



Snohomish County Council

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Council Meets Commitments in 2010 Budget

The Snohomish County Council on Monday adopted a 2010 budget that makes strategic choices to preserve essential county services and to begin rebuilding depleted reserves. County Council Chair Mike Cooper said the Council's adopted budget is about "commitment to fiscal integrity, commitment to our employees, and commitment to serving the needs of county residents during this difficult and trying economic recession."

In June the Council adopted a motion identifying "Strengthening Our Economy and Preserving Essential County Services" as the overall theme for the 2010 budget. The motion established priorities for the budget including the preservation of jobs, preservation of essential services, protection of vulnerable citizens, strengthening the economic health of the economy, addressing long-term transportation needs, and providing solutions for public health. "The budget adopted today addresses all of these issues and more without raising taxes," added Cooper.

The Council's budget included reductions equivalent to five unpaid furlough days for many county staff members – a significant reduction from the 15 unpaid days included in the Executive's proposed budget. It also asks the Executive to negotiate five furlough days with all county labor organizations. "It is irresponsible to try to balance the budget on the backs of hardworking county staff that provide the services that so many of our residents rely upon" said Councilmember Brian Sullivan. "We're all in this together and staff are doing their part, but we have to be more creative and find other options for providing services."

Councilmembers and staff identified several options, including bonding for the purchase of a new Emergency Operations Center building rather than using limited resources to pay cash, which helped achieve the reduction in furlough days while maintaining funding for critical services such as public safety. "We looked under every rock to find even small amounts that we could use to continue providing services without raising taxes," said Councilmember Dave Somers. "I think the Council and our staff have shown what can be done when you approach a problem with an open mind and don't just look for easy answers."

No department was spared during this difficult budget year, and reductions were made to the Parks Department and to other popular programs. "These were difficult decisions, but we had to keep the

focus on providing services that are essential to the health and safety of Snohomish County residents,” said Councilmember John Koster. “When the economy improves we can review funding for these valuable programs, but for now we simply can’t afford them,” he added.

In its adopted budget the Council acknowledged the changing landscape of county government resulting from the financial downturn and from potential annexations. Recognizing that “business as usual” cannot persist in recessionary periods such as this, the budget provides for the creation of a Council-led work group in 2010 to consider restructuring options for county government including the consolidation or elimination of departments. “The reductions in force due to budget cuts over the past two years, combined with a redefined focus on essential services offers a window of opportunity to look critically at how we do business,” said Councilmember Dave Gossett. He continued, “We need to use this situation to make sure we are providing services in the most efficient and cost effective manner possible.”

Chair Cooper also noted that the Council’s adopted budget returns more money to the county’s reserves than the budget proposed by the Executive. “We have to begin rebuilding our reserves to maintain our fiscal health. The County has a long history of fiscal prudence that provided strong reserves that have helped us weather this recession in much better shape than some of our neighboring counties. We need to continue on that path and exercise financial discipline for the future, and the budget we adopted today is the first step.”

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