

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council](#)
Subject: Reconfiguration of Health Department Board
Date: Saturday, August 23, 2025 2:10:45 PM

Greetings Councilor Galloway and Councilor Buchanan,

I want to bring to your attention two letters to the editor in this week's Cascadia Daily News:

[Letters, Week of Aug. 20, 2025 – Cascadia Daily News](#)

As you'll see, both letter writers voice concern about the current structure of the Health Department Board. A key theme is that most residents are unaware that the County Council serves as the Health Board, and when they learn this, they believe the structure should change.

While anecdotal, my own conversations confirm this disconnect. Over a couple of days, I randomly "button-holed" more than 35 people on the street in Bellingham, Blaine, and Birch Bay and asked first if they lived in Whatcom County. Of the 31 who did, not one of them knew who sits on the Health Board. When I explained that it was the County Council, people were surprised, even alarmed -- and all responded that it should be reconfigured. A number of them went further, saying that if a council member opposed reform, it would affect their vote in the future.

Of course, most residents don't base their decisions on a single issue. That said, questions of public health and community well-being are weighty matters, and it is clear that many constituents feel strongly about how those responsibilities are handled.

Thank you for taking the time to consider these concerns. I sincerely hope that you decide to support a change to the Health Board's composition, because all signs suggest your constituents want and expect it.

Respectfully,

Micki Jackson
Bellingham

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council](#)
Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT - RECONFIGURE HEALTH DEPT BOARD
Date: Sunday, August 24, 2025 3:46:14 PM

I support reconfiguring the Whatcom County Health Board to reflect the authority now granted under Washington State law. Currently, the Health Board consists only of County Council members, and most residents are unaware of this arrangement. Once people do learn, they are often surprised and concerned that the board lacks broader expertise and representation.

Public health decision-making should include voices from across our community, including health and medical professionals, tribal representatives, and others with relevant knowledge and experience. Such a balanced Health Board would strengthen trust, improve transparency, and ensure more informed decisions for the well-being of all Whatcom County residents.

I urge you to move forward with this reconfiguration at the

Patricia Fabiano, PhD

[REDACTED]

Bellingham WA 98226

[REDACTED]

I have deleted my Facebook account
and I encourage you to think of doing
the same.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council; Public Health Advisory Board](#)
Subject: Public Comment – Reconfigure Health Dept Board
Date: Sunday, August 24, 2025 6:25:23 PM

Dear Councilmembers and PHAB,

I urge you to reconfigure the Whatcom County Health Board to reflect the authority now granted under Washington State law. At present, the board is made up solely of County Council members. Most residents are unaware of this arrangement, and once they learn of it, many are surprised that public health decision-making does not already include a wider range of expertise.

Broadening the Health Board to include health and medical professionals, tribal representatives, and others with relevant knowledge will strengthen trust, improve transparency, and lead to more informed decisions for the well-being of our community. Public health touches every aspect of our lives, and diverse representation ensures that policy is grounded in both professional expertise and lived experience.

I strongly encourage you to move forward with this reconfiguration at the earliest opportunity.

Sincerely,

Erin Lynch
Bellingham, WA

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Public Health Advisory Board; Council](#)
Subject: Reconfiguring health board
Date: Sunday, August 24, 2025 12:24:17 PM

Deer County Council and public health advisory board of Whatcom County,

I'm writing in my capacity as a Whatcom County resident to support reconfiguration of the health board to include equal numbers of elected and non-elected representatives in accordance with current state law. Including tribal representatives on the health board is of critical importance both for the tribes and non-tribal local communities.

I have served as the public health officer for Kitsap County since July 2020, and I was instrumental in reconfiguring that health board to its optimal current configuration of five elected and five non-elected representatives. This has added tremendous power and leadership and is unequivocally beneficial to optimizing county public health department performance. I hope you'll do the right thing and vote to relinquish a little bit of countywide political power in favor of a more diverse and effective health board structure.

Thank you,
Gib Morrow, MD, MPH

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council; Public Health Advisory Board](#)
Subject: Reconfiguring the Public Health Board
Date: Sunday, August 24, 2025 5:38:13 PM

I have long been troubled by the fact that the Whatcom County Health Board is comprised of elected county commissioners who have very limited training and expertise in public health issues. Public health issues are complex and need to be addressed by those with the knowledge and background necessary to make informed decisions.

State law now permits counties to reconstitute their public health boards to reflect the medical and organizational experts so important to making decisions to maintain and improve the quality of health and life in our county. I urge you to modernize Whatcom County's approach to public health with this change.

Susan Wright

[REDACTED]
Bellingham, WA 98225

Sent from my T-Mobile 5G Device

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council](#)
Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT - RECONFIGURE HEALTH DEPT BOARD
Date: Monday, August 25, 2025 8:41:32 PM

I support reconfiguring the Whatcom County Health Board to reflect the authority now granted under Washington State law.

Public health decision-making should include voices from across our community, including health and medical professionals, tribal representatives, and others with relevant knowledge and experience. I have medical needs including cancer and heart issues. I have tried to find experts in these fields yhat I trust to make the best decisions with me. I want a health board that has vast knowledge in medical fields so I can trust that they will know what is needed whether it is a pandemic, tsunami, earthquake etc. Such a balanced Health Board would strengthen trust, improve transparency, and ensure more informed decisions for the well-being of all Whatcom County residents.

I urge you to move forward with this reconfiguration at the earliest opportunity.

Sincerely,
Judith Akins

Whatcom County

[REDACTED]
Bellingham, WA
98229

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council](#)
Subject: Public Health Board
Date: Monday, August 25, 2025 5:28:57 PM

Good afternoon:

I am writing to express my strong support for the reconfiguration of the Whatcom County Health Board. Governor Inslee voiced two reasons for the implementation of the statute which will direct our efforts. He said that the statute was important to remove politics from health care policy and to best prepare us for the next pandemic. These are two of the compelling reasons why Whatcom County should now take the action necessary to put health care professionals front and center of the important decisions that we will face as a community. This new board should necessarily include consumers and tribal representatives as well as those with expertise in Public Health. It is critical that public health decisions include those with the necessary knowledge and experience to set policy and work to protect our citizens.

I urge you to move forward immediately with the necessary change to our Health Board.

Jill Bernstein
Sedro Woolley - Whatcom County

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council; Public Health Advisory Board](#)
Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT - reconfiguring the Health Dept Board
Date: Monday, August 25, 2025 7:55:19 PM

Dear County Council and Public Advisory Health Board Members,

I support reconfiguring the Whatcom County Health Board as allowed in RCW 70.05.030.

