



Lodging Tax Advisory Committee  
2026 Funding Allocation Meeting  
October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
**Draft** Minutes

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**COMMITTEE MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:**

Executive Satpal Sidhu, County Executive (Chair)  
Rebecca Boonstra, Mt. Baker Chamber of Commerce (TR<sup>1</sup>)  
Meganne Offredi – Holiday Inn & Suites (TC<sup>2</sup>)  
Guy Occhiogrosso, Whatcom Chamber (TR)  
Dylan Deane-Boyle, BWCT – Visit Bellingham Whatcom County (TR)

**STAFF PRESENT:**

Jake Logan, Whatcom County Executive's Office - Administration

**October 13, 2025, 10:20 a.m. – 12:25 p.m.**

322 N. Commercial Street, Bellingham, WA (Hybrid Meeting)

**OTHER ATTENDEES - IN PERSON:<sup>3</sup>**

| Name                | Organization                                 |
|---------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| Representative      | Whatcom Frightmare Haunted House             |
| Erin Deinzer        | Sea to Sky Events                            |
| Delaney Skordahl    | Sustainable Connections                      |
| Representative      | Sustainable Connections                      |
| Jiggy Sorrel        | Warrior Service USA                          |
| Representative      | Photo Palooza                                |
| Audrey Sager        | Cascadia International Women's Film Festival |
| Adam Carroll Brooks | Cascadia International Women's Film Festival |
| Frida Desmond       | Point Roberts Chamber of Commerce            |
| Debbie Parker       | Wings Over Water Northwest Birding Festival  |
| Lindsay Gerhard     | Bellingham Whatcom County Tourism            |
| Danielle Gaughen    | Birch Bay Chamber of Commerce                |
| Tatiana Stone       | Bellingham SeaFeast                          |
| Kevin Coleman       | Bellingham SeaFeast                          |
| Representative      | Bellingham Scottish Gathering                |
| Anna Rankin         | Whatcom Events                               |
| David Starr         | North Cascades Bluegrass Festival            |
| Representative      | Cascade Mountain Ascents                     |
| Representative      | Allied Arts                                  |

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<sup>1</sup> TR – Tax Recipient

<sup>2</sup> TC – Tax Collector

<sup>3</sup> Attendee list complete/correct to best of clerk's ability

## OTHER ATTENDEES - VIRTUAL:

| Name            | Organization                      |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------|
| Madison Cluny   | Jansen Arts Center                |
| Jared Loranger  | Bellingham Bay Marathon           |
| Marshall Miller | Ragnar Relay Northwest Passage    |
| Di Marrs-Smith  | Birch Bay Chamber of Commerce     |
| Louise Mugar    | Point Roberts Chamber of Commerce |
| Sara O'Connor   | Ferndale Community Services       |

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### 1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Chair Sidhu called the meeting to order at approximately 10:20 a.m. and confirmed a quorum was present. Introductions were made by all committee members, staff, and meeting attendees both in person and virtually.

Chair Sidhu acknowledged the recent retirement of Tawni Helms approximately 10 days prior to the meeting, noting her significant contributions to the Executive's Office and the LTAC program over the years. He announced that Jake Logan would assume responsibility for LTAC administration while the Executive's Office undergoes reorganization through the end of the year.

Chair Sidhu expressed appreciation for holding this meeting and thanked committee members for their unique role in bringing joy to the community through tourism and events. He emphasized the "noble task" that committee members and applicants undertake in supporting tourism in Whatcom County.

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### 2. CONFIRMATION OF JUNE 26, 2025 MEETING MINUTES

**MOTION:** Rebecca Boonstra moved to approve the minutes from the June 26, 2025 meeting. Guy Occhiogrosso seconded.

**VOTE:** The motion passed unanimously.

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### 3. PUBLIC COMMENT

Chair Sidhu opened the floor for public comment regarding the board, lodging tax policy, or process (not specific to individual project applications). One attendee inquired about whether funding decisions would be made during the meeting. Chair Sidhu responded that most if not all the applicants would know their funding status before leaving the meeting. No other formal public comments were offered during the designated public comment period. Other members added on provided more detail on how the funding decision is made – that County Council is technically the final decision.

