



To: Whatcom County Council

From: Rick Harrison, Project Manager, Mission Critical Partners, LLC (MCP)

Date: August 6, 2025

Ref: Fire District Comments

Councilmembers,

I am writing to address recent feedback you have received from members of the fire and EMS service in response to the draft assessment report commissioned by the Council. As you are aware, this engagement was not welcome by the fire service, and MCP did our best to alleviate concerns at our first kickoff meeting. However, that initial meeting was met with anger and frustration. While most subsequent discussions were professional, some agencies chose not to engage, and certain information requests were not fulfilled. In those cases, we relied on publicly available or alternative sources to fill data gaps. In one instance, information could not be obtained from the state due to our non-affiliation with a specific fire district.

I will address some of the outstanding and more pointed comments made by the districts:

1. **Wrong information in the report** – As stated, we did our best to acquire accurate information directly from the districts and via some online sources. Obviously from the feedback, we recognize that some data in the draft may require updating or clarification. Where possible, we will cross-check facts with verified sources and make corrections in the final report.
2. **Purpose and Audience of the Report** – Some stakeholders expressed concerns that the report contained information they already knew (e.g., NFPA or WSRB ratings). We note that we were scoped to develop a report primarily for the Council's review, as well as for the public, to provide a comprehensive overview and basic context. The report was not intended solely for the fire service audience. Basic information had to be included to educate non-professionals in some aspects of the fire service. For reference, information from the Scope of Work that was part of our contract with the County includes:

Purpose: This independent study will review the structures, staffing, budgets, and service delivery of the current systems and identify opportunities and make recommendations for further collaboration and or consolidation. Additionally, the study will identify potential benefits and drawbacks of enhanced partnerships

and/or consolidations, as well as cost and savings estimates for proposed changes.

Draft Recommendations: Contractor will develop a strategic plan report based on the data and information reviewed. This report will contain recommendations for the County's consideration in improving its processes, potentially justifying modifications to policies hindering success.

Final Report: The final report will include a guide to next steps for the future of the fire and EMS systems in Whatcom County. The report will address next steps and be written for a general audience of property owners who may potentially benefit from a better understanding of the fire and EMS structure in our county and how recommendations could affect service to their properties.

3. **Autonomy Concerns** – With respect to the concerns that the report does not reflect the fire districts' autonomy, the draft report emphasized that all recommendations are non-binding and at the discretion of whatever agency has the authority to make those decisions. We will ensure this point remains clear in the final version. Recommendations are intended to serve as a point of discussion between the districts, the county, and the communities served by each district.
4. **Legal and Governance Questions** – In some cases, recommendations were interpreted in ways not intended. For example, the suggestion regarding assignment of unincorporated areas was based on precedents such as South Whatcom Fire Authority's agreement and was intended to ensure clarity in service coverage mapping for dispatch purposes. Where wording can be improved for accuracy, we will adjust the language in the final report.
5. **Bias Allegations** – MCP stands by the objectivity of its findings. While some recommendations may not align with every stakeholder's preference, others reinforce or support the fire service's existing strengths and practices. We were asked by the County Council to develop an independent report and the County did not direct our conclusions.
6. **MCP Qualifications** – Some comments questioned MCPs credibility for reports of this nature. MCP has completed similar assessments in multiple states, including large-scale efforts such as the National Capital Region project involving two states and a population of six million. I personally am coming from a 30-year career in fire/EMS services and am a former fire chief and EMS provider. Jason Malloy, who works with me on this contract, has direct operational and command



experience in emergencies, including public safety communications, emergency management, and firefighting, with expertise in incident command and crisis response.

Next Steps

MCP will review all submitted comments, correct factual inaccuracies, and clarify ambiguous language. Recommendations will be adjusted only where warranted by substantive information, not solely based on disagreement. Additionally, MCP will develop a comment and response ledger showing how we responded to stakeholder comments in the report. This will allow stakeholders to see and ensure that comments are considered and addressed.

We appreciate the Council's support and your consideration of the one-month extension granted to allow a thorough review of stakeholder comments. While stakeholder pushback was expected, we remain committed to delivering a final report that is accurate, balanced, and useful for decision-making. I will present the final report at your September 9 or 23 meeting. In the meantime, I am happy to address your questions.

Respectfully,

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