

RESOLUTION NO. \_\_\_\_\_

**SUPPORTING THE USE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INVESTMENT (EDI) FUNDS FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

**WHEREAS**, housing is an important element of economic development, especially workforce housing that supports business recruitment and retention; and

**WHEREAS**, a lack of available and affordable housing for all economic segments of our community remains a significant challenge in Whatcom County; and

**WHEREAS**, the [City of Bellingham](#) estimates that less than 30% of Whatcom County housing is affordable to a household earning the median family income, and a more balanced proportion is around 50%; and

**WHEREAS**, the [Washington State Department of Commerce projects](#) Whatcom County will need to build 34,377 new homes by the year 2044, 18,053 of which need to be affordable to households earning less than 50% of Area Median Income; and

**WHEREAS**, Whatcom County needs to take a more holistic, system-wide approach to our community's housing issues, addressing housing availability and affordability through both a health and human services approach as well as a land use and planning approach; and

**WHEREAS**, on January 10, 2023, the Whatcom County Business and Commerce Advisory Committee transmitted their proposal to increase access to housing for all income levels, which included recommendations to:

- Reduce the complexity and the cost of compliance of code,
- Prioritize density in existing city boundaries and urban growth areas while supporting limited annexations,
- Provide incentives for permanently affordable home ownership and rentals for occupants whose incomes range from 50% to 150% of area median income; and

**WHEREAS**, on August 8, 2023, the Whatcom County Council approved [Resolution 2023-020](#) affirming the housing affordability and homelessness are a public health crisis requiring systemwide actions; and

**WHEREAS**, the Economic Development Investment (EDI) Board was created to make recommendations to the Whatcom County Council to invest in economic development and public facilities consistent with [RCW 82.14.370](#); and

**WHEREAS**, [RCW 82.14.370](#) authorizes Whatcom County to retain a portion of sales and use tax to finance public facilities, including affordable housing infrastructure or facilities, with the goal of improving the economy by stimulating and creating ongoing private sector jobs; and

**WHEREAS**, [RCW 82.14.370](#) defines "Affordable workforce housing infrastructure or facilities" as housing infrastructure or facilities that a qualifying provider uses for housing for a single person, family, or unrelated persons living together whose income is no more than 120 percent of the median income, adjusted for housing size, for the county where the housing is located; and

1           **WHEREAS**, RCW 82.14.370 defines “Qualifying provider” as a nonprofit entity as defined  
2 in RCW [84.36.560](#), a nonprofit entity or qualified cooperative association as defined in  
3 RCW [84.36.049](#), a housing authority created under RCW [35.82.030](#) or [35.82.300](#), a public  
4 corporation established under RCW [35.21.660](#) or [35.21.730](#), or a county or municipal  
5 corporation; and  
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7           **WHEREAS**, the Whatcom County Executive manages the EDI Program, which makes  
8 grants and low interest loans to assist in financing public facilities required by businesses to  
9 create or retain jobs; and  
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11           **WHEREAS**, the Whatcom County Council makes the final loan and grant approval  
12 decisions for all EDI projects; and  
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14           **WHEREAS**, the EDI Board makes recommendations aligned with the following goals to:

- 15           1. Increase the number of family wage jobs available to the citizens of the county,
- 16           2. Retain existing businesses within the county,
- 17           3. Facilitate the expansion of existing businesses,
- 18           4. Attract new businesses to Whatcom County, and
- 19           5. Sustain the EDI Program through repayment of EDI loans; and  
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21           **WHEREAS**, Whatcom County’s [2022-2026 Comprehensive Economic Development](#)  
22 [Strategy \(CEDS\)](#) aims to strengthen and sustain the regional economy through the retention  
23 and creation of living-wage jobs and to foster a stable and diversified regional economy; and  
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25           **WHEREAS**, the [CEDS](#) identifies housing availability and affordability as high priority  
26 issues affecting Whatcom County’s ability to grow economically; and  
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28           **WHEREAS**, the [CEDS](#) identifies an objective to work with local jurisdictions and service  
29 providers to inform and assist with the development of affordable and available housing choices  
30 for all income levels in Whatcom County; and  
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32           **WHEREAS**, the [CEDS](#) identifies a strategy to promote and support immediate solutions  
33 to the housing crisis, including

- 34           1. Support and promote the urgent need for affordable housing for workers, in areas  
35           near services, throughout Whatcom County.
- 36           2. Support efforts to address houselessness issues throughout Whatcom County.
- 37           3. Support and advocate for local businesses impacted by the housing crises.
- 38           4. Support and promote a diverse array of housing solutions, housing choice, and  
39           affordable housing types that address the housing crisis.
- 40           5. Support housing development and modular construction companies that develop  
41           innovative and environmentally sustainable housing solutions.
- 42           6. Support increased mixed-use zoning in order to encourage different housing choices  
43           and creating different yet sustainable and innovative live-work spaces.
- 44           7. Support nonprofits that work on innovative housing solutions.
- 45           8. Participate on boards and committees working to address the housing crisis.
- 46           9. Collaborate with the Whatcom Housing Alliance to conduct a workforce housing  
47           feasibility study; and  
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49           **WHEREAS**, [Substitute House Bill 1267](#) amended [RCW 82.14.370](#) in May 2023, to extend  
50 the authorization for the sales and use tax for public facilities in rural counties through  
51 December 31, 2054; and  
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