

PRESS RELEASE



Snohomish County

County Council

19 Nov. 2007

Dave Gossett
John Koster
Gary Nelson
Kirke Sievers
Dave Somers

2008 County Budget Approved

This budget is about leadership, says Gossett

The Snohomish County Council unanimously approved a \$672.9 million budget for 2008 that fully funds county programs and obligations without borrowing money to balance the budget. Next year's budget also includes a one percent reduction to the general fund property tax levy recommended by County Executive Aaron Reardon. The cut is estimated to save owners of a \$300,000 house or condo approximately \$2.04 next year.

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Earlier, the council also unanimously approved Councilman Dave Somers' motion reaffirming that the county will continue to abide by the limits set forth in the Initiative 747 – limiting property tax increases to one percent. The state Supreme Court recently ruled the initiative unconstitutional.

"This budget is about leadership," said Council Chair Dave Gossett, "mature, thoughtful leadership that provides workable solutions to complex problems."

The council's budget includes a fast-track, \$130 million construction program that focuses road and pedestrian safety improvements in the county's most congested areas. "But as important as this step is, it is only a first step," said Gossett. "A deficit of over \$300 million in unfunded transportation needs still remains." Funding was also added for the council's neighborhood improvement program, first created in 2001.

"County financial resources may be limited, but our resourcefulness should not be. Just the opposite."

Dave Gossett, Council Chair

"The council was very pragmatic in addressing the executive's budget requests," said Councilman Gary Nelson, "and we did not fall into the trap of spending money on his 'item of the week' proposals that can have serious long term financial impacts."

"This budget is conservative," said Councilman John Koster. "We avoided new 'bow-wave' programs that would have created financial obligations into the future."

The council created a separate Office of Security, administered by the Sheriff's Office. The original proposal was "top heavy with administrators," said Gossett. "Instead, the council has adopted a plan today that eliminates administrative positions in favor of more security marshals."

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“Instead of borrowing more money to pay a \$1.8 million loan payment, as proposed, the council found funds for the debt payment within existing revenues,” said Council Vice-Chair Dave Somers.

Since the late 1990s, the council has annually established an 11 percent reserve policy, one of the highest in Washington, said Gossett. “Such a high reserve level was what allowed Snohomish County to weather the recession following the 9/11 attack. And today, in line with the council’s prudent approach to budgeting, we are securing this important policy in the county code – in the law.”

The budget also set aside \$11 million dollars towards the construction of a Regional Justice Center. “Until today,” said Gossett, “the only plan for paying for this important need was to increase property taxes. This council is committed to continuing to look for ways to reduce or eliminate having to ask the voters to raise their property taxes.”

“I was delighted,” said Koster. “After six years of trying, we did get a one percent property tax cut.’

Gossett said the council was able to approve the one percent general fund property tax cut because the council’s past fiscal management had “set the stage for the strong financial state of the county today. We have created the financial environment that gave the County Executive an opportunity to offer a 1% cut in the general fund property tax.”

As has been the practice for many years, the council raised the county road tax by one percent, as allowed by law. County road taxes are typically used to match state and federal construction grants. The increase would raise an additional \$477,515 (about a \$3.30 increase for a \$300,000 house or condo). The county road fund tax applies only to property in the unincorporated county.

“Leadership requires making tough decisions that are right, not merely popular,” said Gossett. “This is not an easy decision,” he said, “and it is one that may not be popular, but it is the right choice for the county. This is leadership.”

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