Rather than further explain, please consider my letter in the August 20 issue of *Cascadia Daily News*, as explanation for my support to reconfigure.

Thank you.

Delores Davies
Editor,

What's heavier, a pound of feathers or a pound of bricks? That's a classic trick question we've all heard. This is not a trick question: How many health or medical professionals serve on our Whatcom County Health Board?

Shockingly, the board consists only of elected county council members. There are no medical professionals among its seven members. Some council members claim they aren't hearing public concern about the board's makeup, but that's because most residents don't have a clue that our health board is comprised entirely of elected officials. How can people raise objections to a situation they're unaware of? There are even broader ramifications, detailed in Isaac Stone Simonelli's recent article ([CDN, Aug. 14, 2025](#)).

Now, more than ever, strengthening local public health leadership is essential. With major changes and increased uncertainty in federal public health policies (and funding), upgrading right here, where we live, is critical.

Washington law (RCW 70.05.030) empowers counties to

reconfigure the board to include council members, epidemiologists, doctors and community members. Most counties have already modernized their boards, with marked improvements. Some council members are diligently working toward reform; others remain hesitant and say they are struggling to get to YES.

A modern, empowered board of health benefits every resident. For those “hesitant” council members, please get to YES — for the future health and safety of all.

Delores Davies
Ferndale

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council](#)
Subject: Reconfigure the County Health Board
Date: Monday, August 25, 2025 10:54:25 PM

Council persons,

I was surprised to learn that the County Health Board's members are all County Council persons. This seems rather limiting for as far as I know none of you are health professionals. I am not opposed to having representation on the Board from the Council, I just feel that more informed decisions could be made with broader representation.. Surely a health board should have health care workers --doctors, nurses, social service workers etc. as the main representatives.

Decisions could be made in a more timely manner if the Health Board did not have to go ask the advisory board which is predominantly healthcare professionals for information. Yes I know all of the decisions are not necessarily about health, but would assume most of them are.

Please take the opportunity to make some changes. when the new Council begins.

Thanks

Jayne Freudenberger [REDACTED] Bellingham WA 98229

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council](#)
Subject: Public Comment, reconfigure the Health Dept. Board.
Date: Monday, August 25, 2025 9:17:22 AM

To Council Members,

I am sending along a letter I just had published in the Cascadia Daily News. Two years ago when I learned about the County Council being the Health Dept. Board I was shocked. I believe a health board that makes the final decisions and votes on health policy should consist mostly of people with medical expertise.

Everyone I have informed of the present configuration is as shocked as I was. The fact is the public is unaware of this and I believe if they were aware of it many would be requesting a change.

Thank you
Sheri Lambert

Editor,

Ask a neighbor who comprises our county's Board of Health, and chances are they won't know, not because they're uninformed, but because almost no one realizes the answer: it's our elected County Council.

This arrangement isn't common knowledge. That's a problem. When such a crucial body operates without public awareness or debate, residents can't weigh in on how it's structured or whether it has the right expertise. The lack of knowledge of who's on the Board of Health means the public hasn't had a real chance to ask if we're doing this the best way possible.

Our council members work hard for the community, but health policy is complex, requiring specialized knowledge in medicine, epidemiology, and public health management. In emergencies — pandemics, water contamination, disease outbreaks — we depend on decisions grounded in science and experience. Without trained experts at the table, we risk decisions made without the very insights that could save lives.

Washington law allows counties to reshape their health boards to include public health professionals, medical experts, and community members alongside elected officials. Numerous counties have already made the informed change. This isn't about fixing something "broken" — it's about transparency, preparedness, and building a stronger, smarter system before the next crisis hits.

The first step is public awareness. The second is action. Let's open the conversation, lift this decision out of obscurity, and put expertise where it belongs — at the heart of our public health leadership. Our county deserves nothing less.

Sheri Lambert

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council](#)
Subject: Reconfigure Health Dept Board
Date: Monday, August 25, 2025 9:34:27 AM

SUBJECT: Public Comment - Reconfigure Health Dept Board

I support reconfiguring the Whatcom County Health Board to reflect the authority now granted under Washington State law. Currently, the Health Board consists only of County Council members, and most residents are unaware of this arrangement. Once people do learn, they are often surprised and concerned that the board lacks broader expertise and representation.

Public health decision-making should include voices from across our community, including health and medical professionals, tribal representatives, and others with relevant knowledge and experience. Such a balanced Health Board would strengthen trust, improve transparency, and ensure more informed decisions for the well-being of all Whatcom County residents.

I urge you to move forward with this reconfiguration at the earliest opportunity.

Bernadette Prinster
Bellingham, WA 98229

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council; Public Health Advisory Board](#)
Subject: Public comment-reconfiguration of Health Dept. Board
Date: Monday, August 25, 2025 8:32:33 PM

County Council Members and members of PHAB,

It was only recently that I became aware that the Whatcom County Health Board consists of elected Whatcom County Council members. As a registered nurse with 40 years of work experience this was a surprise! Even after working closely with the Public Health Dept. during the COVID pandemic, I was not aware of this.

I am guessing that many residents in Whatcom County are also not aware of this. Decisions made that affect public health issues requires a broader area of expertise. Specifically that of medical professionals, epidemiologists and members of our community who advocate for those historically not well represented. Our tribal communities also need a voice in public health matters. Tribal members better understand the needs of their community.

In order to meet the current needs as well as future needs, the Whatcom County Health Board needs to be more balanced in expertise in order to improve decision making and future outcomes for the residents of Whatcom County.

I would encourage you to act upon this in the very near future.

Julia Pillar-Schaefer
Bellingham

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council; Public Health Advisory Board](#)
Subject: Public Comment - Reconfigure Health Dept Board
Date: Monday, August 25, 2025 5:13:49 PM

I support reconfiguring the Whatcom County Health Board to reflect the authority now granted under Washington State law. Currently, the Health Board consists only of County Council members, and most residents are unaware of this arrangement. Once people do learn, they are often surprised and concerned that the board lacks broader expertise and representation.

Public health decision-making should include voices from across our community, including health and medical professionals, tribal representatives, and others with relevant knowledge and experience. Such a balanced Health Board would strengthen trust, improve transparency, and ensure more informed decisions for the well-being of all Whatcom County residents.

I urge you to move forward with this reconfiguration at the earliest opportunity.

Vicki Thomas
Bellingham

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council](#)
Cc: [Public Health Advisory Board](#)
Subject: Public Comment - Reconfigure Health Dept Board
Date: Tuesday, August 26, 2025 1:39:33 PM

Dear Council Members,

I am writing to support reconfiguring the Whatcom County Health Board to reflect the authority now granted under Washington State law. I recently learned that the Health Board consists only of County Council members. As a community member and a healthcare professional, I was surprised and concerned that the board lacks broader expertise and representation.

