

Draft Legislative Agenda 2026 Legislative Session

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COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

NOVEMBER 5, 2025



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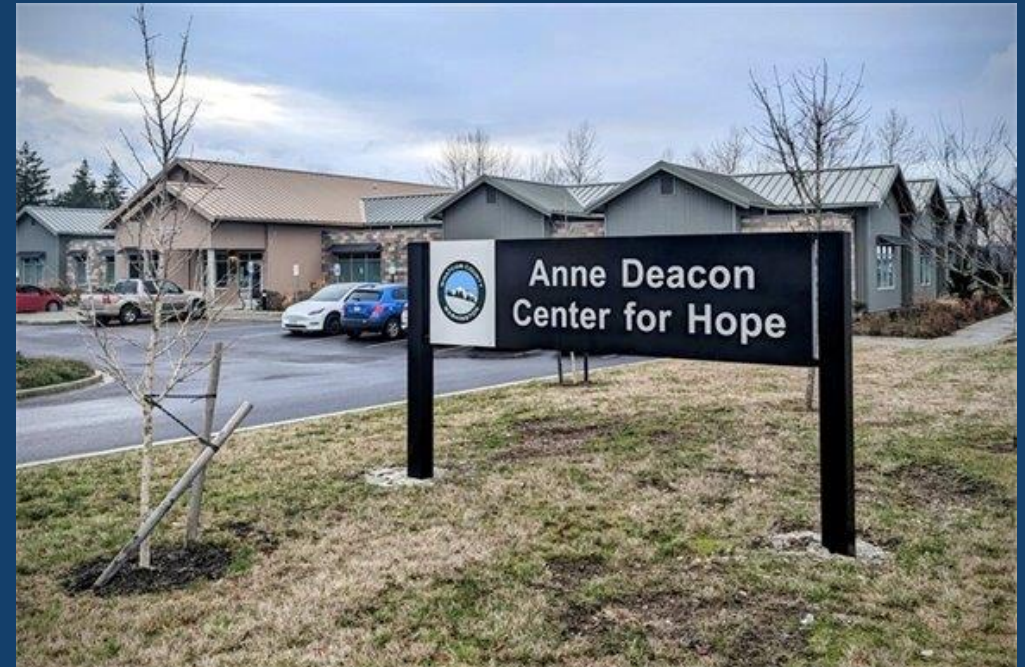
Key Objective: Ferry District Legislation

- Whatcom County is proposing legislation to remove the requirement that county ferry districts only provide "passenger only" service.
- Intent: enable Whatcom County to consider this mechanism for funding both operating and capital needs of the County's ferry system, which represents a significant burden on the Road Fund.
- Engaging with legislators from 42nd Legislative District to sponsor legislation in each house



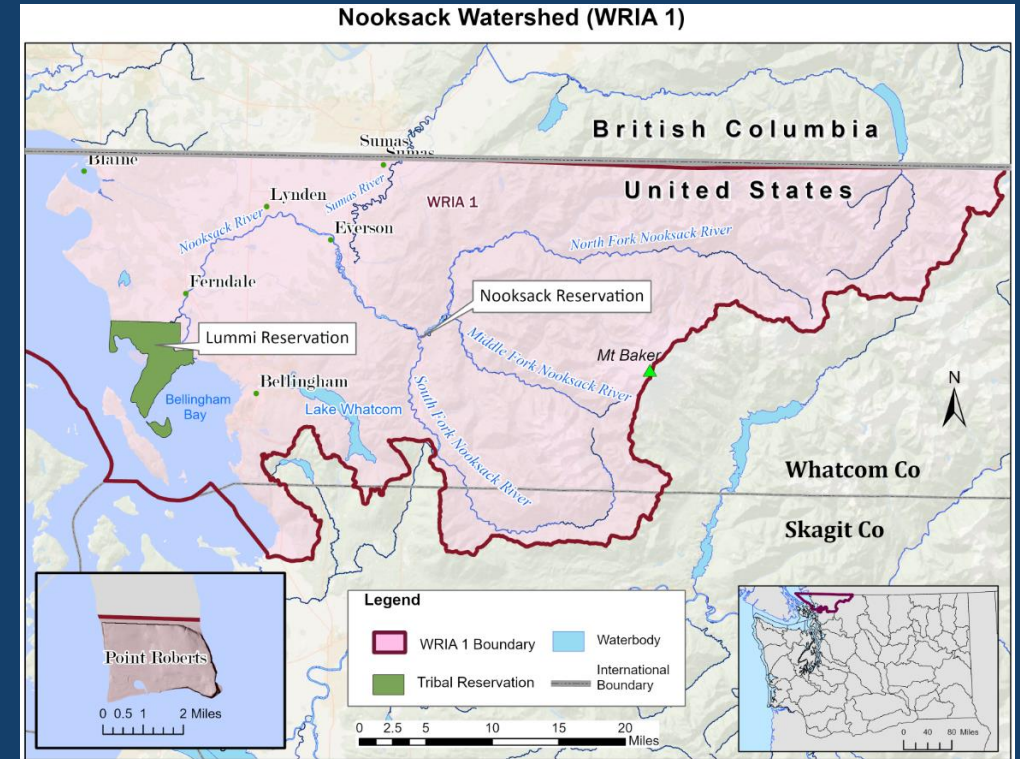
Key Objective: Capital Allocation Flexibility

