September 17, 2013

Dear Reader,

We are pleased to present the 2014 Preliminary Thurston County Budget. The Board of County Commissioners is interested in your comments as they deliberate on the budget proposals.

Indicators show the Thurston County economy is improving. The county anticipates growth in the coming year, however, county revenue overall continues to be significantly below pre-recession levels. All functions of county government have been affected by the economic downturn. The county continues to face the challenge of state and local tax structures that make it heavily dependent on sales tax revenues and property tax revenues linked to new construction. Our forecast for 2014 predicts modest improvement.

County leadership is committed to good management and fiscal practices. In order to continue to keep the Thurston County general fund and other funds financially sound in 2014, we will need to continue to carefully manage funds. At this time, rising costs in future years are expected to continue to exceed the growth in revenues, and early projections show a gap between revenues and expenses. We must be diligent to ensure there are sufficient reserves to meet cash flow needs and the costs of unanticipated emergencies. Our greatest challenge is to balance the needs of county citizens with our current revenue sources.

This preliminary budget reflects the amounts necessary to maintain the current level of county services. It will be necessary to reduce general fund spending to sustain a financially responsible fund balance in future years.

In addition to the costs and revenues reflected in this document, policy level proposals address unmet needs, increasing demands and declining revenues. The Commissioners will consider each proposal to determine what must be addressed in the 2014 fiscal year. A list of all policy proposals can be found on the county website: www.co.thurston.wa.us/budget.

Over the course of the next few weeks, Commissioners will hold work sessions to review and deliberate on these proposals. You are invited to comment at a public hearing on October 29, or send written comments to the board.

The county budget is complex. It contains 78 funds and thousands of line items, managed by 21 offices and departments. These funds support the county’s services to the public for law and justice, public health and social services, emergency services, roads, parks, open space and trails, land use planning, development services, environmental protection and utilities operations. The budget also provides for general government services that enable the county to conduct its business, such as elections, property assessment, financial management, human resources and capital facility management. The budget is organized to reflect the services provided by each office and their value to the citizens we serve.

Sincerely,

Cliff Moore
Interim County Manager

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