

Prepared comments from John Spady, Deputy Councilor Coordinator, Countywide Community Forums. Presented to the Government Accountability and Oversight Committee (GAOC) of the King County Council. 4/7/2009  
Councilmembers: Reagan Dunn, Chair; Pete von Reichbauer, Vice Chair; Larry Gossett, Larry Phillips

## I. Slide 13 -- Budget, Taxes

### A. Biggest Problem

54 % of expenditures growing faster than revenues

1. (T-22) When asked, “**What do you believe is the single biggest problem with King County’s current budget situations with respect to the General Fund?**”, *a majority of Citizen Councilors, 54 percent, agreed that the biggest problem is that expenditures are growing faster than its revenues.*

The next closest answer was a distant 11 percent having to do with not having the authority to levy a B&O tax on unincorporated residents.

### B. #1 priority

34 %: adopting strict limit on growth of overall County spending

1. (T-23) **When given several different alternatives to balance King County’s budget by 1) increasing revenues, 2) reducing expenses, or 3) avoiding large budget shortfalls**, *a plurality of Citizen Councilors, 34 percent, chose to REDUCE EXPENSES by adopting strict limits on the growth of overall county spending (such as the rate of inflation in the previous year, plus or minus X%) -- even if it reduces or limits core county services.*

The #2 priority was 30 percent who chose, during good economic times, to increase the “rainy day” reserve from \$15 Million to at least \$50 Million in order to better insulate essential county services.

## C. Solutions

### 1. **Legislative change to tax/budget structure (SEE NEXT SLIDE)**

*We will look at this in a moment on the next slide*

### 2. **Combine program and functions**

(T-28) When asked, “**Which one option will have the greatest impact on increasing efficiencies in King County government?**” *a plurality of Citizen Councilors, 42 percent, agreed that the County should look for ways to consolidate or combine programs or functions.*

The next closest answer was a distant 19 percent who said that the County should have more measurable objectives for specific programs to promote accountability and better management.

### 3. **Furlough days (if trying to cut labor costs)**

(T-39) When asked, “**ASSUMING that the County’s elected leaders decided in the future that it was again necessary to reduce the County’s labor costs to help balance a future budget...**”, *a plurality of Citizen Councilors, 34 percent, agreed that the best way was to implement unpaid “furlough days” for employees.*

The next closest answer was 21 percent who said that the County should reduce health insurance or other employee benefits.

## II. Slide 14 -- Should the State Legislature...

### A. 66 %: give King County more flexibility on how it uses its taxes

(T-27) When asked, “**Should the state Legislature give King County more flexibility in how it uses its existing local taxes to help King County avoid further cuts in services?**”, *a large majority, 66 percent, of Citizen Councilors said YES.*

### B. 64 %: allow King County to levy same taxes on unincorporated residents as incorporated residents pay

(T-32) When asked, “**Should the County have the same power to levy the same kind of taxes on residents of the ‘unincorporated’ areas of the county that cities have in the ‘incorporated’ areas**”, *another large majority, 64 percent, of Citizen Councilors also said YES.*

### C. 55 %: require cities to annex urban areas

(T-31) When asked, “**Should cities be required to annex adjacent ‘urbanized’ areas so that the County can focus its efforts on regional issues rather than providing local services to unincorporated areas?**”, *a majority, 55 percent, of Citizen Councilors said YES again.*

D. 54 %: NO to Allow King County to raise more local taxes

(T-26) But when asked, “**Should the state Legislature authorize King County to raise more local taxes to help King County avoid further cuts in service? (such as authorizing the county to increase its overall property tax revenues by more than 1% annually, and/or levy utility taxes and/or ‘Business & Occupation’ taxes in unincorporated areas)**”, *a majority of Citizen Councilors, 54 percent, said NO.*

### III. Slide 15 -- (Graphic) Support for taxes

- A. (T-34) When asked, “[to] **indicate the extent to which they would support or oppose a variety of revenue options**”, *a plurality of Citizen Councilors, 44 percent, said they would “definitely oppose” a property tax increase.*

When combined with the next largest plurality of 16 percent who would also oppose a property tax increase, opposition rises to a majority of 60 percent among all Citizen Councilors.

- B. (T-35) **And when asked the same question again about support for a sales tax increase, a plurality of Citizen Councilors, 42 percent, said they would “definitely oppose” a sales tax increase.**

When combined with the next largest plurality of 18 percent who would also oppose a sales tax increase, opposition again rises to a majority of 60 percent among all Citizen Councilors.

- C. (T-36) **But when asked the same question about support for a utility tax on residents of “unincorporated” areas, a plurality of Citizen Councilors, 29 percent, said they would “definitely support” such a tax.**

When combined with the next largest plurality of 22 percent who would also support a utility tax in residents of “unincorporated” areas, support rises to a bare majority of 51 percent among all Citizen Councilors.

