

**Whatcom County**  
**DRAFT SCOPE**  
**Professional Services for COVID-19 Pandemic Response Review**

**DRAFT SCOPE**

Whatcom County Council (County) invites consultants to submit a proposal for a review of the countywide pandemic response.

**Project Background**

On January 21, 2020, the Washington State Department of Health confirmed the first case of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in the United States in the State of Washington. COVID-19, a respiratory disease that can result in serious illness or death is caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, a new strain of coronavirus. A national public health emergency arising from COVID-19 was declared by United States Department of Health and Human Services secretary Alex Azar on January 31, 2020.

On March 10, 2020, Whatcom County Council voted to recommend activation of Whatcom Unified Command (WUC) in order to provide an integrated, coordinated, multi-jurisdictional response to the threat of COVID-19 locally. Staff and volunteers from county government, cities, local business, non-profits and other stepped forward to collectively fight the pandemic. Due to the nature of the emergency being global, the county could not rely on neighboring communities for support and had to rely on its own internal County-sources resources. The County believes it is prudent to anticipate a range of future widespread regional/national/global emergencies for which it needs to prepare to manage without assistance for some period of time, including but not limited to severe weather, cyber security attack, a catastrophic loss of the power or telecommunications grid.

Over 16 months, the WUC operated to address the needs of Whatcom County communities during the pandemic and was deactivated in July 2021. Emergency response efforts continued after the dissolution of the WUC via health department and emergency management services staff.

The global pandemic tested county preparedness, structures, and processes for dealing with disasters, and an opportunity exists to reflect on the County's response to the public emergency, to evaluate the systems in place to respond to the event, and identify opportunities to improve. Whatcom County Council wants to ensure the county is ready and even better prepared for the next global disaster, and on July 13, 2021, Council adopted Ordinance 2021-045 (see Exhibit A), establishing an independent commission to review our community's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of the review is to understand how emergency operations worked and identify successes, lessons learned, and opportunities for improvement.

Further, the ordinance directs the County Council to hire an independent special commissioner with the requisite qualifications (ideally a retired senior lawyer familiar with the county) to conduct the inquiry. The Special Commissioner will be compensated at the normal market rate for such work and should arrange for any necessary resources, if needed, such as working space and any staff support person to manage meetings and documentation. It is important that the reviewer be independent, and therefore the Special Commissioner must not have a vested interest in the outcome of the report, nor have any direct relationships with any persons involved in the activities being reviewed.

A review of the pandemic response should evaluate all response activities and provide recommendations for improvement in all aspects, including the structures of authority, roles of leadership, access to information for decisionmakers, services and communication to businesses and members of the public. A completed report will include but not be limited to examining the makeup of the County Health Board, Unified Command, County policy related to open communications with the public, evaluating the designated senior county emergency advisory positions (i.e. manufacturing, logistics, communications) and the community sectors represented. The Special

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Commissioner should include a thorough review and assessment of the County Emergency Management Plan, and other guiding documents used for emergency response activities to identify successes and areas for improvement. The review of the pandemic response should also identify a list of recommendations for improving the County's coordinated response for future widespread emergencies. Specific County agencies and departments such as the Health Department and the Sheriff's Office have completed their own post-event reviews, which are to be included in the data gathering phase of this project. Overall, this review aims to identify opportunities for better emergency preparedness, which includes the development of plans, resources, and capabilities to manage and recover from the effects of a variety of potential future emergencies of a regional/national/global scale.

**Project Timeline**

The County anticipates selecting the consultant and awarding the contract in the middle to end of November, 2021, with contract execution and work to begin by the first week in December, 2021. Phase 1 (Data Gathering) would take place during December, 2021 and January, 2022. Phase 2 (Preliminary Recommendations) would be underway in February, 2022. Phase 3 (Draft Findings and Report) would take place in March, with final work completed by the end of March, 2022.

**Proposed Description of Services**

The services to be provided may include, but not be limited to:

**ENGAGEMENT**

The consultant will engage government staff and community partners and stakeholders to receive feedback on the pandemic response. The target audience includes county and local government staff, health care providers, board and commission members, businesses, non-profits, residents, and people involved in the pandemic response.

