



MEMO:

TO: Whatcom County Council

FROM: Kayla Schott-Bresler, Strategic Initiatives Manager

THROUGH: Satpal Sidhu, County Executive; Tyler Schroeder, Deputy Executive

CC: Tom McBride and Ben Buchholz, McBride Public Affairs

DATE: July 14, 2023

RE: **2024 WA State Legislative Session Planning – July 25 COTW Discussion**

Overview:

The Administration is working to increase County Council, Elected Official, and Department Head Engagement in establishing – and advocating for – the County’s state legislative agenda. As we plan for the 2024 60-day state legislative session, the Administration will facilitate a series of activities to collaboratively develop a set of legislative priorities and budget asks.

The July 25th Committee of the Whole meeting will be the initial opportunity for Council/Executive discussion on 2024 legislative priorities.

Proposed Schedule of Engagement:

The Administration proposes the below schedule for developing the County’s priorities and engaging with the delegation during the legislative interim. The following dates are tentative.

What	Purpose	When
Council Work Session	Legislative agenda development	July 25, 2023
Dept Head/Elected Official survey	Legislative agenda development	July/August 2023
Council, Dept Head/Elected Official individual meetings with Administration	Legislative agenda development	August/September 2023
Justice Project Workshop	Delegation Engagement	Summer/Fall 2023
Swift Creek Tour	Delegation Engagement	Summer/Fall 2023
Port of Bellingham/COB Coordination	Legislative agenda development	Summer/Fall 2023
Council Work Session	Legislative agenda development	September 26, 2023

Council Vote on Legislative Priorities	Legislative agenda development	October 24, 2023
Legislative Kickoff Event	Delegation Engagement	November/December 2023

Setting an Agenda:

The Administration has drafted an initial list of priorities and budget requests (listed below) to kick-start discussion. This list will grow significantly as the Administration consults with Council, Departments, other County elected officials, WSAC, the Port of Bellingham, City of Bellingham and other community partners. Ultimately, the Administration anticipates developing a “lead” agenda with specific County budget and policy requests (i.e. Swift Creek cleanup) and a “support” agenda with broader issues the County wishes to track (i.e. funding for public defense.)

Initial List of Policy Issues:

- Land Use
 - Urban Growth Areas “Land Swap” – working with small cities to determine RCW changes needed to direct development to less flood-prone areas
 - Increasing appropriate development - Limited areas of more intense rural development (LMIRDs) and ADUs in rural areas
- Affordable Housing
 - Economic Development Investment Program “technical fix” bill – clarification to allow use of EDI funds for workforce housing and land banking
- Behavioral Health
 - Ensuring appropriate Medicaid reimbursement rates and coverage for care, including at a 23-hour crisis relief center
 - Supporting efforts to bolster the behavioral health workforce

Initial List of Budget Requests:

- Capital
 - Swift Creek cleanup
 - Justice Project plan priorities – re-entry center; inpatient beds
- Operating
 - Fund the 90-day Medicaid waiver for jail-based health
 - Continued support on floodplain management, water solutions, and natural resources
 - Behavioral health diversion programs, including a potential prosecutorial diversion pilot and/or alternative pathways for competency restoration

Discussion Questions for July 25th Committee of the Whole:

1. Which high-level or specific policy issues do you wish to add to this list?
2. Which issues are you most interested in engaging on and helping with in your role as a Councilmember?

Next Steps:

We encourage Councilmembers to bring forward their policy and budget priorities individually to the Administration or through these scheduled Council work sessions. If you are interested in meeting or have questions, please contact Kayla Schott-Bresler in the Executive’s Office.