

DRAFT 2024 LEGISLATIVE OBJECTIVES

City of Bellingham - Port of Bellingham - Whatcom County

The joint legislative agenda outlines and defines the shared objectives of the three entities and the commitment to work cooperatively with the Legislature, to strengthen the partnership between state and local governments, and to ensure that we have the full resources to implement the policies and goals as adopted by the State of Washington.

Budget Requests

We support funding for community-based projects in line with our shared policy priorities. In addition, we urge the legislature to fund the budget requests submitted individually by the Port of Bellingham, City of Bellingham, and Whatcom County, including:

- MTCA funding for environmental cleanup and brownfield redevelopment (Capital, Port and City of Bellingham)
- Commercial pump-out to protect Puget Sound (Capital, Port)
- What-COMM Dispatch Facility (Capital, City of Bellingham)
- 5th Superior Court Judge to Support Water Rights Adjudication (Operating, Whatcom County)
- LEAD and Prosecutorial Diversion (Operating, Whatcom County)
- 23 Hour Crisis Relief Center Gap Funding (Capital, Whatcom County)
- Fish Passage Barrier Removal (Capital, Whatcom County)
- Point Roberts Lighthouse Marine Park Master Plan (Capital, Whatcom County)

Policy Position Statements

Opioid Response and Behavioral Health: Families and communities across Washington are devastated by the twin crisis of substance use and mental illness. This affects all levels of society – from individuals to institutions - and local governments do not have the resources to provide the continuum of services needed. The State must expand its efforts across the board, including:

- Greater access to substance use treatment and crisis services, including competency evaluations
- Investment in the planning, construction, operations, and maintenance of regional behavioral health facilities
- Continued funding for alternative response programs
- Ensuring adequate Medicaid reimbursements rates and more flexible length of coverage for care, including at newly developed 23-hour crisis relief Centers
- Initiatives to bolster the behavioral health workforce
- Increase State funding support for local drug task forces

Broadband and Digital Equity: High-speed internet service, affordable equipment and access to digital skills, is critical for economic development, education, employment, civic engagement, access to services, and ensuring equity between rural and urban areas. Continued federal and state investments are necessary to fund this vital infrastructure, and those investments should allow local discretion regarding technology methods and geographic priorities. Local government can be a partner in bridging the digital

divide but it is not appropriate to rely on local governments as the sole funder of this utility. We support the Washington State Broadband Office's request for \$100 million in funding for this vital infrastructure.

Housing Affordability and Eviction Prevention: The scale of the housing affordability crisis and the number of families at severe risk for homelessness is at crisis levels. Affordable housing is essential towards maintaining a vibrant and sustainable regional economy, and the Legislature must make additional capital, operating, services, and eviction prevention funding available through state programs and new local options. The legislature should also explore available options for stemming the inflow of families into homelessness due to severe cost-burden. The legislature should also make available state resources to support local needs for winter shelter services, severe weather shelters, safe parking sites and other temporary services to serve our growing unsheltered populations.

Climate: The State should utilize multiple pathways for distributing Climate Commitment Act Funding, including:

- Local government formula allocations. Current funds available to local governments are competitive grant applications, which adds administrative burden, limits predictability, and jeopardizes smaller governments' ability to implement projects if they lack staff capacity to submit applications. Non-competitive grant allocations promote cross-jurisdictional collaboration, long-range planning, and a more impactful investment of funding beyond an individual project.
- Continue grant programs for climate resiliency and climate impact mitigation, vehicle electrification and multimodal projects, ferry vessel and terminal electrification, clean building upgrades and solar, weatherization, urban forestry, and other investments for local governments and individual households to make the clean energy transition.

Additionally, we urge the legislature to continue support for energy efficiency and clean energy transition and development, including the Solar Energy Resiliency Act and Fair Access to Community Solar.

Childcare: As communities struggle with workforce retention and recruitment post-pandemic, the importance of a stable childcare sector is paramount. State investments into childcare facilities, workforce development and stabilization, family subsidies, and augmenting the full cost of quality care are necessary to stabilize this industry and provide critical early education to children across Washington.

Fiscal Sustainability: Local governments have limited abilities to raise revenue and continue to face immense pressure to meet growing community needs. We urge the state to protect and enhance local revenue sharing options, preserve shared tax revenue for local governments, and grant flexibility for local governments to utilize investment funds for critical community capital projects.