*(Clerk's note –Executive Sidhu is correct that funding decisions made in these meetings highly predictive of eventually funding approval, though it is also true the ultimate funding authority rests with the Whatcom County Council.)*

#### 4. BUDGET AND FUNDING PRIORITIES DISCUSSION

Chair Sidhu presented the proposed 2026 budget allocation. The Executive's Office proposed increasing the total allocation from the original estimate of \$1,075,000 to \$1,212,054 based on updated revenue projections and fund balance analysis. The committee reviewed the funding priorities established by the LTAC Board in 2024 (for 2025 funding), which remain in effect for the 2026 program cycle. Those priorities can be found on the Whatcom LTAC webpage and are as follows:

1. Funding the primary Destination Marketing Organization (DMO), Bellingham Whatcom County Tourism, as the lead agency responsible for marketing and promoting tourism throughout the county
2. Supporting chambers that have dedicated staff to promote local tourism and provide visitor services
3. Funding organizations that offer broad, year-round services to visitors and the community
4. Allocating funds for infrastructure enhancements that support tourism
5. Supporting festivals and events hosted in unincorporated areas that have a significant impact on attracting overnight visitors

The committee expressed support for moving forward with the increased budget allocation. There was no motion made, this action does not require a motion. The Board agreed to evaluate applications according to established criteria, including emphasis on generating overnight stays and lodging tax revenue throughout Whatcom County, not solely within the City of Bellingham. It was clarified that this meeting would address tourism promotion and events/festivals applications only, with capital project applications scheduled for a separate meeting on October 15, 2025.

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#### 5. REVIEW OF TOURISM PROMOTION / PUBLIC TOURISM AGENCY APPLICATIONS

The committee reviewed eight applications in the Tourism Promotion category, totaling \$847,250 in requests.

Tourism Promotion Applications - Approved in First Motion

**MOTION:** Guy Occhiogrosso moved to fund Bellingham/Whatcom County Tourism, Mt. Baker Chamber of Commerce, Birch Bay Chamber of Commerce, and Whatcom County Parks Guide/Brochure at their requested amounts. The motion was seconded. **VOTE:** The motion passed unanimously.

**MOTION:** Rebecca Boonstra moved to fund Point Roberts Chamber of Commerce and Bellingham Regional Chamber of Commerce. The motion was seconded. **VOTE:** The motion passed unanimously.

The committee discussed the **Sea to Sky application**. Erin Deinzer presented her proposal to launch a Destination Management Company (DMC) targeting group travel to Whatcom County, with specific focus on the FIFA 2026 World Cup as an opportunity to attract international group visitors. She explained her extensive background as a travel journalist specializing in the meetings and events industry and her desire to provide "boots on the ground" services for group planners looking to bring visitors to the area between Seattle and Vancouver.

Guy Occhiogrosso questioned whether Sea to Sky Events would operate as a for-profit entity. MegAnne Offrendi expressed concern that the organization might be competitive with Visit Bellingham (Bellingham Whatcom County Tourism). Dylan Deane-Boyle explained some of the underlying business model concepts that distinguish DMOs (Destination Marketing Organizations) from DMCs (Destination Management Companies). After discussion about potential overlap or competition with existing regional marketing efforts, the Committee determined that no motion would be made for funding at this time.

**DECISION:** No motion was made to fund this application.

## **Blaine Chamber of Commerce - Blaine Visitor Center (New Applicant) – Not funded**

**Request:** \$30,000

The committee discussed this new application in detail. No representative from the Blaine Chamber of Commerce was present to answer questions.

Committee members expressed concerns about establishing a precedent for funding municipal chambers that have their own lodging tax programs. Guy Occhiogrosso noted that smaller cities within Whatcom County already have access to their own LTAC funding and questioned whether the Blaine application provided sufficient budget detail. He also mentioned that the City of Blaine serves as a gateway to Whatcom County but that the Chamber is not conducting as many events as in past years.

Dylan Deane-Boyle suggested revisiting the Blaine Chamber funding at a future meeting, but committee eventually settled to on "let it lay". The Board generally expressed hesitation about using county lodging tax funds to support chambers in specific municipalities that have their own lodging tax programs.

