Bob Williams provided the group with examples and cautions from other states and cities where priority based budgeting has been implemented and distributed a copy of "*The Stewardship Project*," which provides an overview of the priority based process. Limited copies of the manual are available at the County Council or online at: <http://www.ewfa.org/pdfs/stewardship2003.pdf>

"Priority based budgeting meetings are more important than ever," concluded Councilman Gary Nelson. "With the reduction of county revenues coming from court decisions coupled with initiative ballot measures, there is a need to plan reductions in some expected services of county government and to inform the public accordingly."

The council will next hear from Peter Hutchinson of the Public Interest Group on April 7th at 1:30 PM. That meeting will be open to the public and will be held in the Council's Jackson Board room on the 6th floor of the County Administration Building.

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