

## **Speech to Council**

**Presented on January 10, 2012**

**Jack Louws, County Executive**

It is an honor to address the County Council during its first meeting of 2012. My congratulations go to council members Kremen, Brenner and Crawford for your election and re-election. Thank you to everyone for the long hours you devote to studying issues, attending meetings and responding to constituents. It is appreciated by me and by the people of Whatcom County.

I am humbled by the faith that Whatcom County voters placed in me when they elected me County Executive. The county has been served by excellent people in this position, but my thoughts keep coming back to the first one: John Louws. When the county adopted the Home Rule Charter as its form of government, my father was elected as the first County Executive in 1979.

I grew up watching my dad serve our community. I listened as he shared his vision for the future of Whatcom County with other leaders. He taught me the value of respecting others' viewpoints and how to take action to get things done. Like him, I will strive to be inclusive, seeking information and opinions from many sources as decisions are being made.

Since the election, I've been meeting with many department heads and key staff members. I value their hard work and ideas – they are critical to making Whatcom County a better place to work and live for all of us. I've also met with many of you, and I'm looking forward to keeping these lines of communication open.

I'd be remiss if I did not take a moment to thank Executive Kremen for his 16 years of service to Whatcom County. Pete, we worked together 8 years as I served in Lynden, and in that time I've respected your passion and commitment to the people of Whatcom County. You've developed a great team of people here, and I am thankful for that. You and Deputy Administrator Desler have also made the transition very pleasant for me in the last two months, giving me the opportunity and access to meet with people. Thank you, Executive Kremen.

In light of Deputy Administrator Desler's retirement, I've determined that in the near term I am going to work with the department heads and executive staff, combining his and my position together, allowing me the opportunity to experience firsthand the work flow and load of the executive's office and of the other departments. When satisfied that I have a clear understanding of what is required, both in terms of time and expertise, I'll make staffing decisions in the executive's office to meet my goal of continuing to provide excellent customer service, as efficiently and effectively as possible. In light of the challenging financial times we are all experiencing, I believe this will be a good exercise for the new administration to undertake.

When I was Mayor of Lynden, our community made a large investment into infrastructure. It was accomplished by a team effort including the administration, council, and community. It was not me who accomplished this, it was we. Throughout the campaign for this job, I was

continually asked what I was going to do as County Executive, and it was always difficult for me to answer because the truth is that it takes our combined efforts and roles to accomplish tasks. Obviously I have the management responsibility for staff and operations, and you have the legislative responsibility for code, but our roles and responsibilities are ever entwined.

Therefore, I'd like to work together to accomplish some tasks that I feel are important for Whatcom County including:

- Conducting a review that will eliminate conflicting language in our County Planning and Permitting Code, which will enable staff to process permits more efficiently.
- Making a new jail a reality. I feel strongly that it is in the best interest of the county to accomplish this, and I'm very willing to devote the time and effort necessary to get it done.
- Work with the farming community through the Agricultural Advisory Committee to revise the Right to Farm ordinance, for your review, which will strengthen our ag economy for the future.

I articulated more ideas on the campaign trail, and we have plenty of other issues on our plate this year, including Lake Whatcom, Swift Creek, and the reconveyance. Later this year we will be working toward a proposed biennial budget for years 2013 and 2014.

I don't have all the answers to our challenges, nor can I implement solutions by myself. Therefore I am pleased that I will be working with Council Chair Kershner in the coming year. I plan on working with her office to facilitate the processes necessary to accomplish these tasks, if you are willing to undertake them with me. Because, in these tight budgetary times, we can't afford to spend resources, including staff time, on projects on which we are not in agreement.

Together, we have the ability to make our corner of the world an even better place than what it is today. I'm ready and willing to tackle the challenges before us. Please let me know how I can be of service to you in the upcoming months and years. Thank you