**DECISION:** No motion made to fund the Blaine Chamber of Commerce's request.

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## **6. REVIEW OF EVENT/FESTIVAL APPLICATIONS**

The committee reviewed 18 event and festival applications totaling \$436,005 in requests.

### **Bellingham Bay Marathon (New Applicant) - FUNDED**

**Request:** \$32,500 | **Approved:** \$10,000

Jared Loranger, race director representing the Whatcom Rangers and Bellingham Bay Swim Team, presented the application virtually. MegAnne Offrendi asked why the organization had never applied before. Loranger explained that previous race directors were not aware of the funding opportunity. Discussion ensued about the complexity of the funding request and the importance of tracking overnight stays and lodging bookings in Whatcom County. Loranger confirmed he was working with Eric at Bellingham Whatcom County Tourism on tracking methodologies.

**MOTION:** MegAnne Offrendi moved to approve \$10,000 for the Bellingham Bay Marathon. Guy Occhiogrosso seconded.

**VOTE:** The motion passed unanimously.

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### **North Cascades Bluegrass Festival, Sustainable Connections, and Whatcom Events - FUNDED**

Guy Occhiogrosso proposed funding these three established organizations that have demonstrated consistent tourism impact.

**MOTION:** Guy Occhiogrosso moved to approve funding for North Cascades Bluegrass Festival (\$35,500), Sustainable Connections (\$45,000), and Whatcom Events (\$50,000). Dylan Deane-Boyle seconded.

**VOTE:** The motion passed unanimously.

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### **Cascade Mountain Ascents and Allied Arts - FUNDED**

**Cascade Mountain Ascents Request:** \$37,800 | **Approved:** \$15,000

The committee reviewed the Cascade Mountain Ascents application noting the organization received grant funding in the previous year. MegAnne Offrendi inquired about systems for measuring overnight stays related to the program and

which lodging areas are being supported. The representative explained they attract tourists from Seattle with a wide geographic dispersion of lodging throughout Whatcom County. Dylan Deane-Boyle noted they have been working with Luxury Getaways and MegAnne's Holiday Inn as avenues to track overnight stays. The board discussed positively that Cascade Mountain Ascents has experienced an expanded busy season.

**Allied Arts Request:** \$10,000 | **Approved:** \$10,000

**MOTION:** Guy Occhiogrosso moved to fund Cascade Mountain Ascents for \$15,000 and Allied Arts for \$10,000. The motion was seconded.

**VOTE:** The motion passed unanimously.

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### **Bellingham SeaFeast - FUNDED**

**Request:** \$20,000 | **Approved:** \$20,000

Kevin Goldman and Tatiana Stone presented information about SeaFeast's growth, including doubling the number of vendors at the event in the past year. The committee discussed how the program has changed since their last application and noted the event's expansion over time. Danielle Gaughen from the Birch Bay Chamber spoke in support, noting that SeaFeast has been supportive and complementary to some of their events and that 2026 would mark the 10-year anniversary. MegAnne Offrendi expressed that she had seen significant effort from SeaFeast and sounded positive about the application. Guy Occhiogrosso raised concerns that SeaFeast is primarily a City of Bellingham event and part of their signature event program, suggesting the city should fund this event in its completeness. He argued that county lodging tax funds should be strategic and used for things that the City of Bellingham cannot or will not fund, citing opportunity cost considerations. Chair Sidhu discussed the relationship between Bellingham and Whatcom County, emphasizing that while Bellingham's influence is significant, the city and county are deeply interconnected, with Bellingham being a large part of the county. Rebecca Boonstra agreed with supporting aspects of SeaFeast other than the main weekend event. Dylan Deane-Boyle spoke about SeaFeast's relationship to the City of Bellingham's signature event grant process.

### **TWO COMPETING MOTIONS:**

Rebecca Boonstra motioned to fund SeaFeast for \$15,000.

Chair Sidhu made a competing motion for \$20,000 (full funding).

The committee waited to see which motion would receive a second first. Chair Sidhu's motion for \$20,000 was seconded by MegAnne Offrendi.

