



**To:** Whatcom County Council  
**From:** Whatcom County Commission on Salaries for Elected Officials  
**Subject:** Elected Official Salary Schedule for 2026 and 2027  
**Date:** April 30, 2025

The Whatcom County Salary Commission began meeting in January 2025 to make decisions regarding the 2026 and 2027 salaries for elected officials. The commission met seven times between January and April 2025. The Commission was fortunate to have four previous commissioners returned to serve. This was valuable to provide continuity to the process.

The Commission reviewed the work of the previous salary commission, the current salaries of other county elected officials at comparable counties and state-level elected officials for applicable positions. The Commission also received information about other Whatcom County employees including the salaries of the second-in-command for each elected official (if applicable) and department head peers. The Commission was fortunate to receive written and live feedback from elected officials. All of this information informed the final decision.

The Commission would like to thank the HR staff for providing data per the requests of the Commission. The Commission would also like to thank Stacey Carroll and Jake Logan who provided exceptional administrative support. The Commission wants to express sincere appreciation to the elected officials who provided insightful written and verbal feedback about their position and responsibilities to the County.

It has been an honor and a privilege to be selected and serve on the Whatcom County Salary Commission.

DocuSigned by:  
  
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Rebecca Sadwick Shaddix, Citizen at Large  
Commission Chair

Signed by:  
  
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Ralph Fodenauer, Citizen at Large  
Commission Vice-Chair

Signed by:  
  
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Daniel Darwin, Organized Labor

DocuSigned by:  
  
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Guy Occhiogrosso, Business Representative

Signed by:  
  
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Vanessa Bronsema, Personnel Management

DocuSigned by:  
  
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Karen Leigh Funston, Legal Profession

Signed by:  
  
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Gary Wrightson, Citizen at Large

Signed by:  
  
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Sonya Luhm, Citizen at Large

Signed by:  
  
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Tracie Gulit, Citizen at Large

Comment from Commissioner Gulit: I am signing this report to meet the current deadline, but I believe the commission's work remains incomplete. I respectfully recommend that the Council reconvene the commission to allow for further discussion and a more thorough conclusion to our charge.

## Exhibit A: Whatcom County Commission on Salaries for Elected Officials

### Future Salary Placements

Position	July 1, 2025*	January 1, 2026	July 1, 2026**	January 1, 2027	July 1, 2027
Assessor	\$14,471	TBD (by COLA)	No change	TBD (by COLA)	No change
Auditor	\$14,471	TBD (by COLA)	No change	TBD (by COLA)	No change
Treasurer	\$14,471	TBD (by COLA)	No change	TBD (by COLA)	No change
Sherriff	\$19,177	TBD (by COLA)	No change	TBD (by COLA)	No change
Prosecuting Attorney	\$19,771	No change	\$20,386	No change	TBD**
County Executive	\$20,382	TBD (by COLA)	No change	TBD (by COLA)	No change
County Council	\$6,624	TBD (by COLA)	No change	TBD (by COLA)	No change

\*Monthly Rate set by previous salary commission

\*\*Washington Citizens' Commission on Salaries for Elected Officials (WCCSEO) Published information: <https://salaries.wa.gov/salary>

## **Exhibit B: Summary data reviewed by commission and salary placement decisions.**

In determining the appropriate compensation for Elected Officials, the Salary Commission reviewed and considered the following data and information:

- 2023 Commission Conclusions Final Report
- Whatcom County Elected Officials & Second's Pay Information (Actual & Top-Step)
- Unrepresented Position Titles & Salary Matrix (including specific information for other department heads)
- Historical Whatcom County Elected Official Compensation
- Whatcom County COLA History by Group
- 2025 County budget documents & revenue forecasts
- Elected Official written submissions and public comments (see minutes)
- Bureau of Labor Statistics, CPI for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U)
- Comparable County Pay Information (Benton, Kitsap, Skagit, Thurston and Yakima)
- Washington State Superior Court Judge Salaries
- Washington State Legislatures Salaries
- City of Bellingham Council Salaries
- City of Bellingham Police Chief Salary
- Whatcom County insurance benefits coverage and cost
- Crime rates in Whatcom County and other comparable counties
- Population of Whatcom County over the last 10 years

## Exhibit C: Decisions regarding salary placements

The Commission minutes over the various meetings reflect the review and discussions of the information requested and presented, including the written statements and documents submitted by the Elected Officials. Many Commissioners considered the current and projected budget challenges when making their decision. **The final decisions were not unanimous and there were differing opinions about the impact that the budget constraints should have on the salary decisions, but ultimately a majority vote prevailed.**

The final salary placements focused on the following information:

**Prosecuting Attorney:** The Commission reviewed and discussed various compensation data for the Prosecuting Attorney. Most Commissioners felt that continuing the alignment with the Washington Superior Court Judge pay that was established by the previous commissions was relevant and important. This commission, by a majority vote, decided to continue the practice of aligning the pay increase with the timing at the State level. **The salary set for the Prosecuting attorney is set to match 100% that of the Superior Court Judge beginning on July 1, 2026 and will follow any subsequent pay adjustments through the end of 2027.**

**County Executive, Sherriff, Assessor, Auditor & Treasurer:** The Commission reviewed and discussed a variety of salary data points for these positions, including external comparator and comparable data, internal salaries for similar positions (i.e. department heads) and Second-in-Command positions. The Commissioners also reviewed information about the current and projected budget shortfalls expected within the County. Based on this information and data, and the written and verbal statements provided by the elected officials, **the Commission decided that the current pay for these positions is appropriate with an annual COLA that will match the COLA established for the Unrepresented positions in the County beginning on January 1<sup>st</sup> 2026.** The Commissioners understand that these adjustments (if any) are traditionally done on January 1<sup>st</sup> of each year in alignment with the new county budget but recommend that any COLA adjustments that are made for unrepresented county staff also apply to elected officials regardless of the timing.

**County Council:** The Commission appreciated having two current councilmembers, Councilmember Stremmer and Councilmember Scanlon, share their experience serving as a councilmember. This included information about the time commitment, the duties and responsibilities and some of the challenges. The Commissioners had robust conversations about the time commitment expectations of the Council members and expressed concerns that the position is currently identified as a part-time role. While many commissioners felt the position was more than part-time, they were reluctant to adjust the salary to reflect a full-time equivalent salary in advance of changes made to the status of the position. After deliberation, **the Commission decided that the current pay for this position is appropriate with an annual COLA to that will match the COLA established for the Unrepresented positions in the County beginning on January 1<sup>st</sup> 2026.** The Commissioners understand that these adjustments (if any) are traditionally done on January 1<sup>st</sup> of each year in alignment with the new county budget but recommend that any COLA adjustments that are made for unrepresented county staff also apply to elected officials regardless of the timing.