



## State of the County 2017 Executive Summary to Council, May 30, 2017

Good evening council members, fellow elected officials and citizens. I'm pleased this evening to present an Executive Summary of this year's State of the County. For those interested in reading the extensive document that outlines our Departmental achievements, challenges and initiatives, please visit the Executive's page within the County's website. It contains a wealth of good information pertaining to the breadth of our multi-disciplinary operation.

In general, there have been many achievements. We have five of our six labor agreements settled through 2018 and we remain committed to treating all our employees fairly, both represented and non-represented.

We adopted a sustainable biennial budget for 2017-2018. In 2016 the County's General Fund collected 101% of its budgeted revenues and expended 94.36% of its budgeted expenditures.

The Emergency Medical Services (EMS) property tax levy was passed by the voters, providing a stable revenue stream for the purpose of Public Safety related to medical services.

These facts translate into healthy ending fund balances in our major accounts. This allows us to maintain our current level of services throughout the next biennium, while providing some revenue for capitol maintenance projects.

Our Information Technology initiatives are moving forward by leaps and bounds as we bring the county current with available technologies to make staff more productive and to make local government more transparent. Highlights are:

- Council meetings being streamed over the County's YouTube channel
- Establishment of an online job application process
- Initiation of a new web presence for Whatcom County veterans
- Implementation of the State's new DRIVES program in the Auditor's office for licensing
- Completion of an enhanced ability for submission of Real Estate Excise taxes online in the Assessor/Treasurer offices

Next we will implement and convert our permit system to a GIS-centric platform that will completely run our land records and stormwater asset management programs. I believe this will make our permit processing more efficient in Planning and Development Services (PDS), Public Works, and our Health Department for the benefit of our customers. We will also have in place by the end of 2017 a county-wide agenda management system that will make Council agendas electronic. These, and all of our IT initiatives, will improve internal workflows and increase citizen access to information.

Our Health Department, Planning and Development Services, Public Works and Parks and Recreation departments continue to bring innovation to their operations. While I'm pleased with the accomplishments of all the departments, I'm particularly pleased that we have increased our road and bridge maintenance exponentially in the last year, and I want to thank the leadership and team members of the Public Works Department for doing a fine job on our behalf. Again I encourage you to read my full report for information on what these specific departments have achieved and what they have on their horizons.

These four departments also have been leaders in our LEAN initiative process. Following the implementation of projects last year, I have tasked this group with recognizing and implementing one new LEAN project in each of their departments within the next 12 months. I am encouraged by their enthusiasm for thinking of ways to improve customer service and efficiency. I look forward to the outcome of the challenge I have placed before them.

Additionally, our Criminal Justice programs throughout the organization are striving for improvements. The Sheriff's Office, Superior and District courts, the Prosecutor and Public Defender Offices are working together making inroads on robust jail alternative programs. I'm pleased we added a case worker in the Public Defender's Office to facilitate positive outcomes for our clients, along with celebrating graduations from our Mental Health Court program. A new Guardianship Courthouse Facilitator program has just been implemented in Superior Court and the Sheriff's ongoing initiatives for offenders with electronic home monitoring, work release, and work crews are resulting in opportunities for offenders to avoid returning to incarceration.

As you all know we have two major challenges ahead of us, and we are continuing to track and work towards solutions. One is the challenge of the use of permit-exempt wells that was a result of a Supreme Court ruling *Hirst vs. Whatcom County*. We are still actively advocating for a state legislative fix so that we have long-term solutions for our citizens who are impacted by this ruling. We will need to continue to work on this issue for years in the future, as population increases and land use decisions will continue to impact the legal availability of water.

The other major challenge I want to note is, of course, our new justice center. We have made strides to find consensus with all our cities on a new jail use agreement. Before you tonight is a proposal for your consideration to move this project forward for potential voter approval. Our current facility, as you are aware needs replacement for the safety of staff and residents. We are still in the race against the cost escalation of construction with every day that passes. I ask that you act expediently on the decision to authorize my signature and to authorize the vote in November. Without voter support, we will need to continue to protect our cash reserves to pay for the operation and maintenance of our existing jail.

I encourage citizens to take advantage of the information we continue to add to our county website on all of our projects and initiatives. If anyone has questions on specific topics, call my office and we'll meet with you and / or find the answers to those questions.

We have made progress on some large initiatives; and we have serious business to attend to in the next years that our community expects us, as leaders, to accomplish. I appreciate the support of Council, my leadership team, the great and professional staff of the County and all our citizen volunteers on our boards and committees. I believe we are all focused on improving our quality of life for everyone in the County.

Thank you for allowing me to present this Executive Summary of my State of the County remarks to you today.

*Jack Louws, County Executive, 360 778 5200*