**VOTE:** The motion for \$20,000 passed unanimously.

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### **Cascadia International Women's Film Festival - FUNDED**

**Request:** \$10,000 | **Approved:** \$10,000

**MOTION:** Chair Sidhu made a motion to fund the Cascadia Film Festival for \$10,000. Rebecca Boonstra seconded.

**VOTE:** The motion passed unanimously.

### **Ferndale Pride Festival (New Applicant) - NOT FUNDED**

**Request:** \$5,000

Sara O'Connor from Ferndale Community Services presented virtually. MegAnne Offrendi expressed skepticism that the festival was a "heads in beds" kind of event generating overnight stays. Sara confirmed that they did have people from out of town attend, which she admitted was surprising. The committee learned that the organization did not apply for Ferndale LTAC funding, with the explanation that the Ferndale City Council might not be supportive of the event.

**MOTION:** Chair Sidhu made a motion to fund the Ferndale Pride Festival.

**VOTE:** The motion did not receive a second. Rebecca Boonstra stated it was not really an LTAC proposal and that funding it would set a concerning precedent.

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### **Jansen Art Center - "Lens Arts at The J: Come and Stay!" (New Applicant) - NOT FUNDED**

**Request:** \$15,000

Madison Cluny presented virtually on behalf of the Jansen Arts Center in Lynden, describing plans to open a new darkroom and photographic services program that would be one of only five community darkrooms in the state of Washington. The program would bring in nationally acclaimed workshop and program leaders, advertising regionally from Vancouver to Seattle and Portland, as well as nationally to attract people during the summer.

Committee members asked whether they had been funded by or applied to Lynden LTAC. The representatives indicated they had not, citing uncertainty about eligibility or process, but noted they are working with Lynden LTAC for possible 2027 funding.

MegAnne Offrendi and Dylan Deane-Boyle agreed that they did not see a clear connection between the proposal and Whatcom County lodging tax revenue and did not believe it would generate tax-supported overnight stays.

**DECISION:** No motion was made to fund this application.

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### **Bellingham Scottish Gathering/Highland Games - FUNDED**

**Request:** \$25,000 | **Approved:** \$25,000

The representative (Heather) explained that historically 90% of competitors came from Canada, but attendance was significantly impacted in 2025. As a relatively new festival, the event has moved multiple times and recently relocated to Blaine. Dylan Deane-Boyle asked about how the organizer estimated room night numbers.

**MOTION:** MegAnne Offrendi moved to fund the Bellingham Scottish Gathering for \$25,000. Chair Sidhu seconded.

**VOTE:** The motion passed unanimously.

### **Photo Palooza PNW (New Applicant) - NOT FUNDED**

**Request:** \$25,000

The applicant questioned why the event was not funded. Dylan Deane-Boyle commented that the project is focused on Semiahmoo. It was noted that the applicant was not fully aware of how LTAC funds are collected or their intended purpose.

**DECISION:** No motion was made to fund this application.2026-Funding-allocations.xlsx+2

### **Strings & Things International Music Festival - FUNDED**

**Request:** \$45,000 | **Approved:** \$30,000

**MOTION:** Guy Occhiogrosso moved to fund Strings & Things for \$30,000. Rebecca Boonstra seconded.

**VOTE:** The motion passed unanimously.

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### **Warrior Service USA - Blaine Veterans Appreciation Weekend (New Applicant) - NOT FUNDED**

**Request:** \$30,000

Jiggy Sorrel presented the application. The committee was initially skeptical of the proposal.

**DECISION:** No motion was made to fund this application.

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### **Whatcom Frightmare Haunted House Fundraiser (New Applicant) - NOT FUNDED**

**Request:** \$9,228

Beth, the owner, introduced herself and the 7-year-old event during introductions, describing it as a successful fundraiser for Friends of the Food Bank that includes food trucks, carnival games, and other attractions beyond the haunted house. The event also involves the Coast Guard.

The committee generally advised the applicant to pursue funding from the City of Ferndale and expressed that approval seemed unlikely.

