
WHATCOM COUNTY COVID-19 REVIEW

COUNTY COUNCIL PRESENTATION | JUNE 21, 2022

AGENDA

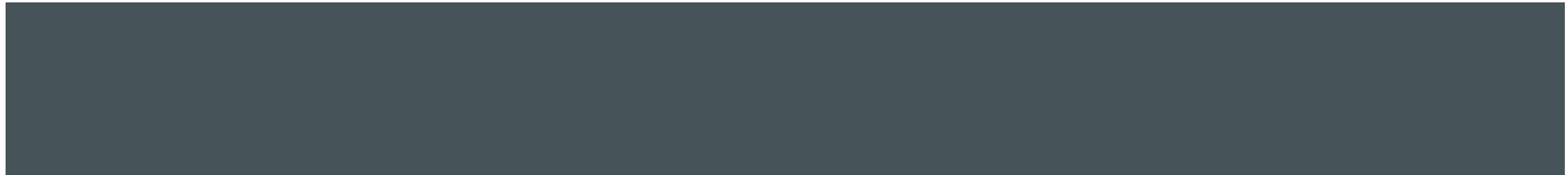
1. Introductions
2. Project Purpose and Process
3. Observations
4. Recommendations
5. Considerations for the Future
6. Conclusions and Next Steps

MEETING OBJECTIVES

- Share draft report
- Hear Council feedback and questions on draft recommendations



PROJECT PURPOSE AND PROCESS



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Project Purpose

Reflect on the County's response to the public emergency, evaluate the systems in place to respond to the event, and identify opportunities to improve and be even better prepared for the next global emergency.

Work Completed to Date

- Reviewed incident documentation, existing plans, county code, meeting notes.
- Conducted 24 interviews with Whatcom County staff and outside partners.
- Presented initial findings to County Council.

Next Steps

- Finalize report based on Council feedback.
- Present final report **July 26.**



OBSERVATIONS



OBSERVATIONS: AREAS OF SUCCESS

- Whatcom County's response had a positive effect on **health outcomes**. The County had the 7th lowest mortality rate of 39 counties in Washington.
- Council approved **use of general funds** early on for emergency response.
- The County organization was able to **adapt quickly to hybrid work** and **continued to provide many services**.
- Use of **volunteers, donations process**, and **distribution of PPE** were all noted as successes.
- **Regional collaboration** resulted in many successes - addressing the border closure, providing reopening guidance to businesses, and using local relief funds.

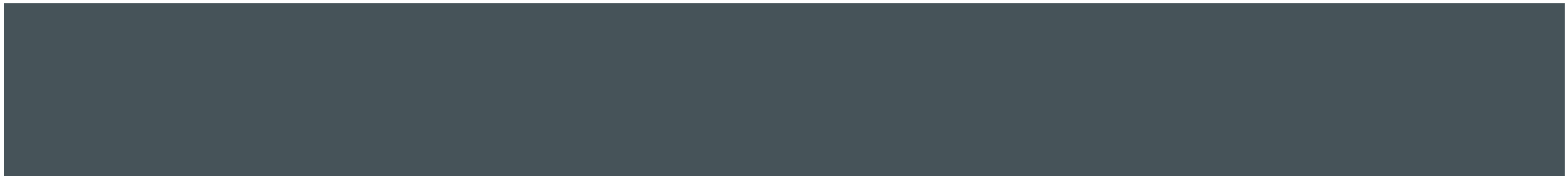
OBSERVATIONS: OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Four themes that inform our recommendations:

- Clarity of **roles, responsibilities, and authorities**.
- **Information sharing**.
- **Training and exercises**.
- **Consistent support** for the response effort.



RECOMMENDATIONS



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- Planning, Training, and Exercises.
- Policy Roles and Responsibilities.
- Information Management.
- Staffing.
- Financial Authority During Disasters.

PLANNING, TRAINING, AND EXERCISES

1. As the Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan is updated, add a Pandemic Annex.
2. Regularly review and update Continuity of Operations Plans.
3. Conduct training and exercises at all levels.
4. Train individuals on Incident Command System.
5. Ensure training materials are available for first-time participants in Whatcom Unified Command (WUC).

POLICY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

6. Conduct training for councilmembers, elected officials, and department heads on crisis communications.
7. Establish protocol if elected officials want to visit the Emergency Coordination Center.
8. Include elected officials in training and exercises and more clearly define their roles and responsibilities.
9. Expand Health Board membership to include public health/medical representatives and elected officials from cities.

POLICY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES, continued

10. Ensure individual departments work together within a unified structure toward common goals.
11. Develop and practice a virtual operational capability for WUC.
12. Use common terminology for the facility housing WUC.

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

18. Develop a policy and protocols for sharing sensitive health information.
19. Develop procedures to ensure that appropriate personnel receive information that keeps them informed.
20. Establish a single Joint Information Center that is managed by a single individual and conduct training and exercises.

STAFFING

13. Encourage elected officials to support staff working in a stressful situation.
14. Maintain Health Department staff at a level necessary to continue the long-term response to the pandemic.
15. Add positions to the Division of Emergency Management to support public information and planning.

FINANCIAL AUTHORITY DURING DISASTERS

16. Conduct training on emergency procurement.
17. Consider alternative decision-making processes to increase the efficiency of spending and hiring in an emergency.



CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE



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- Consider forming a Type 3 Incident Management Team that is all-hazards focused. This is a multi-agency/multi-jurisdictional team used for extended incidents.
- Consider repositioning the emergency management function, placing it under the County Executive or in a department that provides county-wide services.



CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS



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- Finalize report based on Council feedback.
- Present final report **July 26.**



Questions or Feedback?