Public health decision-making should include voices from across our community, including health and medical professionals, tribal representatives, and others with relevant knowledge and experience. Such a balanced Health Board would strengthen trust, improve transparency, and ensure more informed decisions for the well-being of all Whatcom County residents.

I urge you to move forward with this reconfiguration at the earliest opportunity.

Sincerely,
Betsy Greacen, RN, BSN

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council; Public Health Advisory Board](#)
Subject: Public Comment - Reconfigure the Health Department Board
Date: Tuesday, August 26, 2025 7:55:42 AM

Gentlepersons,

I am writing to strongly urge you to reconfigure the Whatcom County Health Board to include medical professionals with the knowledge, skills, and training to ensure our public health response is robust.

When I first learned that our county's Public Health Board actually is County Council rather than a combination of decision makers, tribal representatives, and medical experts, I was surprised and dismayed. Why are politicians in charge of figuring out what to do about public health issues, I wondered?

This board should reflect the expertise of medical professionals with the knowledge and skills to advise us in times of public health emergencies. We were caught flat-footed for the pandemic and that fact should be our wake up call to improve our response. I would think local elected politicians would not want to be in the position of responding to yet another public health crisis, and be required to answer to the community's concerns about why we didn't learn from our experiences so as to be better prepared for the future.

Thank you for your attention to my recommendation.

Betsy Gross

Bellingham, Washington

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council; Public Health Advisory Board](#)
Subject: Public Comment - Reconfigure Health Dept Board
Date: Tuesday, August 26, 2025 11:09:07 AM

Dear council members,

I am writing to state that I support reconfiguring the Whatcom County Health Board to reflect the authority now granted under Washington State law. The current Health Board consists only of County Council members, and most residents are unaware of this arrangement. Upon learning this, our community members express concern that the board lacks broader expertise and representation.

Public health decision-making should include voices from across our community, including health and medical professionals, tribal representatives, immigrant community members, and others with relevant knowledge and experience. Such a balanced Health Board would strengthen trust, improve transparency, and ensure more informed decisions for the well-being of all Whatcom County residents.

I urge you to move forward with this reconfiguration at the earliest opportunity.

Aline Prata
Bellingham, WA

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council; Public Health Advisory Board](#)
Subject: Public Comment - Reconfigure Health Dept Board
Date: Wednesday, August 27, 2025 7:24:43 AM

I support reconfiguring the Whatcom County Health Board to reflect the authority now granted under Washington State law. Currently, the Health Board consists only of County Council members, and most residents are unaware of this arrangement. Once people do learn, they are often surprised and concerned that the board lacks broader expertise and representation.

Public health decision-making should include voices from across our community, including health and medical professionals, tribal representatives, and others with relevant knowledge and experience. Such a balanced Health Board would strengthen trust, improve transparency, and ensure more informed decisions for the well-being of all Whatcom County residents. I urge you to move forward with this reconfiguration at the earliest opportunity.

L Amoret Heise
Bellingham WA

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council; Public Health Advisory Board](#)
Subject: Public Comment - Reconfigure Health Dept Board
Date: Wednesday, August 27, 2025 4:47:42 PM

I support reconfiguring the Whatcom County Health Board to reflect the authority now granted under Washington State law. Currently, the Health Board consists only of County Council members, and most residents are unaware of this arrangement. Once people do learn, they are often surprised and concerned that the board lacks broader expertise and representation.

Public health decision-making should include voices from across our community, including health and medical professionals, tribal representatives, and others with relevant knowledge and experience. Such a balanced Health Board would strengthen trust, improve transparency, and ensure more informed decisions for the well-being of all Whatcom County residents.

I urge you to move forward with this reconfiguration at the earliest opportunity.

Janis Olson
Bellingham WA

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Public Health Advisory Board](#); [Council](#)
Subject: Subject: Public Comment - Reconfigure Health Dept Board
Date: Wednesday, August 27, 2025 10:54:13 AM

I'm concerned that the Whatcom County Health Board lacks broader healthcare expertise and representation.

I support reconfiguring the Whatcom County Health Board to reflect the authority now granted under Washington State law. Currently, the Health Board consists only of County Council members.

Public health decision-making should include voices from across our community, including health and medical professionals, tribal representatives, and others with relevant knowledge and experience. Such a balanced Health Board would strengthen trust, improve transparency, and ensure more informed decisions for the well-being of all Whatcom County residents.

I urge you to move forward with this reconfiguration at the earliest opportunity.

Lynne Pendleton
Bellingham

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council; Public Health Advisory Board](#)
Subject: Public Comment - Reconfigure Health Dept Board
Date: Thursday, August 28, 2025 3:26:49 PM

I support reconfiguring the Whatcom County Health Board to reflect the authority now granted under Washington State law. Currently, the Health Board consists only of County Council members. Many or even most residents are unaware of this arrangement. As I talk with people, they are often surprised and concerned that the board lacks broader expertise and representation.

Public health decision-making should include voices from across our community, including health and medical professionals, tribal representatives, and others with relevant knowledge and experience. A Health Board more representative of the community would strengthen trust, improve transparency, and ensure more informed decisions for the well-being of all Whatcom County residents.

I strongly urge you to move forward with this reconfiguration of the Health Department Board.

Mary Lynne Courtney
Whatcom County, District 3

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council](#)
Subject: Restructuring Whatcom County Health Bosrd
Date: Thursday, August 28, 2025 6:11:57 PM

Dear Councilmembers and PHAB,

I support reconfiguring the Whatcom County Health Board to reflect the authority now granted under Washington State law (RCW 70.46.031). Currently, the board is composed solely of County Council members. Most residents are unaware of this arrangement, and once they learn of it, many are surprised that public health decision-making does not already include a wider range of expertise.

RCW 70.46.031 specifically authorizes and directs counties to expand local boards of health beyond elected officials, requiring the inclusion of non-elected members such as public health experts, health and medical professionals, community stakeholders, and tribal representatives.

As a retired local nephrologist, I fully support this effort. Broadening the Health Board to include health and medical professionals, tribal representatives, and others with relevant knowledge will strengthen trust, improve transparency, and lead to more informed decisions for the well-being of our community.

Public health touches every aspect of our lives, and diverse representation ensures that policy is grounded in both professional expertise and lived experience.

I strongly encourage you to move forward with this reconfiguration.

