

## **PRESS RELEASE**

**February 4, 2003**

**MASON COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR  
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TO: KMAS, KRXY, MASON COUNTY JOURNAL, SHELTON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, NORTH MASON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, CITY OF SHELTON, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

RE: Fairground Fees

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By approval of Initiatives 695 and 747, which reduced county revenues, the voters sent a message to government to spend less. However, the demands for county services remain the same or need to be increased to meet anticipated needs.

In 2003 the county expects Current Expense revenue of \$19,506,774. After reducing expenses, the county expects to spend \$20,412,091. This still required the County to use \$905,317 in prior accumulated cash balance to balance the budget.

What does this all have to do with Fairground fees? In 2003, the budget for operation of the Fairgrounds includes total revenue of \$182,585, and total expenses of a \$390,080, resulting in an operating loss of \$207,495.

Just like citizens, the county has to have enough money to pay the bills. There are three ways to balance the books: cut services, raise fees and find more cost efficient ways to operate.

One simple way to avoid further losses and cut costs is to close the Fairgrounds. This would save taxpayers \$207,495. However, the Fairgrounds provides a service to the community, enriches our quality of life, and the events draw many tourists to the county, which generate an economic benefit. The Fairgrounds also provides the opportunity for community organizations to raise revenue which provides valuable services in the community, thus addressing a variety of needs.

A second way to help address the shortfall is to increase fees. Asking visitors who use the Fairgrounds, 60 percent of whom live outside of Mason County, to spend a little more for the service they receive reduces the cost to all other taxpayers. The fee increase will increase revenue by about \$40,000 thus

reducing the anticipated operating loss to \$167,495. Additionally, new efforts will be undertaken to attract new groups to use the facility, thus increasing revenue.

The last avenue is to find ways to operate the Fairgrounds more efficiently. The county is presently exploring a number of options which will retain the benefits of the Fairgrounds while reducing operating costs.

Mason County, like many other jurisdictions and the state, face difficult financial times and difficult choices. The Fairgrounds is an important asset to our community and should be maintained, but the economic reality is that the county, just like the average citizen, can't continue to spend more than it earns.

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Ron Henrickson, Mason County Administrator