- A capital appropriation of \$11.2 million dollars for a “23-hour crisis center” was provided earlier
- In 2025, Whatcom County took a closer look at the crisis center operating model as well as the spectrum of behavioral health needs.
- More flexibility in the parameters of would allow Whatcom County to create a facility with a more sustainable financial model and better adapted to the wide range of needs in the community.
- Whatcom County is requesting modification of the language associated with this allocation to allow for more flexibility in its use (i.e., a multi-license facility).



Key Objective: Adjudication Needs

- The Administrative Office of the Courts submitted a request to fund extraordinary costs related to the adjudication filed by the Department of Ecology.
- This request adds staff in the Superior Court and Clerks Office to manage claim filings and evidence, provides for a traveling court and rural outreach to inform and serve unrepresented litigants, and invests in technology infrastructure.
- The request includes \$817,000 for the current biennium (2025-2027) and anticipates \$1,292,000 in ongoing costs for the next biennium (2027-2029).



Other Important Topics

Funding for Indigent Defense

- The caseload standards adopted by the Supreme Court for indigent defense requires counties to expand their public defender's staff. Whatcom County joins other counties and cities in advocating for adequate state funding for public defense.

Food Security

- Given the recent disruption of SNAP benefits and reductions in federal food programs, Whatcom County advocates for state support of local food system infrastructure, including support for food banks.

Personal Property Exemption ([HB 1004](#))

- Legislation was introduced last year to provide relief for small businesses, and administration relief for the Assessor's and Treasurer's office. Whatcom County will continue to support this administrative relief.



Other Important Topics

Swift Creek Cleanup

- Funding provided for the current biennium was less than half the planned allocation. Whatcom County will continue to remind our legislators and partners about the importance of fully funding the agreed mitigation program.

Technical Assistance for Water Users Affected by Adjudication

- The current state operating budget includes \$200,000 for technical assistance in FY2026. This was significantly less than the \$600,000 requested for the biennium.

Youth Co-Occurring Treatment Facility

- Whatcom County will support cooperative efforts to address the critical need for youth-focused co-occurring treatment services, integrating mental health and substance use care across the North Sound region.



Other Important Topics

Regulatory Framework and Operating Funds for Crisis Relief Center

- The County will continue to collaborate with community partners to refine reimbursement mechanisms and the staffing model for crisis relief centers.

Increase Medicaid Reimbursement Rates for Providers

- Increased rates are essential for recruiting, training, and retaining qualified staff, and ultimately for the success of all existing and new behavioral health facilities.

Strengthening the 988 System ([SB 5762](#))

- Whatcom County supports increased funding for the 988 behavioral health crisis line to ensure individuals in crisis receive appropriate and timely care.



Other Areas of Interest

Whatcom County will actively monitor legislative proposals related to the following areas:

- Policy and funding for Search and Rescue
- State funding for BECCA cases
- Commercial fishing revenue options to for communities dependent on the industry (HB 1806)
- LAMIRD Reform
- Childcare, including easing regulatory burden on providers
- Opioid response and behavioral health
- Housing affordability, homeless services, severe weather shelter (e.g. smoke, heat, cold)
- Broadband, including use of hybrid deployment
- Fully funding implementation of medical examiner accreditation requirements
- State support for high-needs school districts and junior taxing districts reliant on timber revenue
- Preservation and maintenance funding for the county transportation system.



WSAC Priorities

- New county revenue
- Funding for indigent defense
- Funding for rural County Coroners
- Addressing county housing access and affordability
- Funding for the preservation and maintenance of the county transportation system
- County fiscal relief