Sincerely,

William E. Lombard, MD
Bellingham

Get [Outlook for iOS](#)

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council; Public Health Advisory Board](#)
Subject: Public Comment - reconfigure Health Dept. Board
Date: Thursday, August 28, 2025 1:21:59 AM

I support reconfiguring the Whatcom County Health Board to reflect the authority now granted under Washington State law. Currently, the Health Board consists only of County Council members, and most residents are unaware of this arrangement. Once people do learn, they are often surprised and concerned that the board lacks broader expertise and representation.

Public health decision-making should include voices from across our community, including health and medical professionals, tribal representatives, and others with relevant knowledge and experience. Such a balanced Health Board would strengthen trust, improve transparency, and ensure more informed decisions for the well-being of all Whatcom County residents.

I urge you to move forward with this reconfiguration at the earliest opportunity.

Laura Plaut
Bellingham WA

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council; Public Health Advisory Board](#)
Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT - RECONFIGURE HEALTH DEPT BOARD
Date: Thursday, August 28, 2025 10:41:52 AM

To all,

I support reconfiguring the Whatcom County Health Board to reflect the authority now granted under Washington State law.

Public health decision-making should include voices from across our community, including health and medical professionals, tribal representatives, and others with relevant knowledge and experience. Such a balanced Health Board would strengthen trust, improve transparency, and ensure more informed decisions for the well-being of all Whatcom County residents.

I urge you to move forward with this reconfiguration at the earliest opportunity.

Thank you,

Hilary Walker
Deming, WA

--

Hilary Walker, OTL, CAPS
ACP Consultant & Chair WA POLST Task force



Helping you thrive in the home you love

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council](#)
Subject: Public Comment - Reconfigure Health Department Board
Date: Thursday, August 28, 2025 11:58:42 AM

Until recently, I was not aware that our County Health Board is **comprised** of the Whatcom County Council members. While I value Council members' service, I would recommend that the County Health Board be made up of a broader representation of our population, and include people with medical knowledge and other concerned members from our community.

Please establish an independent Health Board made up of individuals with medical knowledge and other interested representatives from our community as soon as possible.

Josselyn Winslow

Bellingham

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council](#)
Subject: Whatcom County Health Board
Date: Saturday, August 30, 2025 12:19:06 PM

Dear County Council:

This is my second attempt to express my concern for our community.

I support reconfiguring the Whatcom County Health Board to reflect the authority now granted under Washington State law. Currently, the Health Board consists only of County Council members, and most residents are unaware of this arrangement. I am sincerely concerned that the board lacks broader expertise and representation.

Public health decision-making should include voices from across our community, especially health and medical professionals, tribal representatives, and others with relevant knowledge and experience. Such a balanced Health Board would strengthen trust, improve transparency, and ensure more informed decisions for the well-being of all Whatcom County residents.

I urge you to move forward with this reconfiguration at the earliest opportunity.

Respectfully,
Carole Hanaway
Bellingham

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council; Public Health Advisory Board](#)
Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT - RECONFIGURE HEALTH DEPT BOARD
Date: Sunday, August 31, 2025 9:00:15 PM

I support reconfiguring the Whatcom County Health Board to reflect the authority now granted under Washington State law. Currently, the Health Board consists only of County Council members, and most residents are unaware of this arrangement. Once people do learn, they are often surprised and concerned that the board lacks broader expertise and representation.

Public health decision-making should include voices from across our community, including health and medical professionals, tribal representatives, and others with relevant knowledge and experience. Such a balanced Health Board would strengthen trust, improve transparency, and ensure more informed decisions for the well-being of all Whatcom County residents.

I urge you to move forward with this reconfiguration at the earliest opportunity.

Siri Hiltz
Bellingham

From: 
To: [Council](#)
Subject: WCHB
Date: Monday, September 1, 2025 8:20:24 AM

I support re-configuring the Whatcom County Health Board to reflect the authority now granted under Washington State law. Currently, the Health Board consists only of County Council members.

Public health decision-making should include voices from across our community, including health and medical professionals, tribal representatives, and others with relevant knowledge and experience. Such a balanced Health Board would strengthen trust, improve transparency, and ensure more informed decisions for the well-being of all Whatcom County residents.

I urge you to move forward with this reconfiguration at the earliest opportunity.

TY,
Brandyn

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council](#)
Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT - RECONFIGURE HEALTH DEPT BOARD
Date: Monday, September 1, 2025 4:21:24 PM

To Members of the Whatcom County Council:

I am Lane Davis-Coury, a resident of Bellingham, and I support reconfiguring the Whatcom County Health Board to reflect the authority now granted under Washington State law.

Currently, the Health Board consists only of County Council members. While I respect the experience and good judgment of the Council, I believe that the Health Board should offer broader, more specific expertise and representation.

To achieve that goal, the Health Board should include members from health and medical professionals, others with relevant knowledge and experience in public health, and tribal participants if they are interested.

A more balanced Health Board could increase the range of knowledgeable input, ensuring more informed decisions for the well-being of all Whatcom County residents.

I encourage you to support this reconfiguration.

Sincerely,
Lane Davis-Coury
Bellingham, Roosevelt Neighborhood

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council](#)
Subject: Reconfiguration of Whatcom County Health Board
Date: Monday, September 1, 2025 2:39:18 PM

The Whatcom County Health Board should be reconfigured to include experienced health/medical professionals as well as tribal representatives. Politicians alone should not be making healthcare decisions for our county. Please support reconfiguration.

Varya Fish

[REDACTED] Bellingham, WA 98229

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council](#)
Subject: Whatcom County Health Board
Date: Monday, September 1, 2025 8:16:09 AM

Dear Whatcom County Health Board Members,

I am a strong advocate for the re-configuring the Whatcom County Health Board to reflect the authority now granted under Washington State law.

I believe public health decision-making should include voices from across our community, including health and medical professionals, tribal representatives, and others with relevant knowledge and experience. Such a balanced Health Board would strengthen trust, improve transparency, and ensure more informed decisions for the well-being of all Whatcom County residents.

Sincerely,
A voting citizen of Whatcom County,
Pamela Graham

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council](#)
Subject: Whatcom County Health Board Re-configuration
Date: Monday, September 1, 2025 10:20:33 AM

We strongly support re-configuring the Whatcom County Health Board to reflect the authority now granted under Washington State law. Currently, the Health Board consists only of County Council members. We are concerned that the board lacks broader expertise and representation.

Public health decision-making should include voices from across our community, including health and medical professionals, tribal representatives, and others with relevant knowledge and experience. Such a balanced Health Board would strengthen trust, improve transparency, and ensure more informed decisions for the well-being of all Whatcom County residents.

We urge you to move forward with this re-configuration at the earliest opportunity. Thank you.