- **Target Audience:** The consultant team will work with the following groups to receive information and feedback on the pandemic response:
  - a. **Technical Advisory Committee (TAC):** A core group of 7-8 County staff members and agency leaders will serve on the TAC. Their main role will be to provide information to facilitate the work of the consultant team (such as data, access to plans and reports, etc.) The TAC will meet as needed throughout the project (can meet virtually), or as needed to provide critical information to the consultant. Often times, the consultant will reach out to TAC members individually, rather than scheduling group meetings.
  - b. **Boards and Commissions:**
    - Health Board
    - Public Health Advisory Board
    - EMS Oversight Board (EOB)
    - EMS Technical Advisory Board (TAB)
    - Housing Advisory Committee of Whatcom County
    - Economic Development Investment Board (EDI Board)
    - Child and Family Well-Being Task Force
    - Business and Commerce Advisory Committee
    - Food System Committee
  - c. **Community partners:**
    - Bellingham Regional Chamber of Commerce
    - School Districts
    - Peace Health
    - Unity Care NW

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- d. County Council: Project updates will be provided to the County Council. The consultant will present to the County Council at 3 key milestones of the project to provide updates on project progress and solicit feedback and direction.
    - (1) Results of data gathering
    - (2) Review of preliminary recommendations
    - (3) Draft findings and report
  - e. Bellingham City Council and Small Cities: The consultant will coordinate with the Bellingham City Council and the Small City Partnership to solicit feedback early in the process and again in Phase 2 after preliminary recommendations are developed.
- **Communications Tools:** The consultant team will use a variety of communications tools, including but not limited to the following:
    - a. Project Materials: The consultant and the County will work collaboratively on all public facing materials with the consultant drafting final versions and County staff reviewing and posting materials. Outreach materials may include:
      - Project webpage content, including FAQs, (hosted on County website)
      - Project fact sheet
      - Email content (distributed by the County)
      - Online survey content
      - Survey Results Summary Sheet
      - Press releases (drafted by consultant) approved/posted to project webpage
      - Presentations (3 presentations to Council)
    - b. 1-on-1 Interviews: The consultant will conduct 1-on-1 interviews with elected officials, staff, and other key community leaders to solicit feedback.
    - c. Online Survey: The consultant team will develop an online survey, hosted by the consultant team and distributed by County staff to persons participating in the emergency response activities. A summary document of survey responses will be posted on the project webpage and included in the final report.

**Phase 1: Data Gathering**

The Phase 1 Data Gathering will include a comprehensive review of the pandemic response, including the following areas of interest:

- Roles and responsibilities of county and local leaders (as per codes and in experience), including the makeup of Unified Command.
- Evaluate expanding the designated senior county emergency advisory positions (i.e. manufacturing, logistics, telecommunications, messaging/marketing/promotion) and the community sectors represented.
- Evaluate policy related to open communications to businesses and the public (reaching all and diverse demographics)
- Emergency/Event coordination among government leaders (Health Board/Council, Executive, Health Department Whatcom Unified Command, local jurisdictions)
- Expertise of staff working on pandemic response and how positions are filled
- Evaluate logistics related to the fulfillment of supplies including:
  - personal protective equipment for emergency response, local businesses, and medical facilities
  - food distribution
  - medical supplies
  - emergency shelters
- Alternative communications plans in the event most/all traditional methods become unavailable
- Availability of data to inform decision-making during the event

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- Application of guidance from policy documents (e.g. Emergency Management Plan)
- Communications both within emergency management and to the public.

The Consultant will:

1. Work with Technical Advisory Committee members to gather information and data (quantitative and qualitative) on the aforementioned topics.
2. Work with the Technical Advisory Committee to receive all available data and reports, including:
  - (a) Situation Reports
  - (b) Results of any internal post-pandemic reviews completed (including Sheriff's Office and Health Department)
  - (c) Others as needed
3. Review and consider guidance provided to pandemic response staff in plans and reports, including:
  - (a) Emergency Management Plan
  - (b) NIMS Training
  - (c) Others as needed
4. Collect feedback from County leadership and staff as well as partner agencies through interviews and/or surveys
5. Review Phase 1 Data Report with County Leadership (Council/Executive/Sheriff)

**Phase 2: Preliminary Recommendations**

During Phase 2, the consultant will evaluate information collected in Phase 1 Data Gathering and identify preliminary recommendations for improvements to the pandemic response. Recommendations will consider not only the potential future event of another pandemic, but also emergency response procedures related to other potential future global emergencies (e.g. cybersecurity event, etc.). The Phase 2 Preliminary Recommendations will include the following:

1. Recommendations for code changes or regulations
2. Summary of recommended programmatic and staffing (e.g. expertise) needs to better prepare for the next global event
3. Recommended changes to decision-making structures (i.e. Health Board, Executive/Health Department, Public Health Advisory Board, Whatcom Unified Command, etc.)
4. Identify best practices from other jurisdictions that can be useful to address gaps and needs in our local pandemic response,
5. Create a concise list/chart of recommendations
6. Specific recommendations to be considered for incorporation into the next update of the Whatcom County Emergency Management Plan and any other County guiding documents.
7. Presentation of preliminary recommendations to County Leadership (Council/Executive/Sheriff).

