

# SAMMAMISH

ISSUE 98

CITY NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 2010

## Government costs less in Sammamish

If you're anxious about ballooning deficits and "out of control" government – here's some good news: Your city doesn't fit the stereotype.

Compared to the nightmarish scenarios outlined in the national media, Sammamish is the picture of modesty, thrift and financial health.

Although statistics can be treacherous, here's one that stands up pretty well to scrutiny: Annually, the city spends only \$479 per resident.

That figure (which excludes capital project costs) is far below Kirkland's \$946, Bellevue's \$801 and Redmond's \$894. (See chart on page 3.)

Here's another: The city has only 1.7 employees per thousand residents. Most nearby cities have five or six per thousand.

These strikingly low figures are not solely the result of civic virtue, but one thing is clear: Government costs less in Sammamish.

Before discussing the numbers,

*See COST, pg. 3*



## City remains firm on keeping fire taxes low

**BUT EF&R PRESSES SAMMAMISH TO DISCUSS REORGANIZATION THAT COULD DOUBLE COSTS**

Back in 2006, the City Council unanimously passed a resolution opposing the creation of a Regional Fire Authority (RFA).

The reason: An RFA could double the amount of money Sammamish residents pay in taxes for exactly the same

fire services.

Currently, residents pay roughly the equivalent of 67 cents per thousand of assessed valuation for services from Eastside Fire and Rescue (EF&R). A city analysis indicates an

*See RFA, pg. 5*

**MAYOR'S MESSAGE**

*Page 2*

**PARKS SURVEY**

*Story on page 4*

**SAMMAMISH DAYS**

*Story on page 7*

## Transit on the Plateau

When I moved to Sammamish in 1979, I worked in Bellevue and got to work in 20 minutes in my single-occupancy-vehicle (SOV) with no congestion and a very pleasant drive around the south end of Lake Sammamish.

Back then, I-90 had so many lanes that I didn't visualize it ever being congested. Scroll forward thirty years, though, and congestion awaits Sammamish commuters to the south and to the north.



*Don Gerend  
Mayor*

Partly, this is because Washington State makes an effort to contain growth within a defined area surrounded by an "Urban Growth Boundary." Sammamish bumps up against that containment perimeter to the east.

But it's also because a lot of Sammamish residents commute to work. We may have one of the highest home business percentages in the Puget Sound region, but many of us face a morning drive to Redmond, Issaquah, Bellevue, Seattle or even more distant destinations. And, the method of choice for most commuters is still a gas-powered SOV.

The persistence of this choice is largely due to an absence of convenient transit service. We do have the Metro 269 that goes back and forth between Issaquah and Redmond, and the Metro 216 that is a great commuter service into Seattle in the morning and back in the late afternoon. And if you have to stay in Seattle into the evening, you can get home on the Sound Transit

554, a route that takes you on a scenic tour of the Issaquah Highlands before heading towards home base via Sammamish's park and ride lot. Of course, if you work for Microsoft you can use the Connector service that runs to and from the Redmond campus along 228th Avenue. But transit doesn't come close to covering a majority of our commuter needs.

So what does the future hold for transit service to Sammamish and other "outer rim" suburban/urban cities? Our King County transit system, Metro, is struggling financially. It gets only about 20 percent of its operating revenue from the fare box. Most of its revenue comes from a 0.9% sales tax funding authority, and with the economy down, so is the Metro budget. Scenarios that reduce service up to 600,000 hours per year are being tossed around.

The state legislature was concerned about this and instructed King County to form a task force to make recommendations regarding Metro operations. That Regional Transit Task Force (RTTF), whose 28 members are appointed by King County Executive Dow Constantine, meet every two weeks in an effort to generate some meaningful insight.

The schedule for these public meetings, which are held at the Mercer Island Community Center in the evenings, can be viewed at [www.king-county.gov/transportation/Transit-TaskForce](http://www.king-county.gov/transportation/Transit-TaskForce).

The RTTF is looking at criteria for service reductions, service additions, and possibly changes to Metro's mission and vision. Why is all this analysis necessary? Well, currently the bulk of Metro service is Seattle centric, even though the majority of the funding comes from the suburbs.

For example, approximately 60% of the Metro service hours are in Seattle-North King County, even though that

area contributes only about 37 percent of the revenue. East King County also contributes about 37 percent of the revenue, but receives only 20% of the service hours. South King County receives 20 percent of the service hours but contributes 26 percent of the revenues.

If there are service reductions to be made, I think it would be equitable to make those reductions in proportion to the current distribution of service – 60% of the service hour reductions should be in the Seattle-North King County, whereas only 20% should be in East King County and 20% in South King County. The RTTF, of course, might be inclined to reduce the least productive routes rather than focusing on geographic and economic equity.