Alice and Chuck Gustafson, Bellingham

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council](#)
Subject: Re-configure County Health Board
Date: Monday, September 1, 2025 10:14:11 AM

I support re-configuring the Whatcom County Health Board to reflect the authority now granted under Washington State law. Currently, the Health Board consists only of County Council members, and most residents are unaware of this arrangement. Once people do learn, they are often surprised and concerned that the board lacks broader expertise and representation.

Public health decision-making should include voices from across our community, including health and medical professionals, tribal representatives, and others with relevant knowledge and experience. Such a balanced Health Board would strengthen trust, improve transparency, and ensure more informed decisions for the well-being of all Whatcom County residents.

I urge you to move forward with this reconfiguration at the earliest opportunity and thank you for your attention to this matter.

Miriam Margulies
Bellingham

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council](#)
Subject: County Health Board
Date: Monday, September 1, 2025 9:23:38 AM

Dear Council Members:

I support re-configuring the Whatcom County Health Board to reflect the authority now granted under Washington State law. Currently, the Health Board consists only of County Council members, and most residents are unaware of this arrangement. Once people do learn, they are often surprised and concerned that the board lacks broader expertise and representation.

Public health decision-making should include voices from across our community, including health and medical professionals, tribal representatives, and others with relevant knowledge and experience. Such a balanced Health Board would strengthen trust, improve transparency, and ensure more informed decisions for the well-being of all Whatcom County residents.

I urge you to move forward with this reconfiguration at the earliest opportunity.

Sincerely,
Kathryn Piscitello
Bellingham

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council](#)
Subject: Whatcom County Health Board
Date: Monday, September 1, 2025 8:27:55 AM

I support re-configuring the Whatcom County Health Board to reflect the authority now granted under Washington State law. Currently, the Health Board consists only of County Council members, and most residents are unaware of this arrangement. Once people do learn, they are often surprised and concerned that the board lacks broader expertise and representation.

Public health decision-making should include voices from across our community, including health and medical professionals, tribal representatives, and others with relevant knowledge and experience. Such a balanced Health Board would strengthen trust, improve transparency, and ensure more informed decisions for the well-being of all Whatcom County residents.

I urge you to move forward with this reconfiguration at the earliest opportunity.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council](#)
Subject: Re-Configure the Whatcom County Health Board
Date: Monday, September 1, 2025 11:53:28 AM

Hello.

I support re-configuring the Whatcom County Health Board to reflect the authority now granted under Washington State law. Currently, the Health Board consists only of County Council members, and most residents are unaware of this arrangement. I was surprised and concerned that the board lacks broader expertise and representation.

Public health decision-making should include voices from across our community, including health and medical professionals, tribal representatives, and others with relevant knowledge and experience. Such a balanced Health Board would strengthen trust, improve transparency, and ensure more informed decisions for the well-being of all Whatcom County residents.

I urge you to move forward with this reconfiguration at the earliest opportunity.

Sincerely,
Angela Seguel
Bellingham

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council](#)
Subject: County Council and the Public Health Advisory Board (PHAB)
Date: Monday, September 1, 2025 6:41:26 PM

Dear Council Members,

Public health decision-making should broadly include voices from all across our community, including health and medical professionals, social workers, tribal representatives, and others with relevant knowledge and experience. Such a balanced Health Board would strengthen trust, improve transparency, and ensure more informed decisions for the well-being of all Whatcom County residents.

I support re-configuring the Whatcom County Health Board to reflect the authority now granted under Washington State law. I understand that currently, the Health Board consists only of County Council members, and most residents are unaware of this arrangement. Once people do learn, they are often surprised and concerned that the board lacks broader expertise and representation.

I strongly urge you to move forward with this reconfiguration with the inclusion of those who have expertise and experience in the health field, at the earliest opportunity.

Sincerely,
Ingrid Tegner

--

"Humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together. All things connect." --Chief Seattle

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council](#)
Subject: RECONFIGURE PHAB TO INCLUDE HEALTH PROFESSIONALS!
Date: Tuesday, September 2, 2025 8:03:28 PM

I support re-configuring the Whatcom County Health Board to reflect the authority now granted under Washington State law. Currently, the Health Board consists only of County Council members, and most residents are unaware of this arrangement. Once people do learn, they are often surprised and concerned that the board lacks broader expertise and representation.

Public health decision-making should include voices from across our community, including health and medical professionals, tribal representatives, and others with relevant knowledge and experience. Such a balanced Health Board would strengthen trust, improve transparency, and ensure more informed decisions for the well-being of all Whatcom County residents.

I urge you to move forward with this reconfiguration at the earliest opportunity.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council](#)
Subject: Reconfigure the Whatcom County Health Board
Date: Tuesday, September 2, 2025 1:34:01 PM

I support re-configuring the Whatcom County Health Board to reflect the authority now granted under Washington State law. Currently, the Health Board consists only of County Council members, and most residents are unaware of this arrangement. Once people do learn, they are often surprised and concerned that the board lacks broader expertise and representation.

Public health decision-making should include voices from across our community, including health and medical professionals, tribal representatives, and others with relevant knowledge and experience. Such a balanced Health Board would strengthen trust, improve transparency, and ensure more informed decisions for the well-being of all Whatcom County residents.

I urge you to move forward with this reconfiguration at the earliest opportunity.

Best,
Timothy Mason BSN, RN
[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council](#)
Subject: Re-configure the Whatcom County Health Board
Date: Wednesday, September 3, 2025 7:48:58 AM

Dear Council Members,

I support re-configuring the Whatcom County Health Board to reflect the authority now granted under Washington State law. Currently, the Health Board consists only of County Council members, and most residents are unaware of this arrangement. Once people do learn, they are often surprised and concerned that the board lacks broader expertise and representation.

Especially in light of policy changes at the federal level, we need broader expertise on this Board. I would like health professionals as well as local citizens involved in making health decisions.

Robin Bailey

[REDACTED]

Bellingham, WA 98225

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council](#)
Subject: Reconfigure Public Health Advisory Board to provide expertise
Date: Wednesday, September 3, 2025 7:14:12 PM

As a retired Professor of Public Health and infectious disease physician living in Bellingham, with over 50 years of experience at CDC, state and local health departments, and academic Schools of Public Health, I was surprised when my recent application to join the Whatcom County Public Health Advisory Board was rejected. It has been brought to my attention that rather than including health professionals and others with expertise, the Board is composed solely of the elected Council Members.