**Phase 3: Final Report**

During the Phase 3 Final Report, the consultant will compile information from the previous two phases into a report document and presentation. This will include:

1. Final report with summary information from Phase 1 and Phase 2.
  - a. Full report with an executive summary, table of contents, appendices of data, chart of recommendations, and a 1-2-page highlights document for quick reference
2. A presentation of the final report to county leadership (Council/Executive/Sheriff)
3. A PDF document for posting online
4. 5 printed copies of the complete final report with appendices

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**Proposal Submittal Requirements**

To be complete, the proposal must provide all the information requested in this RFP in the order that it is requested. Information must be organized and presented in the same order and sequence as presented below to facilitate the review by the RFP selection team. A response of “see enclosed brochure” will not be considered adequate. Proposals must contain the following sections in no more than twelve (12) single sided pages:

1. Executive Summary / Cover Letter (2 pages)
2. Consultant Overview and Information (2 pages)
3. Qualifications of Staff Assigned to the Project (3 pages)
5. Project Approach/Scope (2 pages)
6. Project Schedule (1 page)
7. Cost Estimate for Scope of Work (1 page)
8. List of Client References (1 page)

**Executive Summary / Cover Letter (2 pages)**

A cover letter shall be addressed to Dana Brown-Davis, Clerk of the Council, Whatcom County. The letter should communicate the Contractor’s particular strengths and why the Contractor should be chosen to provide the requested services. The letter must be signed by an individual who is authorized to commit the Contractor to a binding agreement.

**Consultant Overview and Information (2 pages)**

1. Provide name of consultant/firm and the principal place of business, number of years in business, size of firm, and the name, email address, and telephone number of the primary contact assigned to the project.
2. Provide a brief history and description of the consultant/firm. Include general information regarding organizational structure, size, capabilities, and the consultant/firm’s qualifications and experience.
3. Provide a description of the consultant’s/firm’s approach to this type of project including:
  - a. Consultant/Firm’s qualifications and ability to undertake this project
  - b. Methods and techniques the consultant/firm will employ
  - c. Experience with other public entities
  - d. Knowledge of, and experience in performance evaluations and recommendations
  - e. Description of similar projects performed
  - f. Description of project management experience
  - g. Description of procedures related to quality assurance

**Qualifications of Staff Assigned to this Project (3 pages)**

1. Include resumes for key personnel providing services, including those focused-on interviews, data collection, data evaluation, and surveys.
2. Identify the roles and tasks personnel will perform, including percentage of their time dedicated to this project.

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3. Describe the experience of the lead consultant in working with clients of similar characteristics as Whatcom County.
4. Provide any additional information that specifically addresses the consultant's/firm's unique qualifications for the project.

Project Approach/Scope (2 pages)

Provide a description of the consultant's/firm's project approach by creating a well-developed scope (based on the County's goals described in this RFP) with descriptions of activities. Specifically call out any changes or additions to the work described in this RFP.

Project Schedule (1 page)

Provide a schedule for the study, keeping in mind that the County Council has identified a goal of no later than March 31, 2022 for completion of the project. Present the schedule in the form of a chart that breaks out the project into three Phases described above and shows the approximate times when key activities will occur and their general sequence. Please include the estimated number of hours each person will work per phase and task.

Cost Estimate for Scope of Work (1 page)

The budget proposal should be presented in a table format, showing line items for each phase of work identified, a brief description of services in each phase, and specifics line items for public engagement. The information should be presented in an easy to read table format. Extra lines should be added to the table as needed, such as to list the various consultants participating in each phase element. Provide a relevant narrative to explain the need for any items that are not immediately apparent in the budget table. Costs should be all inclusive of staff time, travel, and incidental expenses.

List of Client References (1 page)

Provide at least three (3) client references, outside of Whatcom County staff, who may be contacted and for whom similar work has been completed in the past five years. References should be entities for which your firm has performed similar projects in the public sector. Provide a contact name, title, organization, email, and telephone number, as well as a brief statement about previous work with the client.

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EXHIBIT A: ORDINANCE 2021-045

PROPOSED BY: BROWNE  
INTRODUCTION DATE: June 15, 2021

**ORDINANCE NO. 2021-045**

**ESTABLISHING AN INDEPENDENT REVIEW  
OF THE COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

**WHEREAS** on January 21, 2020, the Washington State Department of Health confirmed the first case of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in the United States in the State of Washington, and, COVID-19, a respiratory disease that can result in serious illness or death, is caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which is a new strain of coronavirus that had not been previously identified in humans, which easily spreads from person to person; and

**WHEREAS** on January 31, 2020, the United States Department of Health and Human Services secretary Alex Azar declared a national public health emergency arising from COVID-19; and

**WHEREAS** on March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic with global spread, impacts, and health risks; and