**DECISION:** No motion was made to fund this application.

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### **Wings Over Water Northwest Birding Festival - FUNDED**

**Request:** \$10,000 | **Approved:** \$10,000

**MOTION:** Rebecca Boonstra moved to approve Wings Over Water for \$10,000. Dylan Deane-Boyle seconded.

**VOTE:** The motion passed unanimously.

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### **Ragnar Relay Northwest Passage (New Applicant) - FUNDED**

**Request:** \$25,977 | **Approved:** \$15,000

Marshall Miller, race director, presented virtually explaining this was Ragnar's first application. He noted that with a new general manager last year, they missed the application window but intended to apply. He acknowledged that similar challenges faced by the Bellingham Bay Marathon regarding thinner margins and sponsorship dollars also applied to Ragnar. Miller confirmed they were also applying for City of Bellingham lodging tax funding as recommended by Bellingham Whatcom County Tourism. GMT20251013-165533\_Recording.transcript.vtt+1

Miller explained the unique funding request amount came from calculating specific expenses that qualify within the county, such as portable toilets and other equipment specifically located in Whatcom County. He provided data showing they had three hotel room blocks totaling 120+ room nights that sold out in 2025, with plans to increase room blocks for 2026. A post-race questionnaire showed 67% of approximately 3,100 participants booked at least one hotel room night,



with the race starting locations at Peace Arch State Park or Whatcom Community College ensuring many stayed within the county.

MegAnne Offrendi confirmed from her direct experience that her Holiday Inn is full with Ragnar racers every year and that the event puts "heads and beds" throughout the county, specifically in Glacier, Mount Baker Rim, and at her property. The committee discussed the amount of the ask.

**MOTION:** Guy Occhiogrosso moved to fund Ragnar for \$15,000. Rebecca Boonstra seconded.

**VOTE:** The motion passed unanimously.

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### **Quest Races - Galbraith Supreme (New Applicant) - TABLED**

**Request:** \$5,000 (clarified)

Committee staff Jake Logan clarified confusion about the request amount. The agenda listed \$25,000 (as communicated in the application), but previous communications with the applicant confirmed the actual request was meant to be \$5,000.

Guy Occhiogrosso indicated that more information would be needed from the Quest Races project to thoroughly evaluate it. The Committee suggested the applicant provide additional information and potentially apply again in the next funding cycle with a more complete application.

**DECISION:** The committee tabled this application, requesting additional information.

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## **8. COMMITTEE DISCUSSION AND CLARIFICATIONS**

At the conclusion of application reviews, one attendee requested clarification about two items that had not received votes: Warrior Service and Whatcom Nightmare Haunted House. Staff confirmed that no motions or votes were made for those applications, and therefore they were not recommended for funding.

For applications from Quest Races, Guy Occhiogrosso recommended that staff reach out to the applicant to request more information. The Committee discussed whether to schedule another meeting or to invite the applicant to provide additional information for consideration in the next funding cycle. The Committee agreed that rather than scheduling additional meetings in 2025, staff would communicate with the applicant and invite them to submit a more complete application for the 2027 funding cycle.

Chair Sidhu and committee members acknowledged that establishing clearer funding criteria and priorities has made the deliberation process more structured and transparent compared to previous years. The committee recognized that while some decisions were difficult, having established policies helped guide consistent decision-making. Committee members expressed appreciation for the productive discussion and noted that the clear criteria and policy framework established in recent years has helped both applicants and committee members understand expectations.

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## **9. UPCOMING CAPITAL PROJECTS MEETING**

Chair Sidhu mentioned that another meeting would be held on October 15, 2025 (Wednesday) to review capital project applications. Chair Sidhu indicated he would be unable to attend that meeting, but Kayla Schott-Bresler (Whatcom County Deputy Executive) would attend and vote on his behalf.

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## **10. ADJOURNMENT**



The meeting adjourned at approximately 12:20p,

**Next Meeting:** October 15, 2025 (Capital Projects Review)

<https://www.whatcomcounty.us/AgendaCenter/ViewFile/Agenda/10152025-3983>

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**Respectfully submitted,**

Jake Logan

Clerk of the Board

Whatcom County Lodging Tax Advisory Committee

Whatcom County Executive's Office

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**DRAFT MINUTES** - Subject to approval at the next LTAC meeting

DRAFT