Public health decision-making should include voices from across our community, including health and medical professionals, tribal representatives, and others with relevant knowledge and experience. Such a balanced Health Board would strengthen trust, improve transparency, and ensure more informed decisions for the well-being of all Whatcom County residents. In these times when public health is so critical, to do otherwise is a disservice to Whatcom County residents whose best interests you are elected to serve.

Alan Lifson, MD, MPH

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council; Public Health Advisory Board](#)
Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT - RECONFIGURE HEALTH DEPT BOARD
Date: Thursday, September 4, 2025 8:31:37 AM

SUBJECT: Public Comment - Reconfigure Health Dept Board

I support reconfiguring the Whatcom County Health Board to reflect the authority now granted under Washington State law. Currently, the Health Board consists only of County Council members, and most residents are unaware of this arrangement. Once people do learn, they are often surprised and concerned that the board lacks broader expertise and representation.

Public health decision-making should include voices from across our community, including health and medical professionals, tribal representatives, and others with relevant knowledge and experience. Such a balanced Health Board would strengthen trust, improve transparency, and ensure more informed decisions for the well-being of all Whatcom County residents.

I urge you to move forward with this reconfiguration at the earliest opportunity.

Thank You,

Dianne Gerhard

Whatcom County resident

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council; Public Health Advisory Board](#)
Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT - RECONFIGURE HEALTH DEPT BOARD
Date: Thursday, September 4, 2025 8:52:55 AM

SUBJECT: Public Comment - Reconfigure Health Dept Board

I support reconfiguring the Whatcom County Health Board to reflect the authority now granted under Washington State law. Currently, the Health Board consists only of County Council members, and most residents are unaware of this arrangement. Once people do learn, they are often surprised and concerned that the board lacks broader expertise and representation.

Public health decision-making should include voices from across our community, including health and medical professionals, tribal representatives, and others with relevant knowledge and experience. Such a balanced Health Board would strengthen trust, improve transparency, and ensure more informed decisions for the well-being of all Whatcom County residents.

I urge you to move forward with this reconfiguration at the earliest opportunity.

Edward Gerhard
resident - Whatcom County/Bellingham

Sent from [Outlook](#)

Kirsten Smith

From: Gordon Stratton [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, September 5, 2025 6:05 PM
To: Council; Public Health Advisory Board
Subject: Public Comment - Reconfigure Health Dept Board

I am writing to express my strong support for reconfiguring the Whatcom County Health Board.

The current board, consisting solely of County Council members, lacks the specialized expertise required for effective public health oversight. As authorized by state law, the board should be expanded to include medical and public health professionals, tribal representatives, and other community members with relevant knowledge.

A more representative board will improve transparency, strengthen public trust, and ensure better-informed decisions are made for the health of our entire community. I urge you to take swift action on this matter.

Regards,

Gordon Stratton
Bellingham

Kirsten Smith

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, September 8, 2025 1:13 PM
To: Council; Public Health Advisory Board
Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT: Reconfiguration of Health Department Board

Please consider this an additional Public Comment about the reconfiguration of the WC Public Health Board.

Micki Jackson

----- Forwarded Message -----

From: [REDACTED]
To: council@co.whatcom.wa.us <council@co.whatcom.wa.us>
Sent: Saturday, August 23, 2025 at 02:09:53 PM PDT
Subject: Reconfiguration of Health Department Board

Greetings Councilor Galloway and Councilor Buchanan,

I want to bring to your attention two letters to the editor in this week's Cascadia Daily News:

[Letters, Week of Aug. 20, 2025 – Cascadia Daily News](#)

As you'll see, both letter writers voice concern about the current structure of the Health Department Board. A key theme is that most residents are unaware that the County Council serves as the Health Board, and when they learn this, they believe the structure should change.

While anecdotal, my own conversations confirm this disconnect. Over a couple of days, I randomly "button-holed" more than 35 people on the street in Bellingham, Blaine, and Birch Bay and asked first if they lived in Whatcom County. Of the 31 who did, not one of them knew who sits on the Health Board. When I explained that it was the County Council, people were surprised, even alarmed -- and all responded that it should be reconfigured. A number of them went further, saying that if a council member opposed reform, it would affect their vote in the future.

Of course, most residents don't base their decisions on a single issue. That said, questions of public health and community well-being are weighty matters, and it is clear that many constituents feel strongly about how those responsibilities are handled.

Thank you for taking the time to consider these concerns. I sincerely hope that you decide to support a change to the Health Board's composition, because all signs suggest your constituents want and expect it.

Respectfully,

Micki Jackson

Bellingham

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council](#)
Subject: Don't change the health board
Date: Wednesday, September 10, 2025 1:03:43 PM

Keep the health board composition as it is and focus on actual health issues and not race.

Larry Nicholas
Birch Bay

Sent from my Verizon, Samsung Galaxy smartphone
Get [Outlook for Android](#)

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council](#)
Subject: Keep health board council members as is, please.
Date: Wednesday, September 10, 2025 2:52:22 PM

There should be no change.

Heather Peck, Esq., J.D., LL.M.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council; Public Health Advisory Board](#)
Subject: Public Comment: Reconfigure Health Dept. Board
Date: Thursday, September 11, 2025 3:17:48 PM

I support reconfiguring the Whatcom County Health Board to reflect the authority now granted under Washington State law. Currently, the Health Board consists only of County Council members, and most residents are unaware of this arrangement. Once people do learn, they are often surprised and concerned that the board lacks broader expertise and representation.

Public health decision-making should include voices from across our community, including health and medical professionals, tribal representatives, and others with relevant knowledge and experience. Such a balanced Health Board would strengthen trust, improve transparency, and ensure more informed decisions for the well-being of all Whatcom County residents.

I urge you to move forward with this reconfiguration at the earliest opportunity.

Elisabeth Marshall
Lummi Island

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council](#)
Subject: Reconfiguration of Whatcom County Public Health Board
Date: Thursday, September 11, 2025 3:59:47 PM

September 11, 2025

Dear Council Members,

I wish to register my support for the County Council to reconfigure the Whatcom County Board of Health. This reconfiguration has been thoroughly studied by a committee of the Whatcom County Council. After hearing and studying the committee's report I found this configuration to be a more efficient and effective way to oversee the Public Health of Whatcom County.

The Council has done a good job over the years but as Public Health becomes more complex and difficult to oversee, I believe that this aspect of the council's duties needs to be assigned to a select group which includes stronger emphasis on people knowledgeable of the county's public health concerns. Another factor is the increased responsibilities of the Whatcom County Council. Removing Public to a specialized group would at least ease the workload of the council.

Thank you for considering my thoughts.

