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Longtime Snohomish County Public Works Director to Retire at the End of the Year

Steve Thomsen has worked in public service for 43 years, 33 with the county

EVERETT, Wash., December 4, 2019 – Snohomish County Public Works Director Steve Thomsen has served under five different county executives during his 33 years with the county. He has guided the department through many natural emergencies such as the State Route 530 Oso landslide and seasonal flooding events, and provided the leadership to complete hundreds of public works projects since becoming director a decade and a half ago. Thomsen said that he will miss the challenges and the people the most as he announced his retirement to be the end of the year.

“Steve Thomsen has been a tremendously successful leader for Snohomish County,” Snohomish County Executive Dave Somers said. “The number one issue for most for our residents is traffic and congestion. Steve has been dogged in his determination to find state and federal resources to supplement our local money, giving us more opportunities to improve the safety and capacity of our transportation network. Steve will be missed.”

Thomsen oversees one of the largest county departments with more than 600 full time employees spread over five divisions. He said that his proudest accomplishments are helping to move the county’s transportation system into the 21st century, creating a flood warning system, working to protect the county’s estuaries and recover natural salmon populations, and the acquisition of the intermodal site in Everett where a half a million tons of garbage and recycling is transported to Eastern Washington each year for disposal and energy production.

“Hiring the right people is incredibly important, and I have been extremely lucky because our staff is as good as it gets,” said Thomsen, who has worked in public service for 43 years. “I have a lot I want to do after the first of the year and I leave with no regrets.”

In retrospect, Thomsen noted that when he was hired there were only two-lane county roads and “non-motorized transportation” was not in the staff’s vocabulary.

“Snohomish County Public Works has grown into a regionally recognized department thanks to Steve’s leadership and forward thinking,” Snohomish County Engineer and Deputy Director Doug McCormick said. “It is going to be tough to lose his leadership, knowledge, and vision.”

Thomsen came to Snohomish County as an engineer from Oregon's Tri-Met Mass Transit in 1986 and worked his way up to design manager, County Engineer/Deputy Director and became Public Works Director in 2005.

He served eight years as chair on the Regional Project Evaluation Committee at the Puget Sound Regional Council, Board of Directors of Snohomish County Committee for Improved Transportation (SCCIT), and eight years on the Transportation Improvement Board.

He said that he plans to spend more time with his wife Joanie and their family and plans to build a house on his property in Plain, Wash. He enjoys hiking, traveling, kayaking, his new electric bike, photography, and fishing.

His advice for the next director: "Get to know your staff and listen to what they have to say. Include them in all decision making and allow them the space to be creative and innovate."

The county is currently searching for a new Public Works Director and hopes to have a new director in place by January.

About Snohomish County Public Works

The Snohomish County Public Works Department constructs and maintains county roads; controls and manages surface water quantity, quality, and fish habitats; and oversees the recycling and disposal of solid waste. The department's main office is located at 3000 Rockefeller Ave., Everett, WA 98201. For more information about Snohomish County Public Works, visit www.snohomishcountywa.gov/PublicWorks.

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