



THURSTON COUNTY  
WASHINGTON

# Frequently Asked Questions

## Thurston County Budget Reductions

Updated March 30, 2009

Every year, Thurston County is required to adopt a balanced budget to fund county services. Like other counties across the nation, our county has been hard hit by the national recession. The 2009 county budget, approved in mid-December, is already out of date because of a steep drop in sales tax revenues in early 2009.

Just as American families are having to tighten their belts in this tough economy, so too must Thurston County. On April 14, county commissioners are scheduled to adopt amendments to the 2009 budget that will enable our county government to live within its means. The process has involved identifying difficult budget cuts that will reverberate throughout the county's workforce and programs and services that serve our local residents. This document answers commonly asked questions about the proposed budget reductions.

### Join Us...



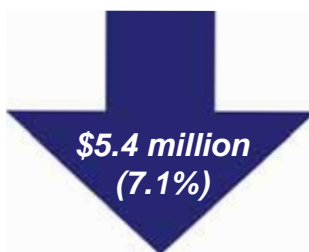
As a resident of Thurston County, you have a stake in the outcome of this budget and may also have valuable information to share about the needs and future of our community.

Please plan to attend a public hearing on proposed budget amendments scheduled for Monday, April 13 at 5:30 p.m. in Room 152, Building 1 of the Thurston County Courthouse, 2000 Lakeridge Drive S.W. in Olympia. You may also e-mail Thurston County commissioners by visiting [www.co.thurston.wa.us/bocc](http://www.co.thurston.wa.us/bocc).

### Q What changes are being made to the Thurston County general fund budget for the April adjustment?

The proposed changes include about \$5.4 million in cuts to the county's general fund programs as a result of declining revenue. (For details, see the back page.) This represents an approximate 7.1% cut from the county's \$76 million general fund budget. These cuts are on top of a \$4 million reduction made at the beginning of the year.

**\$76 million 2009 general fund budget**



### Q What was cut late last year to formulate the 2009 budget?

The 2009 budget approved in mid-December shaved \$4 million from the 2008 spending plan. Layoffs and program reductions were enacted to create a balanced budget with a 5% reserve.

### Q What is causing this unprecedented reduction?

The global economic crisis has played a key role in declining revenue for Thurston County and all of the other counties in the state. Locally, sales tax revenue is off 22% from 2007. The county was already in trouble because of a fundamental problem with county funding—the general fund budget relies primarily on two major funding sources, property tax and sales tax. In addition, initiatives have limited property tax growth to 1% a year, which is not enough to keep up with inflation.

### Q How many Full Time Equivalency (FTE) positions are being cut from offices funded by the general fund?

More than 70 FTEs were cut in the initial 2009 budget, and the April budget revisions will cut about 60 more positions. Combined, the two rounds of layoffs will result in a 10% reduction in the county workforce since 2008.

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**Q Of those reductions, how many actual layoffs have there been?**

Prior to 2008, the county tried to accomplish personnel reductions through attrition – that is, leaving vacant positions unfilled. However, for the preliminary 2009 budget and again for the current budget reductions, the county has been forced to issue layoff notices to current employees. Dozens of county workers have been let go, and the Human Resources Department is providing assistance to the laid off employees.

Thurston County's FTE level in general government offices – like the Assessor, Auditor, Treasurer and Commissioners – is now at roughly 1994 levels, despite a population growth of more than 30% over the past 15 years.

**Q How many offices and departments are affected by these reductions?**

No part of Thurston County government is free from the impacts of these reductions. All offices and departments—those of elected officials as well as those that have appointed directors—are experiencing the effects of severely decreased revenue while operation costs and service demands continue to increase.

**Q What do these reductions mean to the Parks and Fair departments?**

The proposal calls for eliminating all remaining 2009 general fund support for the Thurston County Parks Department, a \$320,615 reduction that will effectively close most county parks. Other sources of revenue will be used to preserve public access to a few of the more heavily visited parks. Self-supporting recreation programs not dependent on general funds will continue.

The proposal also calls for eliminating all remaining 2009 general fund support for the Thurston County Fair, a \$63,296 reduction. The Fair intends to use a remaining fund balance and reduce expenditures to close this revenue gap in 2009. Additional funds for 2009 will come from fair-related fees.

