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Snohomish County Executive Dave Somers Delivers 2017 Budget Recommendations

Budget Targets Reform, Critical Infrastructure, and Technology

EVERETT, Snohomish County, September 23, 2016—Today, Snohomish County Executive Dave Somers delivered his 2017 Budget Recommendations to the Snohomish County Council. This is Somers' first budget as County Executive. The County Council will deliberate and adopt a budget to fund Snohomish County for 2017.

"I believe my budget recommendation for 2017 is fair, innovative, and reform-minded," said Somers. "Most importantly, my budget is balanced. I think it's a budget that fulfills our basic responsibilities, provides essential public services, and invests in the future of Snohomish County."

Since expenses exceed revenue, the Executive had to find \$6 million in savings. Without these savings, the budget would have exceeded \$244 million; instead, the Executive's recommended General Fund budget totals \$238, 662,352 for 2017. Most of the cuts were achieved through savings in personnel costs but without layoffs. In addition, the number of employees supported by the General Fund was reduced. If during 2017 the targeted savings are not realized as budgeted, then a proposed "Restricted Hiring Process" would be established. The Restricted Hiring Process would allow for greater scrutiny over any human resource needs, giving the county an additional cost-saving and budget-balancing tool.

Executive Somers set four primary goals for the 2017 budget:

1. Launch reform of county government.
2. Save public funds.
3. Target investments in infrastructure and innovation.
4. Prioritize high quality economic development.

By investing in critical areas of county responsibility—infrastructure, innovation, and reform—Snohomish County is planning for future growth and the resulting increase in demands for services.

The 2017 recommended budget invests in the STEP [Service, Technology, Excellence Program] Initiative, an effort launched by Executive Somers to improve service, deploy technology, and maintain excellence. STEP is Snohomish County's program to adapt LEAN management principles to reform efforts. STEP will allow Snohomish County to become more efficient by implementing innovation and process improvement across departments. The STEP Initiative also provides an opportunity to empower employees, identify opportunities for greater efficiency, and improve customer service.

The 2017 recommended budget also invests in a review of the structure of county government. The county will conduct a top to bottom analysis of all executive departments to see where opportunities for mergers and consolidation might exist with the goals of lowering overhead and management costs, while removing silos, and improving customer experience. The county believes this can be done without layoffs, relying on natural attrition and systemic cost savings.

Executive Somers believes economic development must be a priority. There will be an additional 200,000 people moving to Snohomish County in the next twenty years, driving a need for employment, housing, and transportation options. Snohomish County must plan now for this growth or risk unanticipated problems.

Earlier this year, Executive Somers launched an Economic Development Initiative to focus the county's efforts on this critical area of work. He identified nine high priority areas of economic development and appointed a liaison for each area. These "sector leads" will be the eyes and ears in the community, providing one point of contact within Snohomish County government for each sector. Snohomish County plans to put significant effort into its economic development activities in 2017 and beyond, since this is one area of county government that can help with the critical priority of job creation.

"I know that there are frustrated elected officials and department directors who each had good ideas for new programs," said Somers. "While their cases for more resources were sensible, and in most cases the needs undeniable, the reality remains that we have limited resources. I am confident that this budget is an investment in the future and will help us achieve the county's goals in 2017."

Snohomish County is the third largest county in the State of Washington by population and is currently the fastest growing county in the State. Snohomish County is home to the largest manufacturing facility in the world and is one of the top tourist destinations in the region. From the waves of Puget Sound to the ice fields of Glacier Peak, Snohomish County has diverse ecosystems, while also being home to a thriving agriculture industry and dynamic urban centers. Executive Dave Somers took office in January 2016, after more than a decade on the Snohomish County Council. He is the fifth County Executive since home rule was established in 1980. Snohomish County government is charged with significant responsibilities, including: regional public safety, including the sheriff, prosecutor, emergency management, the medical examiner, district and superior courts; planning and permitting for building and zoning; parks and recreation; human services to address homelessness, drug addiction, and to otherwise protect vulnerable populations; and roads, solid waste, and surface water management.

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