

**WHATCOM COUNTY
EXECUTIVE'S OFFICE**

County Courthouse
311 Grand Avenue, Suite #108
Bellingham, WA 98225-4082



Satpal Singh Sidhu
County Executive

MEMORANDUM

TO: Whatcom County Council

THROUGH: Satpal Sidhu, County Executive

FROM: Kayla Schott-Bresler, Strategic Initiatives Manager

RE: Whatcom Racial Equity Commission Appointment Committee

DATE: June 8, 2023

Background

In October 2022, the Whatcom County Council established the Whatcom Racial Equity Commission (WREC) through [Ordinance 2022-065](#). As a conduit for ongoing community collaboration, engagement, and education, within the broader context of diversity and inclusion, the purpose of the WREC is to gather, review, and evaluate data and to make recommendations on eliminating racial inequities, in all its forms, throughout Whatcom County.

Whatcom County and the City of Bellingham subsequently entered into an interlocal agreement ([202210012](#)) to provide for joint funding of the WREC.

Ordinance 2022-065 lays out an appointment procedure for the WREC:

An Appointment Committee consisting of one staff representative for Whatcom County appointed by the County Executive, one staff representative for the City of Bellingham appointed by the Mayor of Bellingham, and four community representatives recommended by the County Executive and confirmed by the County Council shall be established to 1) review applications for appointed Commission positions 2) evaluate applicant's eligibility for appointment, and 3) provide written recommendations for Commission appointments to the County Executive and Mayor of Bellingham.

This Committee is time-limited and will be eventually superseded by the WREC steering committee. In addition to assisting with appointments to the WREC, this Committee will also assist with the hiring process for WREC's Executive Director position.

Appointment Committee

The Executive's Office conducted an application process for the Appointment Committee. There were seven applicants for the Appointment Committee. The Executive has selected four community-members for service on the Appointment Committee, for confirmation by County Council. Further, the Executive recommends the remaining applicants to serve as fully-participating alternates on the Committee. This will allow for the County to follow the letter of Ordinance 2022-065 while maximizing community participation.

Recommended Appointees

- **Dr. Vernon Damani Johnson, Bellingham.** Dr. Johnson served as a Professor of Political Science at Western Washington University from 1986-2021. He was also a stakeholder in the development of the WREC and served on the ad-hoc committee to conduct the WREC fiscal sponsorship search.
- **Dr. Francisco Rios, Bellingham.** Dr. Rios served as a Professor at Western Washington University from 2011 to 2021 and Dean of the Woodring College of Education from 2011 to 2017. His scholarly work and teaching focuses on diversity, equity, and inclusion in education systems.
- **Eliana Steele, Blaine.** Ms. Steele brings over twenty years of health care leadership experience in government, commercial and clinical sectors and was a stakeholder in the development of the WREC.
- **Dr. Pamela Wheeler, Bellingham.** Dr. Wheeler is the Chief People & Culture Officer at the Opportunity Council and has a career of service in human resources management. She also served as a stakeholder in the development of the WREC.

Recommended Alternates

- **Matthew Durkee, Ferndale.** Mr. Durkee is a United States Army Veteran and long-time Whatcom County resident. He brings experience as a Korean American immigrant and his work in the community college and secondary education systems. He currently works as the director of the Edmonds College Veteran Center.
- **Guava Jordan, Bellingham.** Ms. Jordan has been an educator in community colleges for the last ten years, focusing on educational equity and racial equity in higher education. She was a stakeholder in the development of the WREC.
- **Lee Langdon, Bellingham.** Ms. Langdon spent her career working in human resources and healthcare systems, including ten years as the director of human resources for a 1,500 bed hospital. She has a deep passion and commitment to racial equity.

Administrative Services in Support of the WREC

The Administration conducted a Request for Proposals to select a nonprofit to provide administrative services in support of the WREC. Chuckanut Health Foundation (CHF) was the only respondent to the RFP. The administration will bring forward a contract with CHF for proposed services in the coming weeks. If approved, CHF will facilitate the Appointment Committee and hiring of WREC's Executive Director.

Please contact me at x5220 or kschottb@co.whatcom.wa.us with any questions.