



MEMORANDUM

TO: Whatcom County Council
FROM: Satpal Sidhu, County Executive
RE: AB2026-625 "Request confirmation of the County Executive's appointment of James Marks as Director of Whatcom County Planning & Development Services, effective September 14, 2026"
DATE: August 7, 2026

After an extensive recruitment process, I am pleased to present Mr. James Marks for confirmation as the next Director of Whatcom County Planning & Development Services.

Over the last several months and weeks, Mr. Marks has spent considerable time speaking with my office, Councilmembers, Whatcom County staff, and community stakeholders from a variety of perspectives. I am confident he is the right choice to lead Planning & Development Services into its next chapter. You'll find his bio below. Thank you for your consideration.

Professional Biography

James Marks is a planning and transportation executive with more than 20 years managing teams across public planning and transportation. He currently serves as Alaska Area Planning Principal at HDR Engineering, where he leads a community and transportation planning practice, overseeing corridor plans, freight and hazard mitigation studies, and local planning efforts throughout the state.

Before joining HDR, he served as Planning Director for the Alaska Municipal League (AML), working alongside communities throughout the state to build capacity, plan for climate resilience and hazard mitigation, pursue economic development, and secure grant and revenue opportunities.

As the Director of Planning & Program Development at the Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities, James oversaw statewide planning and programming for one of the largest and most geographically diverse transportation systems in America. During his tenure, he managed the State's capital program (growing from roughly \$700 million to \$1.4 billion annually) and led a staff of seventy. From 2018-2024, his work at the State ranged from planning for highways and bridges, the Alaska Marine Highway System, more than 200 state-owned airports, resource development projects, and long-range transportation projects.

James holds an MBA and a Bachelor of Business Administration from the University of Alaska. He is relocating with his family to be closer to relatives while continuing his career in public-sector planning leadership. James is passionate about building teams and focuses on creating an environment where staff have opportunities to improve process, use data to inform decision-making, and engage with the department's customers to improve community wellbeing.