

PRESS RELEASE

August 16, 2011

Island County Commissioner meetings now on video - 2012 budget planning sessions begin.

Island County announces a monumental achievement in communication and government transparency. The Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) is now video recording their official Monday Regular Sessions. We hope to enhance this viewing option to include Wednesday Staff Sessions, Council of Governments and Board of Health meetings and to broadcast on local cable television channels. A special program series to include the 2012 budget adoption will be posted starting on Tuesday, August 23rd on the Commissioners web site at: <http://www.islandcounty.net/commissioners/video/>
Schedule of meetings: August 23, 24 & 25, September 12-15

The BOCC invites you to attend or watch these budget sessions so that you can provide comments and suggestions but most of all to help you be informed voters. To put things in perspective a summary of county functions is provided. As you read them please think about what you would keep or cut but don't forget that 98% of these services are mandated by law and those that are not (like Meals on Wheels for the elderly and dog sheltering beyond 5 days before euthanasia) are considered essential by most Americans. Note too that about 80% of the Current Expense Budget goes to pay the people who do the work and most of them have not had advancement training or cost of living increases in over 3 years. Due to reductions most offices are closed to the public in the early mornings, late afternoons and on Fridays. Sheriff Deputies' vehicles need replacing and staffing levels are 15% lower than they were in 1998. Bear in mind that much of this work is buoyed by Federal or State funding, subject to even further reductions. Island County has the lowest property tax rate of all 39 Washington Counties yet our workers are the 7th highest wage earners. A report done recently indicates nearly all Island County employees, particularly those with professional qualifications, have lower wages than their peers in Counties of similar size and in the private sector.

Counties are required to arrest, provide indigent defense, prosecute, judge and often jail offenders (and provide medical treatment to inmates). The Assessor must value property and levy taxes. The Treasurer must safely bank and invest monies to pay for county staffs and private contracts and must process accounts for independently governed Junior Taxing Districts like schools, libraries, public transportation and cemetery districts. All monetary functions are done with the oversight of the Auditor who is also responsible for administering elections, issuing licenses and registrations for property, vehicles and marriages. The County must provide death investigation, environmental, mental, public and health services, water quality monitoring, food handling inspections, garbage and waste processing. It is responsible for processing building, clearing, forest practice, septic, water availability and grading permits and must maintain rights of way where power, water, and cable utilities reside. Your county also manages storm water, road construction and maintenance and provides senior services support, critical area protections, animal control and relief to indigent veterans and families.

During the prior three years' budgets the Board of County Commissioners reduced expenses by over 6 million dollars or 20% of the Current Expense Budget. Those prudent reductions earned the County an AA bond rating and positioned us to weather the worst of the recession hopefully without more crippling cuts; however, as we embark on the 2012 budget process we do so with a very empty glass. Your dedicated public servants will continue to find efficiencies with energy usage, technology upgrades, consolidated functions and agency cooperatives. While establishing the "New Norm" in government we must consider the current and future impacts on our island communities and what it realistically costs to remain solvent while meeting mandates and expectations.

For information about your property taxes go to:

<http://www.islandcounty.net/assessor/documents/ISLANDCOUNTYPROPERTYTAXES-CountyCommissioners2011.pdf>

For County Government 101:

<http://www.islandcounty.net/commissioners/>

As your commissioner I will continue to weigh tomorrow's outcomes against today's decisions.

Sincerely,

Angie Homola, Chair Board of County Commissioners