

**WHATCOM COUNTY  
SHERIFF'S OFFICE**  
**DONNELL "TANK" TANKSLEY**  
*Sheriff*



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March 24, 2025

Greetings County Council,

I would like to take the opportunity to respond to the email and presentation delivered to the Council by the Executive's Office on March 23, 2025. I would like to provide additional context regarding the "current situation" of the Sheriff's Office, as outlined on slide #5 of the presentation.

The space currently occupied by the Sheriff's Office—located on the lowest of the four floors in the jail—was originally designed and constructed as a storage area. Several years later, a decision was made to retrofit the space for office use and relocate the Sheriff's Office there. This decision was problematic from the outset, compounded by subsequent building alterations that were carried out improperly. Specifically, essential vertical support columns, crucial to the building's lateral stability and resistance to collapse, were removed. While recent steel structural supports have been added over certain entries, there remains a legitimate concern among staff regarding the building's safety in the event of a seismic incident. In such a scenario, it is feared that the top three floors of the building could "pancake" into the current Sheriff's Office space.

Furthermore, as the building continues to deteriorate, there have been ongoing failures within the physical plant, ranging from electrical system malfunctions to sewage and water leaks into occupied office spaces. These issues not only pose significant health and safety risks to our team members, but also threaten the integrity of important documents, evidence and property within the Sheriff's Office.

Space constraints do remain a critical issue, as the Sheriff's Office is currently forced to rent additional space in other buildings to accommodate specialized divisions, such as traffic unit, and to store evidence from criminal investigations. The need to utilize multiple locations has led to duplications of administrative functions, including accounting, payroll, front desk reception, and purchasing. By consolidating all administrative functions under one roof, we would be able to enhance efficiency and streamline operations within the Sheriff's Office.

Since discussions began regarding the construction of a replacement downtown jail, there has always been a plan to relocate the Sheriff's Office as part of the overall project. Both the 2008 HDR design and the 2013 DLR proposal included the construction of a new Sheriff's Office headquarters in conjunction with the new jail facility. Significant funds have already been invested in planning for the co-location of these two facilities. Furthermore, the County has

engaged STV, a professional firm, to serve as an owner's representative during the planning and construction phases of the new justice center. It would be prudent to consult with STV to assess the long-term cost savings and operational advantages of constructing both the jail and the Sheriff's Office simultaneously. This integrated approach could offer significant logistical and financial benefits, improving overall efficiency and reducing costs.

I recognize the County's limited revenue streams, such as REET 1 and 2, available for funding capital improvement projects. However, I believe the Executive's Office may be overestimating the costs associated with building a new Sheriff's Office headquarters. Attached, I have provided examples of five police stations constructed across the United States in 2024, with an average construction cost of approximately \$500 per square foot (SF). Assuming a size of approximately 30,000 SF, the Executive's Office estimate of \$40 million equates to a cost of over \$1,300 per SF, which seems disproportionately high.

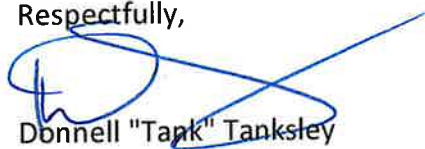
The Executive's Office recently highlighted a troubling reality: each month that the construction of the new jail is delayed, the taxpayers potentially loses a staggering one million dollars due to rising construction costs and inflation.

How much money will the taxpayers lose by not building a new Sheriff's Office concurrently with the new Jail?

Building the new Sheriff's Office isn't just about postponing the issue—it's akin to throwing the problem into a bottomless pit, with no end in sight. We must take immediate action to prevent further financial loss and ensure that our community's public safety needs are met.

I appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to further discussion on how we can address these pressing issues effectively.

Respectfully,



Donnell "Tank" Tanksley  
Sheriff, Whatcom County