

PRESS RELEASE
December 16, 2003

MASON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
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TO: KMAS, KRXY, SHELTON-MASON COUNTY JOURNAL, THE OLYMPIAN, SHELTON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, NORTH MASON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, CITY OF SHELTON, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL, THE SUN

RE: 2004 Budget Adopted by Board of Mason County Commissioners

Adopting an annual budget is one of the Commissioners most important responsibilities. Our goal is to maintain a balanced budget which addresses the needs of our citizens, while continuing to sustain the County's long term financial integrity. To achieve this, the 2004 budget necessitated the reduction of about 5½ positions and the utilization of over \$500,000 in accrued cash balances, as well as some modest fee for service increases.

It is important for citizens to recognize reductions in county staff positions will impact a range of county services in Parks, at the Fairgrounds, in the Auditor and Assessor offices and the replacement of a phone operator by an automated telephone system. These reductions are, in part, the result of the voter approved initiative I-695 which reduced county revenue by placing a cap on auto license renewals and I-747 which placed a one percent cap on the increase of property taxes. Property taxes constitute about 1/3 of all Current Expense revenue. The one percent cap does not keep pace with inflation, which averaged approximately 2.3% during 2003, or address the increasing service needs of citizens as our population continues to grow at about 2.2% per year. In addition, double digit increases in medical insurance and increases in liability insurance also contribute to increasing operating expenses.

Mason County, like most other counties, faces a critical financial dilemma -- How to maintain the level of county services with less than needed revenues.

Over the past couple of years and again in 2004, the county used a combination of approaches to address the issue, including; staff reductions, utilization of technology to improve efficiency, utilization of cash balances, and increased fees for service. While these measures need and should be taken, they do not address the longer term fundamental problem facing the county.

The Commissioners recognize the citizen mandate for the county to live within our means and prioritize spending to have the least impact on the services and functions the county provides.

BOARD OF MASON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Herb Baze
Chairperson

Wesley Johnson
Commissioner

Jayni Kamin
Commissioner