PRESS RELEASE: As San Juan County begins to climb out of the economic downturn and the structure of its government is in transition, beginning February 5 citizens have a special opportunity to offer their ideas and express their opinions about the future direction of public policy and the quality and quantity of public services available in the County.

The project is a series of four countywide round table “Community Conversations” on (1) Quality of Life, (2) Public Services, (3) The Economy and Jobs, and (4) Priorities of Government. Each topic in the series will be repeated in sessions on Lopez, Orcas, and San Juan Islands over a two-and-a-half month period. An additional session encompassing all four topics will be held on Shaw Island.

“This will not be a County show and tell,” said County Council Chair Jamie Stephens. “These meetings are being held so we can hear your thoughts and ideas about living, working and enjoying life in the Islands, and what you need from the County government.”

The discussions in each session will take place in small groups with each group discussing the issues and reporting out the ideas discussed and conclusions it reached to the entire group. The round table format is being used to give all a chance to participate and be heard. Citizens will also be able to offer input through a blog on the County website.

At the end of each round of Conversations, a summary of the discussions will be posted on the County’s website to provide background for the continuing Conversations. The final report will be presented to the new three-member County Council, which will take office in May.

The complete schedule for the sessions and more detail on the discussion areas follow. Additional details and updates on the Community Conversation will be available on the County website at sanjuanco.com/conversation and in a special section of the community newspapers.

MEETING SCHEDULE

February - Conversation #1: Quality of Life
(All meetings 6 p.m. until 9 p.m.)

Feb 5 Orcas Island, Orcas Fire Hall

Feb 6 San Juan, FH High School Commons

Feb 7 Lopez Island, Lopez Arts Center

March - Conversation #2: Public Services
(All meetings except Shaw are 6 p.m. until 9 p.m.)

Mar 5 Orcas Island, Orcas Fire Hall

Mar 6 San Juan, FH High School Commons

Mar 7 Lopez Island, Lopez Arts Center

Mar 16 Shaw Island Com. Center 1-5 pm

April - Conversation #3: Economy & Jobs
(All meetings 6 p.m. until 9 p.m.)

Apr 2 Orcas Island, Orcas Fire Hall

Apr 3 Lopez Island, Lopez Arts Center

Apr 4 San Juan, FH High School Commons

April - Conversation #4: Priorities of Government
(All meetings 6 p.m. until 9 p.m.)

Apr 16 Orcas Island, Orcas Fire Hall

Apr 17 Lopez Island, Lopez Arts Center

Apr 18 San Juan, FH High School Commons

DISCUSSION DETAILS AND SAMPLE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

CONVERSATION #1 - QUALITY OF LIFE

Beginning with the “Big Picture”, what inspires us to live here? What do we value most about our community and need to protect?

#1 How would you define our Island Quality of Life?

Are basic needs met?

Health and wellness needs met?

Educational opportunities?

Economic opportunities?

Access to arts and culture?

Neighborhoods &Island character?

Healthy environment?

#2 What are the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats in Sustaining Quality of Life?

What's working?

What's at risk?

What are the greatest unmet needs?

CONVERSATION #2 – PUBLIC SERVICES

Building towards our vision of Community, what services are essential to overall enhancing the

Quality of Life?

#1 What public services are essential to a good quality of life in San Juan County?

Law Enforcement/Public Safety?

Fire/EMS/Emergency Management?

Schools and Continuing Education?

Utilities/Water/Sewer?

Health Services? Senior Services?

Land Use Laws? Building Safety?

Parks and recreation?

#2 Where is the County doing well? Where can we do better?

Streamlining processes and permitting?

Partnering with others?

Access to County services?

CONVERSATION #3 - ECONOMY & JOBS

Maintaining a healthy economy has long been a challenge for SJC. Decades ago we transitioned from fishing, forestry, and agriculture to tourism, real estate, and construction.

#1 What do we want our future economy to look like?

How can we grow family-wage jobs?

Can we attract cottage industries & still maintain our rural character?

Can we broaden the economy be-yond tourism?

#2 Will current County policies support the economy and sustain services into the future? What should the County's role be in sup-porting our local economy?

Should land use policies be modified to enable businesses and to expand?

Should funding for Economic Development and new business opportunities be increased?

CONVERSATION #4 - PRIORITIES OF GOVERNMENT

What should be the priorities of government (services, service levels, taxes/fees) in balancing: Quality of Life, Services, Economy and Resources?

#1 To achieve our Quality of Life vision where would you increase or decrease current County services?

Law Enforcement/Courts/Prosecutor?

Emergency management?

Public Health?

Social Services (seniors, mental health, etc.)?

Growth management?

Environmental protection?

Economic development?

#2 Growing the economy to broaden the tax base will take years. Meanwhile costs continue to rise faster than the 1% increase allowed in County property tax revenue. Should property taxes and the services they support:

Increase slightly?

Stay the same? Or

Decrease slightly?