



# Whatcom County

COUNTY COURTHOUSE  
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## Agenda Bill Report

File Number: AB2023-791

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**File ID:** AB2023-791      **Version:** 1      **Status:** Substitute Approved  
**File Created:** 11/17/2023      **Entered by:** CHalka@co.whatcom.wa.us  
**Department:** Council Office      **File Type:** Resolution  
  
**Assigned to:** Council Committee of the Whole      **Final Action:** 12/05/2023  
**Agenda Date:** 12/05/2023      **Enactment #:** RES 2023-054  
**Related Files:**

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Primary Contact Email: chalka@co.whatcom.wa.us

**TITLE FOR AGENDA ITEM:**

Resolution to establish an independent review of countywide fire and EMS structures

**SUMMARY STATEMENT OR LEGAL NOTICE LANGUAGE:**

Resolution to establish an independent review of countywide fire and EMS structures

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### HISTORY OF LEGISLATIVE FILE

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Date:	Acting Body:	Action:	Sent To:
12/05/2023	Council Committee of the Whole	RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL WITH PROPOSED AMENDMENT(S)	
		Aye: 5 Buchanan, Byrd, Donovan, Frazey, and Galloway	
		Nay: 1 Elenbaas	
		Abstain: 1 Kershner	
12/05/2023	Council	SUBSTITUTE APPROVED	
		Aye: 5 Buchanan, Byrd, Donovan, Frazey, and Galloway	
		Nay: 1 Elenbaas	
		Abstain: 1 Kershner	

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**Attachments:** Memo, Proposed Resolution, Substitute Resolution Amended in Committee 12.5.2023

**RESOLUTION NO. 2023-054**

**ESTABLISH AN INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF  
COUNTYWIDE FIRE AND EMS STRUCTURES**

**WHEREAS**, Whatcom County residents and businesses are served by thirteen fire districts and two municipal fire departments; and

**WHEREAS**, fire districts levy property taxes in their jurisdictions as well as receive revenues from the countywide EMS levy; and

**WHEREAS**, the Whatcom County EMS Administration manages EMS levy funds for the ALS (advanced life support, paramedic) system and portions of the BLS (basic life support, EMT) system as well as the data management system for EMS services and all EMS dispatching fees; and

**WHEREAS**, the structures of our county's fire districts have changed over time as communities have grown and agencies have identified benefits to collaboration; and

**WHEREAS**, partnerships between fire and EMS agencies have formed over time to capture cost efficiencies and improvements in service delivery; and

**WHEREAS**, North Whatcom Fire & Rescue was formed through a functional consolidation of fire districts 4 and 21, and each continues to maintain separate commissions and share one chief; and

**WHEREAS**, Fire District 8 completed an administrative consolidation in 2019 with Bellingham Fire, and the Bellingham Fire Chief serves as the fire chief for District 8; and

**WHEREAS**, some fire districts rely on interlocal and mutual aid agreements to get assistance from other districts with elements of operations; and

**WHEREAS**, many fire districts and departments have their own staff for training, human resources, and other staff services; and

**WHEREAS**, partnerships can create efficiencies in costs and service delivery, and the collaboration that is already happening between fire districts acknowledges those benefits.; and

**WHEREAS**, further consolidation opportunities could have many benefits for Whatcom County citizens in terms of cost savings and improved service delivery; and

**WHEREAS**, fire agencies have their own administrations and hiring practices, as well as staffing structures comprised of full-time, part-time, and volunteer fire fighters; and

**WHEREAS**, through partnerships or consolidation, fire agencies may provide more consistent recruitment, hiring, and training practice for staff and first responders; and

**WHEREAS**, the Whatcom County Council represents the people of Whatcom County and looks out for their best interests; and

1           **WHEREAS**, the time is right to complete an independent review of the structures of our  
2 county's fire and EMS service providers as well as the Whatcom County EMS Administration; and  
3

4           **WHEREAS**, an independent review can provide transparency for the public and identify  
5 potential benefits and drawback of consolidation opportunities.  
6

7           **NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that the Whatcom County Council commissions  
8 an independent study of the countywide fire and emergency management system (EMS)  
9 structures; and  
10


11           **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that a consultant team will be hired through the Whatcom  
12 County Council office; and  
13

14           **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that regular updates to the County Council will be provided  
15 on progress of the study; and  
16


17           **BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED** that the study will include an overview of the current fire  
18 district, fire department, and county EMS administration systems, an evaluation of potential  
19 consolidation opportunities and benefits, and include stakeholder engagement, as further  
20 defined in Exhibit A: Scope of Work.  
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23  
24           **APPROVED** this 5th day of December, 2023.

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27           ATTEST:

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31             
32           Dana Brown-Davis, Clerk of the Council

33  
34           WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL  
35           WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON

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37             
38           Barry Buchanan, Council Chair  
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34           APPROVED AS TO FORM:

35           /s/Karen Frakes approved via email on 12/6/2023/MR  
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38           Civil Deputy Prosecutor  
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1 **EXHIBIT A: SCOPE OF WORK**

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3 Background

4 Whatcom County area residents and businesses are served by 13 fire districts and 2 municipal fire  
5 departments, as well as the county EMS administration. Over time as communities have grown, these  
6 agencies have collaborated on varying elements of services. This study will review the structures, budgets,  
7 and service delivery of the current systems and identify recommendations for further collaboration and or  
8 consolidation. Additionally, the study will identify potential benefits and drawbacks of enhanced  
9 partnerships and/or consolidations.

10  
11 Tasks

12 1. Discovery

13 Review and compile complete profiles on fire districts, fire departments, and county EMS  
14 administration including budgeting, staffing, interlocal agreements, administration, roles and  
15 responsibilities and other critical elements of the fire service structure in the county.

16 2. Outreach & Engagement

17 Provide opportunities for feedback and discussion about the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities,  
18 and threats to the current systems and structures. Identify the benefits and barriers to consolidation

19 3. Draft Recommendations

20 Provide recommendations and options for how our community could move forward to re-envision  
21 fire and EMS structures. Include potential cost savings and other benefits projected for each option.  
22 Include specific information on potential staffing changes and jobs retention.

23 4. Final Report

24 Summarize all tasks in a final report.

25  
26 Stakeholders

- 27 • Fire District Administration, staff, and first responders
- 28 • Bellingham and Lynden fire departments
- 29 • Whatcom County EMS
- 30 • EMS Oversight Board, Technical Advisory Board
- 31 • Whatcom County EMS & Trauma Care Council
- 32 • What-COMM Dispatch
- 33 • Elected officials
- 34 • Union and Guilds
- 35 • Community leaders

36  
37 Deliverables

38 A final report document (PDF) summarizing findings and recommendations, including all tasks described  
39 above.

40  
41 Timeline

42 Approximately 12-18 months.

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44 Cost

45 Estimated \$275,000, to be confirmed through a request for proposals (RFP) process