Although I want Sammamish to have its fair share of transit service, I don't believe our commuter needs will be solved with more transit routes. A percentage of our residents do head off to a small number of major employment centers, but Sammamish commuter needs are quite diverse.

These needs would be better served by using new technology to enhance carpool and vanpool options. Envision checking your computer in the morning to see which vans are leaving from which locations, to what destinations, and at what times. Review your choices and then reserve a seat in a specific van. Metro's recently updated Rideshare-Online.com tool is quickly moving in that direction.

And here's more good news. Fares for the vanpool system cover 100 percent of operating costs, 100 percent of capital costs, and over 25% of administrative costs. That's why I'm a van fan, and maybe you should be too!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Don Gerend". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a dark ink on a white background.

*COST, cont. from pg. 1*

City Manager Ben Yazici wanted to make it clear that the figures shouldn't suggest that other cities are being careless with tax dollars, noting that other cities often provide more services. Nevertheless, thanks to a blend of factors, Sammamish's costs are notably low.

"First, our City Councils have been fiscally conservative since we incorporated in 1999, and that's still the case," Yazici said. "But our community as a whole also deserves credit. Our residents have not demanded a 'full service' city."

Unlike some nearby communities, Sammamish doesn't have courts; expansive, city-run recreation programs; or its own police and fire departments.

"We also don't have a huge, daytime population like Issaquah and some other cities," Yazici said. "The retail and employment activity they have during the day produces a lot of public safety expenditures and other costs."

Cities like Sammamish are sometimes referred to as "contract cities" because they pay other entities for normal city services. The city contracts with the King County Sheriff's Office for police services, with Eastside Fire and Rescue for fire services, and with various other public and private entities for landscaping, street cleaning, stormwater and other services. In most cases, the "contract" approach reduces costs.

Due to its financial performance, Sammamish has earned an AAA bond rating from Standard and Poors, and will finish 2010 with a projected ending balance of \$15 million.

But the city will have to continue a conservative approach to maintain its financial health. As the city builds

## General fund expenditures per capita

(2008 data)

Issaquah	\$962
Kirkland	\$946
Redmond	\$894
Bellevue	\$801
<b>Sammamish</b>	<b>\$479</b>

## Full time employees per thousand residents

(2008 data)

Issaquah	6.0
Kirkland	4.8
Redmond	5.6
Bellevue	5.6
<b>Sammamish</b>	<b>1.7</b>

## General fund revenue per capita

(2008 data)

Issaquah	\$1270
Kirkland	\$905
Redmond	\$1100
Bellevue	\$979
<b>Sammamish</b>	<b>\$699</b>

more facilities it needs to maintain and operate, and as fire service and other costs rise, the city's operating expenditures, left alone, will eventually exceed operating revenues.

"We call that the crossover point, and right now we're estimating it will arrive sometime in the next five years

or so," Yazici said.

Given the city's thrifty approach over the past ten years, why does it face this looming crossover point?

"Reason number one is that there are costs that are not fully under our control," Yazici said. "Fire services have risen 6 or 7 percent annually between 2002 and 2009, for example. Even though the number of city employees has stayed flat, our costs have not."

The other reason is related to total revenues. Unlike most cities, Sammamish does not have a utility tax. And due to its residential character, it takes in very little sales tax.

And that makes a big difference. Per capita, Sammamish takes in only \$699 in general fund revenue. Redmond, on the other hand, takes in \$1,100 per resident, and Issaquah takes in \$1270. (See chart on this page.)

Sammamish relies on property tax revenue, which by state law can rise only 1 percent annually. With many costs rising faster than that, even thrifty cities eventually face a crossover point.

As part of its long-term financial planning, the city has been turning over the options for several years now. Although the moment of decision has not yet arrived, the finance department last month outlined two basic alternatives to deal with the crossover point:

1 – Keep taxes the same and find ways to cut city services.

2 – Find new revenue sources and keep city services at current levels.

"Our City Councils have always listened to the community and made prudent choices in the past, and as we look ahead, I'm sure they'll do the same in this case," Yazici said. "In the meantime, we should feel good about ourselves as a community. The charts show that government really does cost less in Sammamish."

## Community/Aquatic center a priority

**IF THEY COULD INVEST IN ONLY ONE PARKS AND RECREATION PROJECT, POLLED RESIDENTS MAKE THEIR TOP CHOICE CRYSTAL CLEAR**

Based on a random telephone poll conducted last month, it appears Sammamish residents think a new community/aquatics center should be at the top of the parks and recreation department's "to-do" list.

