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October 8, 2021

Satpal Singh Sidhu,
Whatcom County Executive
311 Grand Avenue #108
Bellingham, WA 98225

Dear Executive Sidhu,

As you know, Western Washington University is located on the ancestral homelands of the Lhaq'temish Lummi Nation and Nuxwsa7aq, Nooksack Nation, as well as other Coast Salish Nations. In recognition of the historic importance of place and in acknowledgement of the University's responsibility to promote educational opportunities for Native students, Western is building a traditional Coast Salish-style Longhouse for use by students, faculty, staff, and our surrounding communities.

The University is consulting with Coast Salish Tribes and Nations to ensure the cultural integrity of the project and working closely with the City of Bellingham on a location in the Sehome Hill Arboretum, that aligns with the mission and purpose of the Longhouse, and provides access to students, faculty, and staff, as well as the general public.

The Longhouse will serve as a gathering and ceremonial space for Native students as well as Coast Salish tribal nations throughout the Salish Sea region. It will support American Indian/Alaska Native and First Nations students by providing a dedicated space to gather, build community, and support each other. The Longhouse will also serve as a "house of healing" to acknowledge the past traumas and distress affecting Native peoples and long-standing racial injustices, as well as grief and suffering caused by the global pandemic and the ensuing economic crisis.

The vision for a Coast Salish Longhouse at Western originated from the Native American Student Union (NASU) and is the result of decades of dialogue among students, faculty, and campus administrators. Responding to the needs of Native American students, faculty, and staff is an important part of Western's strategic plan that, among other things, calls on us to recognize debts and obligations to Indigenous and Native nations. It also calls on us to advance inclusive student success. Education is the most powerful social equalizer, a true engine for upward mobility. But while postsecondary institutions have become increasingly diverse, the degree attainment gap persists for low-income students and students of color, and that trend has only been exacerbated by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We recognize that our most important challenge is to increase retention and persistence rates and the number of graduates, while eliminating opportunity and achievement gaps for students from diverse and under-represented socio-economic backgrounds.

The establishment of a longhouse at Western was also a key element in our legislative proposal during the 2021-23 biennium, and I'm pleased to report that the University received \$4.5 million for design and construction. We are currently engaged in fundraising efforts to raise another \$500,000 from other sources.

We are grateful for the endorsement of the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians and sponsorship of this project by Representative Debra Lekanoff. The University and the Office of Tribal Relations at Western now invite Whatcom County to join the City of Bellingham in supporting this historic effort to expand our community's multi-cultural infrastructure.

As our county's executive leader, you have galvanized efforts to strengthen equity and social justice in our communities. You have identified and recommended funding for projects that achieve a vision of inclusive success – a vision shared by Western as one of our core principles. We invite you to join us in this project to support community healing, nurture understanding, and foster learning.

Western respectfully asks that the Whatcom County Council consider a funding request of \$75,000 to support the construction of the *House of Healing* Coast Salish-style Longhouse in our community which will be operated and maintained as a facility of Western Washington University.

We welcome the opportunity to explore this funding request with you at your earliest convenience.

In gratitude for your consideration of this request,



Sabah Randhawa
President
Western Washington University



Laural Ballew
Executive Director of American Indian/Alaska Native and First Nations Relations &
Tribal Liaison to the President

Enclosure