

**EXECUTIVE'S OFFICE**

County Courthouse  
311 Grand Ave. Suite #108  
Bellingham, WA 98225



**Jack Louws**  
County Executive

Citizens of Whatcom County:

I am pleased to submit the biennial budget for 2017 and 2018. The budget reflects the continued success of county leaders to find efficiencies and control costs. Our collective efforts have helped develop a biennial budget that builds on the successful ongoing programs and capital projects that serve the citizens of Whatcom County.

Fiscal prudence requires the recommended budget not include the assumption that the November 8 EMS levy ballot measure will pass. Therefore, it includes an increased General Fund contribution of \$2.4 million to fund Emergency Medical Services (EMS) through 2017-2018 at the current level of service. The result of this decision will substantially reduce the General Fund ending balance as it will be overspent by \$1.3 million per year.

The budget also does not reflect long-term solutions to the pressing infrastructure challenges we have including the new jail, courthouse exterior, Sheriff's office, and other general county buildings. It does include \$2.4 million for shorter-term maintenance of the courthouse exterior and maintains traditional funding levels for ongoing maintenance projects including the current jail. The budget continues support of the work of the Incarceration Prevention and Reduction Task Force with provisions for electronic home monitoring in District Court; enhanced medical and domestic violence services in the jail; and behavioral health specialists in the Public Defender's office and the Health Department.

The housing market reflects a modest growth in property values throughout the County, and new construction is expected to add \$340 million in value to the property tax rolls in 2017 and includes a modest one time increase resulting from a property valuation dispute resolution. Our latest estimates show sales tax revenue will improve by 3.5% over the next two years. In line with these trends, the revenue for many County funds is growing, but only slowly at approximately 1.5% per year. Additionally, our estimates show that expenditures are continuing to increase at approximately 2.7%.

The County's Budget Guidelines were carefully adhered to and each of the 2017-2018 budget priorities was addressed while building this biennial budget. A projected general fund balance reserve of approximately \$13.5 million dollars is maintained at the end of the biennium. The 2017/2018 budget proposes an additional 9 staff comprised of a Corrections Deputy for the Sheriff's Office; Administrative Assistant for the Assessor's Office; Developmental Disabilities Community Health Specialist in the Health Department; Guardian ad Litem program coordinator transition to Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA); Park Attendant for Parks Department; A Behavioral Health Specialist for the Public Defender's Office, Project & Operations Manager in Facilities; Facilities Administrative Assistant; and a Mental Health Court Specialist in Health.

The 2017 - 2018 budget includes:

- Continued investment in technologies to increase efficiencies, effectiveness and value to citizens and employees including GIS, land records; and a new permit system for planning and development services as well as aggressive maintenance of data network switching and server replacement to combat the upward trend of cyber-security breaches.
- Increased funding for public safety primarily in the Corrections budget to reflect the reduced population and corresponding revenue reductions
- Continued funding of Public Works and Parks capital projects such as:
  - Birch Bay Drive Pedestrian Facility
  - Bridge repair and maintenance program
  - Lake Whatcom stormwater improvements.
  - Deming Levy repair
  - Lake Whatcom Park Trail Improvements
  - Hovander Park Maintenance Building
- Continued commitment for the Water Action Plan and water resource programs such as the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) and Pollution Identification and Correction (PIC) program

In conjunction with the development of the biennial budget, the document format was changed to enhance online access to budget documents. Building on technology improvements from the 2015-2016 biennium, the 2017-2018 budget is indexed by department in its electronic format on the county website. Budget information is provided in detail for each department, division and program providing greater transparency and usability. This information is readily available to the public and will be updated as budget information is changed or finalized through the end of November when the biennial budget is finally adopted by the County Council. The complete budget document can be found, as noted above, [on the website](#).

While key goals of your County government are to improve the lives of our people and the prospects of our businesses, we also have an obligation to assure that every taxpayer dollar is spent as wisely as possible. With current and long-term fiscal challenges, it is imperative we pursue innovative investments and find solutions that will continue to ensure the County is financially stable. I look forward to working with the County Council, our county elected officials, and our great team of staff in these efforts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Louws', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jack Louws  
County Executive

~October 18, 2016