Sincerely,
Suzanne Ming
Bellingham

Kirsten Smith

From: Alan Rosen [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, September 11, 2025 7:19 AM
To: Council
Cc: Public Health Advisory Board
Subject: County Health Board

SUBJECT: Public Comment - Reconfigure Health Dept Board

I support reconfiguring the Whatcom County Health Board to reflect the authority now granted under Washington State law. Currently, the Health Board consists only of County Council members, and most residents are unaware of this arrangement. Once people do learn, they are often surprised and concerned that the board lacks broader expertise and representation.

Public health decision-making should include voices from across our community, including health and medical professionals, tribal representatives, and others with relevant knowledge and experience. Such a balanced Health Board would strengthen trust, improve transparency, and ensure more informed decisions for the well-being of all Whatcom County residents.

I urge you to move forward with this reconfiguration at the earliest opportunity.

Alan Rosen
Lummi Island

Kirsten Smith

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, September 11, 2025 10:19 AM
To: Council
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: WC Public Health Board

I strongly support the reconfiguration of the public health board. As one of the original members of the Commission Against Domestic Violence, I understand the value of having expertise, hands on experience, and differing perspectives at the table. I believe that composition lead us to making strong impacts on systems and awareness in the community. It's a model that has proven successful.

Respectfully,
Kathy Washatka



Virus-free. www.avast.com

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council](#)
Subject: Public Health Board
Date: Tuesday, September 16, 2025 10:40:38 AM

Good morning:

I am writing to encourage you to vote in favor of the proposal to reconfigure the Public Health Board. Governor Inslee identified two reasons for this statute: 1) to best prepare us for the next pandemic and 2) to take politics out of health care decision making. The events in recent weeks on the National stage highlight the critical importance of removing politics from our health care decisions. We need to be assured that decisions about health care policy are based on the best available science from health care professionals....only then will we be able to truly trust the information and directives of the Board. Please take this opportunity to move Whatcom County forward.

Thank you
Jill Bernstein
Sedro Woolley/Whatcom County

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Council; Public Health Advisory Board](#)
Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT - RECONFIGURE HEALTH DEPT BOARD
Date: Wednesday, September 17, 2025 12:15:46 PM

County Council and PHAB members: I am a Whatcom County resident with a career in public health spanning 36 years at local, state and federal levels. I began my career at the Bellingham-Whatcom County Health Department in 1978 as a recent UW graduate. I am gravely concerned about the nationwide erosion of public health infrastructure over these past months. RFK's recent decisions are a glaring example of why we need to remove politics from health care.

It is equally important that health policy decisions be grounded in evidence-based science. I am gratified that our new Health Department Director Champ Thomaskuuty is an experienced epidemiologist and health policy analyst with 25 years of state and local work experience. To safeguard the public health of Whatcom County residents, it is just as imperative that our local Health Board include individuals with public health expertise and local career and health consumer experience. The majority of Washington counties already meet these criteria.

I fully support the reconfiguration of the Health Board and trust you will as well.

Regards,

Karen Dalenius, MPH, RD
Bellingham

Kirsten Smith

From: Jenna Gernand
Sent: Friday, September 19, 2025 10:20 AM
To: Council
Subject: Public Comment regarding Health Board

Hi councilmembers,

Please see the public comment below, which was inadvertently routed into the wrong folder:

Website Feedback

We welcome your feedback. For comments and suggestions regarding the Whatcom County website and the services we offer online, please contact the Web Administrator. We will endeavor to respond to your comments as soon as we are able.

If your browser and email program are compatible, you may also use this form to let us know what you think or to report any problems.

Thank you.

Reply Email

Comment Dear County Council:

Please support a Public Health Board that is both scientifically and ethically based on sound medical principles. We need a knowledgeable leadership to address the well-being of our whole community.

Sincerely,
Carole Hanaway

If you do not wish to receive an email copy of this form after hitting submit, uncheck the following box. If you would like to email yourself a copy of this form, enter your email below.

Jenna Gernand
Legislative Coordinator
Whatcom County Council Office
311 Grand Ave., Suite 105
Bellingham, WA 98225

360-778-5017

My incoming and outgoing email messages may be subject to public disclosure requirements per RCW 42.56.

Kirsten Smith

From: Joni Hensley [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, September 29, 2025 10:05 AM
To: Council
Cc: Rachel M
Subject: townhalls

Dear County Council members. I really appreciated the opportunity to attend the townhall meeting held at the Deming library last week. Although I am not aware of all of the protocols that the council has for conducting these community meetings I am hoping that you can discourage the spread of misinformation. The reason that I am writing to you is that after Councilmember Byrd's discourse of the possible restructure of the Health board two of my friends who attended approached me for clarification.

Despite the comments that there would be uneven representation of elected vs non-elected members [RCW 70.05.030](#) is very clear that this is not the case (j) The number of members selected under (a) and (e) of this subsection **must equal the number of city and county elected officials** on the board of health ((a) states the categories of non-elected members and (e) designates tribal representatives). I think there was a misdirect when it was indicated that the number of appointed (non-elected) had to exceed the number of electeds. The comment from the audience about Snohomish Co now regretting their restructure could certainly be related to their error in this calculation and the haste that they may have assembled their board.

Regarding the performance of the Council during the COVID pandemic that was discussed during the townhall, I think the report commissioned by Council speaks for itself: [Whatcom County COVID Review: The Berk Report 2022](#): page 20 states that "**All operational personnel interviewed cited County councilmembers' participation in and presence at the WUC (Whatcom Unified Command) as disrupting the functioning of WUC as a whole**".

Pages 28-29 outline the Recommendations to the County Council and one of these recommends to "include councilmembers in training and exercises and provide training on crisis communications. **Expand the membership of the Health Board** to include members with public health expertise and representatives from cities within the county. Ensure all participants in a response effort are working within a unified structure toward common goals."

Recommendation #12: A Health Board with members representing a wider diversity of professions and perspectives would enhance its functioning during a health emergency. (This addresses the complexity of the Council's role as both the Health Board and Council.) I know that some of the councilmembers who were present during the emergency phase of the pandemic are no longer on council but I don't think bringing up that "they are all opposed to a restructure" was an appropriate comment during the meeting. **There are some very clear action steps for county leadership in this document and I am hopeful that they are being addressed for future emergencies.** If you have not read this document, I encourage you to do so.

Page 25 outlined one role of PHAB and it appears that members were instrumental in the development and implementation of the Employer Support Taskforce. This appeared to be successful but is one small part of how this advisory group can help. **As I mentioned in the townhall, your PHAB has made the recommendation to restructure the Health Board by a unanimous vote.** Please respect the time and effort that has gone into this recommendation.