The poll, part of the city's Parks, Recreation and Open Space (PRO) Plan review, gave residents four choices:

- Acquisition of land for parks and open Space
- New sports fields
- Construction of new community/aquatic center
- Construction of new trails, bike-ways and paths.

Respondents were asked to select only one priority, with the assumption being that the other items on the list would not be funded. The results:

- 54.7 percent chose the community/aquatic center
- 18.7 percent chose new trails, bike-ways and paths
- 15.4 percent chose acquisition of land for parks and open space
- 11.1 chose new sports fields

The City Council and staff are exploring possible sites for a community/aquatic center, and are also exploring various funding and partnership options.

"There's been a lot of anecdotal ev-

idence that this is a high-interest item," Parks Director Jessi Richardson said. "This statistically valid poll indicates that the interest is real."

When Richardson presented the preliminary results to the City Council on July 20, several members expressed interest in further research, including the possibility of focus group testing.

The poll, conducted by Hebert Research of Bellevue, covered a broad spectrum of parks and recreation topics. An executive summary of the report is available on the city website at [www.ci.sammamish.wa.us/files/document/6830.pdf](http://www.ci.sammamish.wa.us/files/document/6830.pdf).

## City welcomes Aldarra and Montaine neighborhoods

Effective July 10, two additional neighborhoods – Aldarra Estates and Montaine at Aldarra – joined the city of Sammamish. The annexation effort began in early 2009 when residents of the two neighborhoods first submitted petitions to the city. Following a review by the Boundary Review Board, the annexation became official last month.

"We are delighted that these residents decided to become part of Sammamish," City Manager Ben Yazici said. "We're going to work hard to justify their faith in our city."

Combined, the two neighborhoods contain 272 homes and roughly 800 residents. The annexation will add approximately \$200 million to the city's total assessed valuation.



*Aldarra Estates.*



*Montaine at Aldarra*

*RFA, cont. from pg. 1*

RFA could raise the tax rate to a dollar or more per thousand.

Although no one disputes that possibility, EF&R is urging Sammamish to join discussions that are primarily aimed at creating an RFA. As conceived by its boosters, the RFA would add more rural areas to the existing EF&R organization (EF&R is currently composed of Issaquah, Sammamish, North Bend, Fire District 10 and Fire District 38).

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**As conceived by its boosters, the RFA would add more rural areas to the existing EF&R organization...**

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“In our many previous discussions with EF&R, it’s been clear that funding for an RFA would be based primarily on assessed valuation,” Finance Director Lyman Howard said. “Given our urban setting, that, unfortunately, would hit Sammamish pocketbooks very hard.”

As a result, Sammamish has declined invitations to take part in the latest round of RFA discussions that take place on a monthly basis. For added perspective on that, and other fire related issues, please see the accompanying Q&A feature with Sammamish City Manager Ben Yazici.

## Q & A with Ben Yazici

### CITY MANAGER DISCUSSES FIRE SERVICES

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**Q:** Why is the city not joining this latest round of talks regarding a Regional Fire Authority (RFA)?

**A:** These discussions are appropriate for those who want to form an RFA, but our City Council made it clear four years ago that an RFA was a non-starter for Sammamish taxpayers. We don’t want to create any false expectations by joining the talks.

**Q:** Some fire officials have been critical of the city in local newspapers, saying Sammamish should be at the table.

**A:** That’s true, but we think the criticism would only get worse if we took part. Given past history, it’s pretty clear the city would be portrayed as an obstacle unless we went along with an RFA.

**Q:** Why is an RFA bad for Sammamish taxpayers?

**A:** Because an RFA could double the taxes our residents pay for fire services.

**Q:** What services would residents receive for those extra taxes?

**A:** We would receive the same services we’re receiving now. Nothing more.

**Q:** So why do some people think we should help create an RFA?

**A:** A number of fire officials say we should do it for the greater good. They say an RFA would stabilize the funding of regional fire entities and improve service in some areas.

**Q:** And the city’s answer to that?

**A:** We believe in regional solutions when all parties benefit. That’s why

we’ve entered into many partnerships with cities, school districts and other entities. But our analysis shows that an RFA, far from benefiting Sammamish, would actually drive up our costs dramatically.

**Q:** The city’s contract with EF&R ends in 2014. What happens if EF&R expands into an RFA and Sam-

mamish isn’t part of it?

**A:** We would continue to contract for fire services with someone. It might be with Redmond, or Bellevue, or even the new RFA. We’re confident we’ll be able to negotiate a price substantially lower than the cost of being in the RFA.

