

# **NEWS RELEASE**

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Council members John Koster, Kirke Sievers, Dave Gossett, Jeff Sax

## **Council Adopts '04 Budget with no General Fund Property Tax Increase**

The Snohomish County Council today adopted a 2004 budget for the county without increasing property taxes for the county's general fund. The general fund budget, which pays for basic services such as public safety, courts, and general government, will total about \$168.6 million. Total county spending from all funds will be \$571.9 million.

The county is limited to a 1% total increase in property tax revenues for the general fund, but chose to take no increase this year. The council did take the 1% increase for the portion of the property tax that is dedicated to roads in the county and for the collection of the conservation futures tax.

Highlights within the budget include the restoration of Judicial Service Officer positions in the Sheriff's budget for six months and identified funding for the Sheriff to fix his patrol helicopter, Air One. The council rejected an idea to charge for search and rescue but did ask that it be studied further in 2004. Money is provided for animal control contracts with the city of Everett and the Progressive Animal Welfare Society (PAWS) shelters. The PAWS contract with the county has lapsed and the county is renegotiating the contract. The idea of consolidating Animal Control services in the Auditor's office will be studied next year. The council also moved spending for several areas of the law and justice budget into a contingency fund, challenging the departments to find efficiencies within the system. Money is also included for continued implementation of the permit streamlining process and for work on simplifying the county code on land use.

The council also accepted the Executive's proposal to increase Surface Water Management fees in the urban growth areas to \$65. The increase was implemented in the Southwest Urban Growth area in 2003. The revenue provided will be used to manage runoff and flooding problems.

Final approval of the budget came on a 4 – 1 vote with Councilmember Sievers voting no. Several key votes on taxes and fees were by a 3 – 2 margin. Those votes are summarized below with the names of the council members voting no in parentheses.

Surface Water Management Fee increases: 3-2 (Koster, Nelson)

Road Tax revenue increase of 1% in Property Tax: 5 – 0

Conservation Futures Tax revenue increase 1%: 3 – 2 (Koster, Sax)

No increase in Property Tax revenue to general fund: 3 – 2 (Sievers, Gossett)