**Q How will the cuts impact the Law and Justice system?**

Citizens have told us that public health and safety is at the top of their priorities list and they are a priority for the commissioners as well. But unfortunately, the cuts needed to balance the county budget are so deep, that every part of county government will be impacted. Many of the programs and services provided by county government are mandated by the state and federal governments and cannot be eliminated. Likewise, much of the funding that comes to the county must be spent on specific programs and cannot be used otherwise. Since about three-quarters of the general fund revenue goes to support law and justice functions, some reductions have to be made in that funding in order to cover reductions of the magnitude that are needed to balance the county budget.



Despite the budget cuts, the law and justice system will continue to receive the majority of the county's general fund. (See the back page for details.) Most offices are facing general fund budget cuts ranging from 4% to 8%, while the Sheriff's Office has been asked to cut 3.3% from its budget.

**Q Why can't you make budget cuts elsewhere and leave the budgets of the law and justice offices alone?**

The criminal justice system will continue to receive the bulk of the county's general fund support; however, cuts are inevitable. Thurston County must have a balanced budget and live within its means. Approving a balanced budget is a legal mandate.

The county's public safety responsibilities also include other programs and services, such as:

- Disease detection, intervention and prevention;
- Family planning and home visitation services;
- Building and fire code enforcement;
- Mental health services;
- Emergency management and disaster preparedness;
- Floodplain development regulations; and
- Emergency medical services.

## Q How will cuts affect the Public Health & Social Services Department?

A cut of \$495,630 to the Health Department will have far-reaching effects. Because this money leverages millions of federal and state dollars, the cut means that about 20 FTEs will be eliminated. Immediately, the community will see the loss of several important services. These include the Family Planning/Sexually Transmitted Disease program which serves about 3,500 county residents, and the Dental Health program and Project Access which helps citizens gain access to medical services. While “like services” are offered by other local agencies, there will be an undeniable impact on the ability of residents, particularly those with low incomes, to access health and social services.

Unfortunately, the cuts will also impede the ability for the department to leverage county funds to acquire grant money. Put simply, the reduction of \$495,630 may make it much harder for the county to access millions in state and federal grants.

## Q What has been cut from the Commissioners’ Office budget?

The Board of County Commissioners cut 17 percent of its budget from 2008 to 2009. Two positions, a Capital Finance Manager and a Budget Director, were eliminated. In addition, an accounting position was also removed from the commissioners’ payroll.

In the current budget adjustment, Board-managed departments (those not directed by an elected official) face a 16% cut in general funds while the overall budget reduction is 7.1%.

County Manager Don Krupp has declined a pay raise for 2008 and 2009, and the commissioners have likewise suspended future salary increases. The commissioners have also asked the local citizen Salary Commission not to recommend any pay raises for elected county officials.

## Q What impacts might the public see from the latest cuts?

The reductions in funding and personnel have forced many offices and departments of county government to examine how services are delivered to the public. That could mean changes in the hours some offices are open to the public. The Permit Assistance Center, for example, will now be open for walk-in business from 8 a.m. to noon only. Other offices may be closed during the lunch hour. Some county parks will be closed and some programs will no longer be offered. For many of the services, it may mean that what took a day or two to process may take longer because there are fewer employees to do the work.

## Q Why didn’t you begin budget cuts years ago so it would not be so painful now?

In good times and bad, the Thurston County Board of Commissioners has always considered wise stewardship of county resources a top priority. For several years the Board, elected officials, and appointed department directors have consistently made significant budget cuts, instituted hiring freezes, streamlined operations, and “worked smarter” to maintain service levels. These service levels have been maintained despite the challenge of a 1% cap on property tax revenue while the average rate of inflation for the past 10 years has been about 3.2%. However, no one in national, state, or local government was able to predict the speed and severity of the global recession we are now experiencing.

## Q What will happen to the 2010 budget if the economy doesn’t turn around?

While no one can predict when and how much the economy will improve in the coming months, the Board of County Commissioners is prepared to take additional steps, including more cuts, to adjust the 2010 budget accordingly. The county has a dedicated, hard-working staff. They have done an outstanding job of absorbing additional responsibilities. Thurston County is also grateful to have citizens who are involved, informed and active supporters of our community. Together, we will make it through these hard and troubling times.