**D. (T-37) And when asked the same question one more time about support for a Business & Occupation tax on firms in “unincorporated” areas, another plurality of Citizen Councilors, 28 percent, said they would “definitely support” such a tax.**

And when combined with the next largest plurality of 23 percent who would also support a B&O tax on firms in “unincorporated” areas, support again rises to the same bare majority of 51 percent among all Citizen Councilors.

**E. And contrasting these overall results against those of the 57 Citizen Councilors who participated and who actually live in unincorporated King County: 76 percent oppose property tax increases; 66 percent oppose sales tax increases; 65 percent oppose the creation of a utility tax; and 58 percent oppose the creation of a B&O tax. Not a complete opposition but definitely a substantial majority.**

## IV. Slide 16 -- Public Safety

### A. 66 %: feel safe or very safe

(T-15) When asked, “... **how safe [do] you feel in your community today?**”, *a majority of Citizen Councilors, 66 percent, felt safe or very safe.*

### B. 71 %: feel as safe or safer as 5 years ago

(T-16) When asked, “**Are you feeling safer living or working today in King County than 5 years ago?**”, *a majority of Citizen Councilors, 54 percent, felt as safe, and an additional 17 percent (for a total of 71 percent) felt more safe than 5 years ago.*

### C. 57 %: more regional criminal justice services

(T-17) When asked, “... **should [the county] move towards more regional (countywide) service or more local (city) control of the criminal justice system?**”, *a majority of Citizen Councilors, 57 percent, agreed with the arguments of Sheriff Rahr that a more centralized regional criminal justice system would promote efficiency and potentially save money.*

D. 28 %: level of public safety services

**(T-18) When told that the county provides a host of mandated and discretionary public safety services, including not only criminal and administrative justice and law enforcement, but also victim assistance and advocacy, public education and crime prevention programs, a plurality of Citizen Councilors, 36 percent, felt the level of services offered matched the needs of the community. An additional 28 percent felt the level of services were more than adequate for the needs of the community, and another 20 percent felt the level of services were less than adequate for the needs of the community.**

## V. Slide 17 -- Health and Human Services

A. *I would like to start with the last bullet item on this slide because it is so similar in structure to my previous statement about public safety services. In a similar question, health and human services were also probed for levels of adequacy.*

*30 %: level of health and human services*

***(T-19) When told that the county delivers a host of health and human services to the public either directly or by funding service delivery organizations, including disease prevention, crisis clinics, children's healthcare, services for special need populations, family planning and senior services, a plurality of Citizen Councilors, 30 percent, felt the level of services offered matched the needs of the community. An additional 28 percent felt the level of services were more than adequate for the needs of the community, and another 30 percent felt the level of services were less than adequate for the needs of the community -- an almost even split.***

B. 62 %: YES for secure, stable and adequate funding

(T-20) A clear majority of Citizen Councilors, 59 percent (not 62 percent), agreed that “there should be a secure, stable and adequate funding source for health and human services.” However, participants were divided on the best funding source. Only 12 percent supported a special property tax levy, another 12 percent supported a special sales tax left, 17 percent supported dedicating a specific percentage of existing taxes, and 18 percent supported a tax increase on something other than property or sales. 28 percent felt it was not a core function of the county and that the county should not be funding health and human services.

C. 59 %: NO personal impact from “lifeboat”

(T-21) Finally, when asked, “**How much will you be impacted personally if funding is not found to pay for the programs currently in the ‘Lifeboat’?**”, a plurality of Citizen Councilors, 40 percent (not 59 percent), said they would feel no personal impact. But, fully half of the Citizen Councilors, 50 percent, would feel some kind of impact and 17 percent of that number would be impacted more than most.

## VI. Slide 18 -- last slide -- Acknowledgements

- A. There are a whole host of people to acknowledge but I will let this slide speak for itself.

This marks the end of Round 2. Round 3 is anticipated to begin in mid-May and, as indicated earlier by Ms. Stevens, will be a kind of “State of the County” event with important questions from Councilmembers on a variety of issues for Citizen Councilors to consider.

The general public, and also Councilmembers, are invited to register at [www.CommunityForums.org](http://www.CommunityForums.org) as official, volunteer, Citizen Councilors and participate in the upcoming face-to-face meetings across the county.

Every opinion is important and all opinions are equally valid because every Citizen Councilor has a unique perspective. There is indeed an important collective wisdom that we are trying to reveal in this process of civic engagement and community dialogue.

It is now up to this council to interpret the measured opinions of contributing Citizen Councilors. Please, let us know when something we have said helps to influence your decisions. Engage us in your deliberations, and your decisions will be easier.

Thank you.