As I stated in the first paragraph, I am not aware of rules of conduct for townhall meetings. My hope in sharing this email with you is that you will honor your role as leaders when you dialogue with your community and restrain from a discourse of misinformation. It really is okay to say you don't know and will get back to folks. We respect this. There is already too much distrust in our communities and giving false information to make a point just leads to an "us vs them" mentality. We are all in this together.

Thank you for hosting these townhalls. I know it is hard to anticipate what questions pop up. If you need more information about my comments, please don't hesitate to contact me.

In sincere gratitude,

Joni Hensley, BSN-RN

PHAB member (but only representing myself!)

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Kaylee Galloway; Public Health Advisory Board](#)
Cc: [Council](#)
Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT in support of reconfiguring the WC Health Board
Date: Wednesday, October 15, 2025 11:45:12 AM

I submit this as a public comment in support of reconfiguring the WC Health Board:

The creation of the Governors' Public Health Alliance by fifteen Democratic governors and Guam provides a timely and persuasive validation for restructuring Whatcom County's Health Board to include public health professionals and scientific advisors alongside elected officials. The alliance demonstrates that in times of destabilized federal health leadership, science-based collaboration and decentralized expertise are essential to maintaining community health resilience.

Just as states formed a multistate alliance to restore science-driven leadership amid federal uncertainty, Whatcom County faces similar vulnerabilities if its Board of Health remains composed solely of elected council members without formal medical or public health expertise. Both efforts arise from the same imperative: when top-down guidance becomes politically compromised or insufficient, localized, expert-informed governance becomes

the most reliable safeguard for community health and public trust.

The Governors Public Health Alliance has explicitly prioritized real-time disease surveillance, vaccine coordination, and joint emergency response, functions that require technical understanding and professional continuity. Whatcom County's Public Health Advisory Board (PHAB) already includes professionals from various fields, including medicine, epidemiology, housing, and social determinants of health; yet, as the 2025 joint working group concluded, excluding these voices from the decision-making process of the Board of Health itself creates a structural blind spot in crisis response capacity.

Interview evidence gathered by Whatcom's own structural review shows that counties combining elected and non-elected expertise make fairer, faster, and less politicized health decisions, especially during pandemics. The federal retreat from science-based coordination under HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. further underscores this: if science becomes contested at the national level, local boards insulated from ideological swings can ensure continuity of rational, protective health measures.

The Governors Alliance also emphasizes inclusion—linking diverse state populations through shared expertise and pooled resources. Similarly, an expanded Whatcom Health Board could strengthen community legitimacy and transparency, incorporating input from tribal partners, health care systems, and vulnerable populations, supporting broader public compliance and trust during crises.

In essence, the Governors Public Health Alliance reflects the same rationale that should guide Whatcom County: when higher levels of government falter, empowered local health governance rooted in professional expertise becomes essential. Reconfiguring the county's Board of Health to include scientific and medical members would align Whatcom's local strategy with the evidence-based, collaborative model now being adopted at the state level across the United States.

Micki Jackson

Bellingham WA

Kirsten Smith

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, October 21, 2025 7:52 AM
To: Council
Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT: Reconfiguration of the Health Board: BERK REPORT recommendations

Dear County Council and PHAB members,

Please refer to Recommendation #12 in the **BERK REPORT**, which was commissioned to assess Whatcom County's handling of the Covid-19 crisis.

[Whatcom Covid response.](#)

Recommendation #12, as you see, speaks to the wisdom of expanding the Health Department Board before the next public health crisis hits us.

The BERK Consulting report commissioned by Whatcom County after the COVID-19 response made it clear that our community has much to learn from recent public health challenges. **Among its most important findings is Recommendation #12, which calls for reconfiguring the Health Board to better reflect the range of experience and perspectives essential to effective leadership in future health crises.**

The report rightly notes that “a Health Board with members representing a wider diversity of professions and perspectives would enhance its functioning during a health emergency.” This recommendation speaks to what our county experienced firsthand during the pandemic: decision-making constrained by limited professional diversity and blurred lines between political and public health roles. A stronger, more balanced Health Board is fundamental to improving our readiness and our unity in the face of the next crisis.

Including members with public health and medical expertise—those who understand epidemiology, emergency management, hospital coordination, and community impacts—will help the Board maintain focus on evidence-based decisions. **Moreover, involving city representatives from Bellingham and other municipalities acknowledges that health emergencies do not stop at jurisdictional boundaries.** Collaboration among local governments should be built into the Board’s structure, not left to ad hoc partnerships. I would think that Council members representing our smaller communities would want to support the reconfiguration -- after all, those communities are your friends, family, and neighbors who you want to love and protect.

As for Council member Kaylee Galloway, who has still not made up her mind, I would urge her to support the reconfiguration for similar reasons. In the next election cycle, you may not be unopposed in your campaign.

This should not be a political or a power issue -- it is a common-sense, common good decision.

As BERK's analysts found, distinguishing the roles of the Health Board and the County Council will promote clearer accountability and communication. A reconfigured Board that values diversity of skill, perspective, and representation will make Whatcom County more resilient and better prepared for future public health emergencies.

I urge the Council to prioritize the full implementation of Recommendation #12—expanding and reconfiguring the Health Board to reflect professional expertise and community diversity. The lessons we've paid for through hardship and loss during COVID-19 should guide a stronger, more responsive public health system.

Micki Jackson

Bellingham

Here is how the Berk Report phrased Recommendation #12:

Recommendation #12:

Health Board Role and Membership

During the pandemic period, the Whatcom County Council fulfilled its responsibilities as both the Council and the Health Board. During this time, it was not clear that the members of Council fully understood the separation of their duties as it pertained to each of their roles. The roles of the two organizations are different. While the Health Board has specific approval roles for some decisions made by the Health Officer, there were times when its decision making may have interfered with what is traditionally the role of the executive branch of government. The County must change the membership of either its Health Board or its PHAB to comply with recent updates to state statute. This presents an opportunity to expand the membership of the Health Board to both add public health and/or medical expertise and create a governing body with a different makeup from the County Council.

Recommendation #12:

A Health Board with members representing a wider diversity of professions and perspectives would enhance its functioning during a health emergency. Having members with public health and/or medical expertise could help keep the focus on public health issues. Members can also hear from peers on the Board rather than only County staff. Further, changing the composition of the Health Board could help distinguish the roles of that entity and the County Council. The County Council should also consider expanding or reconfiguring the elected members of the Health Board. It may be desirable to add or replace some County elected positions with elected officials from the City of Bellingham or other municipalities within the county. The number of elected officials may not be greater than the number of non-elected members, so the Council should be mindful of the total size of the Board.
