



To: Whatcom County Executive Satpal Sidhu
Whatcom County Council
Whatcom County Finance & Facility Advisory Board

From: Ashley McClaran, STV, Area Manager NW, Senior Associate, West Region PMCM

Through: Kayla Schott-Bresler, Deputy Executive

Date: March 25, 2026

Re: Current Trajectory of Justice Facility Scenario Development

As we embark on the next steps in the validation phase for the Whatcom County Justice Facilities (Jail and Behavioral Care Center), I want to outline a path forward that supports timely, informed decision-making and responsible use of County resources.

Early benchmarking efforts indicated that the anticipated revenue stream would not support the full scope outlined in the Implementation Plan. In response, the team developed scenarios to help inform decisions around establishing a realistic project budget. Those scenarios have provided meaningful insight into the relationship between scope, cost, and operational considerations.

The County has requested additional scenarios and detailed operational cost analyses and set a deadline for the delivery of this information from the Design Build Team at the end of March/early April.

At this stage, we do not believe this is a prudent use of time or resources. There is a risk of entering a cycle of continued scenario development in response to evolving inputs without establishing the foundational direction needed to move the project forward.

The level of preconstruction effort, cost and time required to support continued scenario development is growing, and my strong recommendation is to allow the team to complete the programming phase of validation prior to returning to scope decision-making. Both STV and the Design Build Team (Nelson RMC Clark RAM) have demonstrated professional expertise in behavioral-health informed justice facilities and are capable of using the work completed to date to begin programming with project priorities in mind.

We understand the outcomes the County is working to achieve, including balancing capacity, operational efficiency, and access to behavioral health services. These are complex and important objectives; translating these priorities into the spatial adjacencies of the facilities will occur during programming. Once budget clarity is provided for the team, completing this exercise will allow us to report back to decision-makers on how to best accommodate shared goals and priorities as envisioned by all stakeholders and the County Council.

The most immediate need is to establish a budget framework that can guide programming and decision-making. Based on the work completed to date, there is sufficient information to begin defining project priorities.



To realign the process and restore forward momentum, we recommend the following:

- Establish a clear budget cap
- Direct the team, in coordination with partners, including the Sheriff's Office and Whatcom County Health and Community Services, to program and shape a facility within that budget based on community needs
- Implement a structured schedule with defined check-in points that allow for input, adjustment, and potential redirection at appropriate intervals, reducing rework and unnecessary cost

This approach allows the team to move forward with clarity, supports decision-makers with actionable information based on data, and protects the project from avoidable delays and cost escalation.

We recognize the complexity of the decisions in front of you and remain committed to supporting a process that aligns stakeholders and advances the project responsibly. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss the next steps and help facilitate alignment.