**Q:** What about starting a stand-alone Sammamish Fire Department?

**A:** That’s also an option. As a contract city, we haven’t taken that route in the past, but as we move forward, we’ll continue to evaluate the alternatives.



*Ben Yazici  
Sammamish City Manager*

## “Critical areas news” on email alert system

With a review of the city’s Critical Areas Ordinance on the horizon, and broad public interest in environmental issues that affect the community, the city has decided to add a “Critical areas news” topic to its email alert system.

Residents who would like to receive email updates on the topic can sign up easily by going to the city website at [www.ci.sammamish.wa.us](http://www.ci.sammamish.wa.us), and clicking on the “email alert” icon on the right side of the home page.

The prompts will lead to a long menu of topics, including the new “critical areas news” item. Residents can sign up for as many or as few topics as they would like, and suspend delivery whenever they like.

Launched late last year, more than 1,300 residents are now receiving regular updates from the system on more than 50 topics related to city government and city-sponsored events and activities.

## “Water” you talking about?

It’s all around us here in Sammamish, but do we understand our relationship with water, and how our daily habits affect its quality?

Probably not as well as we should, so the city, as part

of its – get ready for a mouthful, here – National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit process, is offering information on good water habits and asking for input from the public on their perspective.

To get up-to-date on the city’s effort, go to the city website at [www.ci.sammamish.wa.us](http://www.ci.sammamish.wa.us) and click on “departments, public works, and then stormwater management program.”

What are a few things you can do to reduce the pollution of our streams and lakes?

Don’t wash your car on a driveway and let the soapy, chemical-laden water flow into a storm drain. Don’t put too much fertilizer on your yard. If you have a septic tank, maintain it properly and make sure to have it pumped every three to five years. And, if you see a spill that could pollute our water, call 425-295-0500 during business hours, or 206-296-8100 after hours.

## City holds talent auditions

The Arts Commission will hold auditions for local performing artists on Friday, Aug. 27, 6-9 p.m., and Saturday, Aug. 28, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., in the City Hall council chamber. Selected artists will go on a roster and be used by the Arts Commission over the coming year.

Music, dance and theater are some of the arts that will be considered. All ages are encouraged to audition. For more information, go to [sacarts@gmail.com](mailto:sacarts@gmail.com) and put TALENT in the subject line.

## THANK YOU TO OUR 2010 SPONSORS!



# CITY OF SAMMAMISH

## Sammamish Days/Sammamish Nights!

TWO BIG CULTURAL EVENTS WILL MAKE FOR A VERY SPECIAL AUG. 21ST

If you would like to become part of a new Sammamish tradition, clear your schedule for Saturday, Aug. 21, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. That's when the inaugural "Sammamish Days"



event, a celebration of cultural diversity, will crank up the fun meter at City Hall Plaza.

Among other things, you'll be able to learn how to belly dance, eat Turkish food, and hear the drums of the Snoqualmie Tribe. Puppet shows, cello performances,

and plenty of Irish and Indian dances will also be on the entertainment and cultural menu.

For more information on "Sammamish Days," go to [www.ci.sammamish.wa.us](http://www.ci.sammamish.wa.us), click on the "Events" tab on the

left side of the home page, and then choose "special events."

That's also where you'll find information on "Sammamish Nights," a Chamber of Commerce event, also on Aug. 21, that follows the daytime fun.

Running from 6:30 to 10 p.m. at City Hall Plaza, the evening festivities will include wine, food and live jazz. Unlike the daytime event, which is free, Sammamish Nights will cost \$45 per ticket, and \$65 for a VIP pass.

"We had our first Sammamish Nights event last year," City Manager Ben Yazici said. "Now we're adding Sammamish Days to make it a full-day experience. We think this is really going to become a great, annual summer event in our city."



## CITY CALENDAR

### AUGUST

**Tuesday, Aug. 3**

National Night Out, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.  
City Hall

Finance Committee Meeting, 5 p.m.

**Wednesday, Aug. 4**

Sammamish Farmers Market, 4-8 p.m.

**Wednesday, Aug. 11**

Sammamish Farmers Market, 4-8 p.m.

Parks and Rec Comm. Mtg, 6:30 p.m.

**Monday, Aug. 16**

Arts Commission Meeting, 6:30 p.m.

**Wednesday, Aug. 18**

Sammamish Farmers Market, 4-8 p.m.

**Saturday, Aug. 21**

Sammamish Days, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.

City Hall

Sammamish Nights, 6:30-10 p.m.

City Hall

**Wednesday, Aug. 25**

Sammamish Farmers Market, 4-8 p.m.

### SEPTEMBER

**Wednesday, Sept. 1**

Sammamish Farmers Market, 4-8 p.m.