### Flash Facts

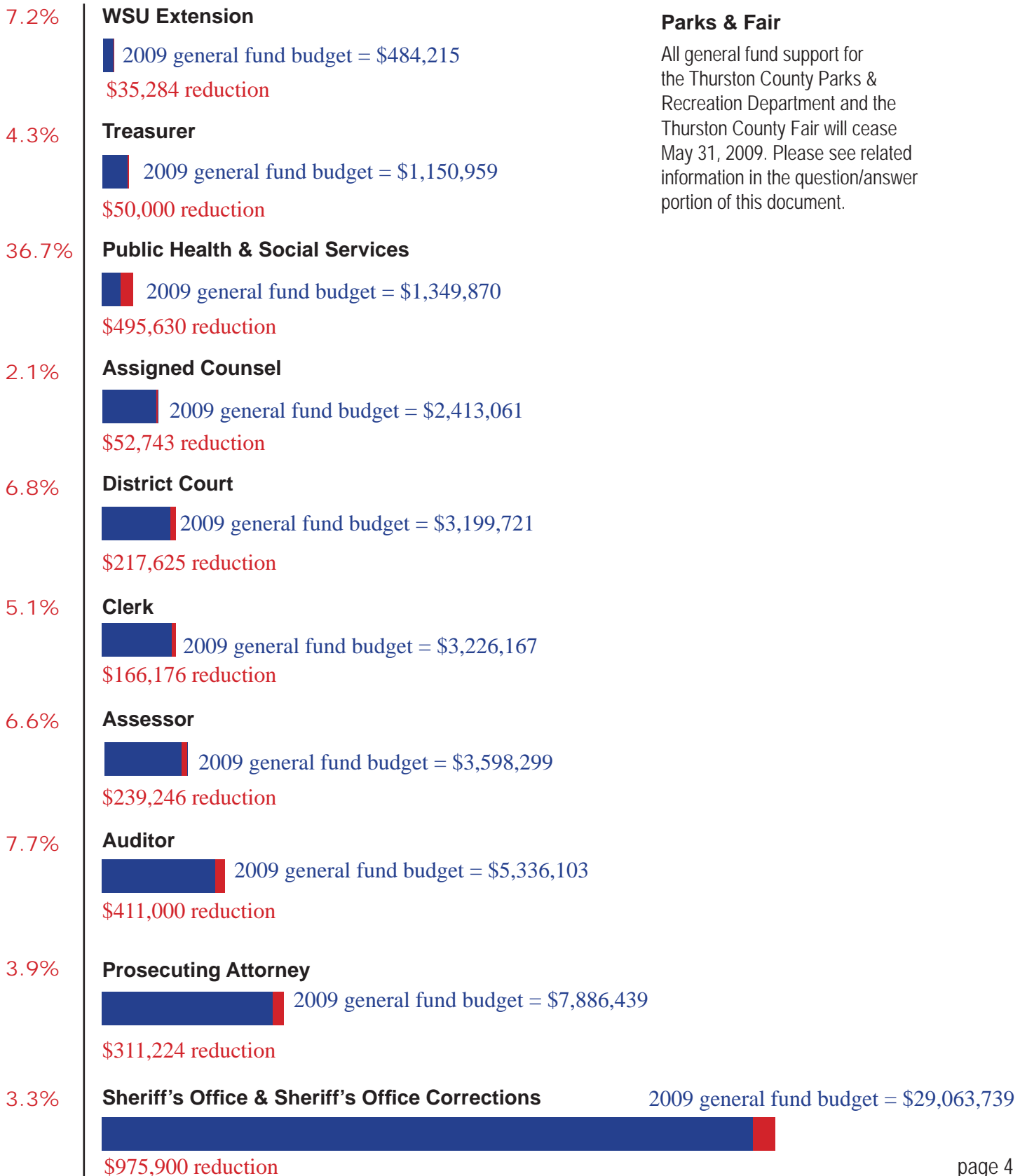
Below are highlights of the April adjustments to the 2009 general fund budget. The adjustments:



- Cut about \$5.4 million from the \$76 million 2009 general fund budget, which represents a reduction of approximately 7.1%.
- Are the result of a national recession that has caused declining sales tax and property tax revenues.
- Will result in a reduction of some 60 FTE positions. When added to the 70+ positions cut in the initial 2009 budget, this represents a 10% cut in the county workforce since 2008.
- Continues to make public safety a priority; the bulk of the general fund budget continues to go to law and justice.

# General Fund Budget Reductions by Department

The illustrations below depict reductions in the general fund portion of the departments' budgets. The departments also receive revenue from non-general fund sources (such as grants or other dedicated revenue sources).



## Parks & Fair

All general fund support for the Thurston County Parks & Recreation Department and the Thurston County Fair will cease May 31, 2009. Please see related information in the question/answer portion of this document.