**WHEREAS** in March 2020, Whatcom Unified Command (WUC) was activated to provide an integrated, coordinated, multi-jurisdictional response to the threat of COVID-19 locally, in partnership with the Whatcom County Health Department; and

**WHEREAS** the staff of Whatcom County Government; the cities of Bellingham, Lynden, Ferndale, Blaine, Nooksack, Everson, and Sumas; the Lummi and Nooksack Nations; PeaceHealth; medical providers; fire districts; businesses; non-profit and faith-based organizations; community groups; and countless citizens all stepped forward to collectively fight the pandemic; and

**WHEREAS** in all prior emergencies the County has faced, we could rely on neighboring communities or states to provide us with materials and skilled workers to help us cope – but as this was a truly global disaster, for a time we had to rely on our own internal County sourced resources to manufacture PPE, distribute food, etc.; and

**WHEREAS** Whatcom County can expect future emergencies to arise, of a yet unknown type, which could include future pandemics, floods, fire, earthquake, cyber-attack, widespread communications loss, and perhaps even things we have not yet imagined; and

**WHEREAS** in the book “The Great Influenza” the story of the Spanish Flu pandemic the author concludes:

*“The final lesson of 1918, a simple one yet one most difficult to execute, is that...those in authority must retain the public's trust. The way to do that is to distort nothing, to put the best face on nothing, to try to manipulate no one. Lincoln said that first, and best. A leader must make whatever horror exists concrete. Only then will people be able to break it apart.”*; and

**WHEREAS** this is not humanity's first pandemic, nor will it be our last; and

**WHEREAS** citizens will be less likely to blame their government for future disasters caused by factors outside our control, but will have good reason to be critical if their government fails to plan, prepare and learn from past experiences; and

**WHEREAS** the Pandemic has truly tested our structures and processes for dealing with disaster, and in doing so has provided us an ideal opportunity to evaluate, to recognize what we did well and where we have an opportunity to improve; and

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EXHIBIT A: ORDINANCE 2021-045 (continued):

**WHEREAS** the Pandemic response has inspired various requests to review: the makeup of the County Health Board; Unified Command; the County Emergency Management Plan; and County policy related to communications with the public; and

**WHEREAS** the people most qualified to provide feedback on our response are those who actively worked on answering the needs of the community; and

**WHEREAS** this year we will have several key members of our community retiring and we would like to hear from them before they become unavailable; and

**WHEREAS** the best way to determine the lessons to be learned from the Pandemic is to appoint a Special Commissioner to interview the key participants, to document the lessons learned, to better inform the community on how we can ensure the things we did right, what will be likely to occur again, where we need to improve, and what to avoid next time.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED** that the Whatcom County Council establishes a County Commission to review our community's response to the COVID-19 Pandemic; and

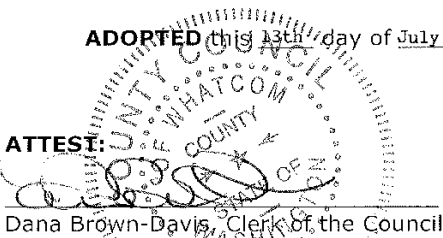
**BE IT FURTHER ORDAINED** that County Council shall select, and Whatcom County shall hire, an independent Special Commissioner with the requisite qualifications (ideally a retired senior lawyer familiar with the county) to conduct the inquiry; and

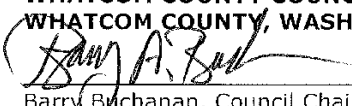
**BE IT FURTHER ORDAINED** that such Special Commissioner be compensated at the normal market rate for such work, and be provided the necessary resources including office space and one or more full-time support persons to manage meetings and documentation; and

**BE IT FURTHER ORDAINED** that they shall include, but not be limited to examining: the makeup of the County Health Board; Unified Command; County policy related to open communications with the public; expanding the designated senior county emergency advisory positions (i.e. manufacturing, logistics, communications) and the community sectors represented; and

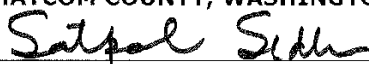
**BE IT FINALLY ORDAINED** that the person shall complete and deliver their report to the County Council, County Executive and County Sherriff by March 31, 2022, to enable the county to incorporate their findings in future updates to the County's existing emergency response plan.

**ADOPTED** this 13th day of July, 2021.

**ATTEST:**  
  
Dana Brown-Davis, Clerk of the Council

**WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL**  
**WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON**  
  
Barry Buchanan, Council Chair

**APPROVED AS TO FORM:**  
  
/s/ Karen Frakes Approved via E-mail/ JL  
Civil Deputy Prosecutor

**WHATCOM COUNTY EXECUTIVE**  
**WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON**  
  
Satpal Sidhu, County Executive  
 Approved      ( ) Denied  
Date Signed: 7/19/21