**Monday, Sept. 6**

Labor Day, City Hall closed

**Tuesday, Sept. 7**

Finance Committee Meeting, 5 p.m.

City Council Meeting, 6:30 p.m.

**Wednesday, Sept. 8**

Sammamish Farmers Market, 4-8 p.m.

City Council Office Hours, 5:30-6:30 p.m.

Parks and Rec Comm. Mtg, 6:30 p.m.

**Tuesday, Sept. 14**

City Council Study Session, 6:30 p.m.

**Wednesday, Sept. 15**

Sustainable Sammamish, 2-9 p.m.

City Hall

Sammamish Farmers Market, 4-8 p.m.

Art Exhibit Reception, Curated Photography, 6-8 p.m.

City Hall

Sammamish Youth Board Mtg, 6 p.m.

**Monday, Sept. 20**

Arts Commission Meeting, 6:30 p.m.

City Council Study Session, 6:30 p.m.

**Tuesday, Sept. 21**

City Council Meeting, 5:30 p.m.

**Wednesday, Sept. 22**

Sammamish Farmers Market, 4-8 p.m.

City Council Office Hours, 5:30-6:30 p.m.

**Thursday, Sept. 23**

Film Screening "Wounded Healers", 7-9 p.m. at City Hall

**Wednesday, Sept. 29**

Sammamish Farmers Market, 4-8 p.m.

### PLEASE NOTE:

All meetings and events at City Hall, unless otherwise noted. Times, dates and locations are subject to change. Please consult the city website for the most current information.



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## SAMMAMISH CITY COUNCIL



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Mayor



*Nancy Whitten*  
Deputy Mayor



*Mark Cross*  
Councilmember



*John Curley*  
Councilmember



*John James*  
Councilmember

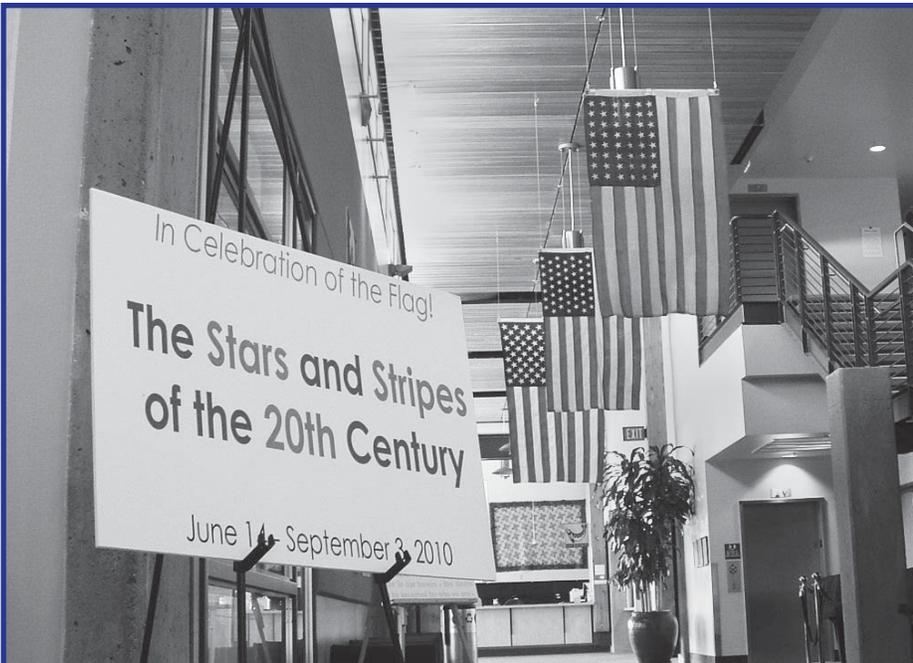


*Tom Odell*  
Councilmember



*Michele Petitti*  
Councilmember

# Flag display at City Hall



*A half dozen U.S. flags, and several from other countries, will adorn the City Hall lobby through Sept. 3 as part of the "Stars and Stripes of the 20th Century" display. The flags, some of them historical, can be viewed during normal business hours.*

### CITY OF SAMMAMISH OFFICES

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Pete Butkus	Deputy City Manager
Kamuron Gurol	ComDevDir/AsstCityMgr
Lyman Howard	FinanceDir/AsstCityMgr
John Cunningham	Public Works Director
Jessi Richardson	Parks & Rec Director
Mike Sauerwein	AdminServices Director
Melonie Anderson	City Clerk
Nathan Elledge	Police Chief
Lee Soptich	Fire Chief
Bruce Disend	City Attorney
Tim Larson	Communications Mgr