



COUNTY COURTHOUSE
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MEMORANDUM

TO: Whatcom County Council
FROM: Councilmember Barry Buchanan, SAC Chair
DATE: February 1, 2023
RE: Justice Project Needs Assessment Report

Presentation of Justice Project Needs Assessment Report

The Stakeholder Advisory Committee for the Justice Project (Public Health, Safety, and Justice Facility Needs Assessment) voted on January 26th by an overwhelming majority to approve the final [Justice Project Needs Assessment](#) report to present to the Whatcom County Council. On January 23, 2023, the Incarceration Prevention and Reduction Task Force (IPRTF) endorsed the report. At the February 7th County Council meeting, the project Planning Team will present an overview of the report and the effort to create it.

Process to develop the Needs Assessment Report

The process to create the Needs Assessment report is different than any other effort in the past as it involved a diverse group of committee members and far-reaching outreach to the public. The Stakeholder Advisory Committee was comprised of 38-members including broad representation from local government, Tribal Nations, community-based service providers, criminal legal system agencies, and people with lived experience in the criminal legal system. SAC members engaged in a yearlong consensus building process to understand each other's perspectives and build common ground. Additionally, the SAC considered feedback from a variety of public outreach efforts including a community survey with over 1,700 respondents, a town hall listening session with 100 participants, a survey of people incarcerated and staff in the jail, and targeted outreach to priority audiences (Latinx, Tribal Nations, and people who had previously been incarcerated and their families).

What is in the Report?

The Needs Assessment Report:

- **Establishes a vision, values and goals** for criminal legal system in the county (rooted in the principles of Council [Resolution 2019-036](#)).
- **Examines data** related to incarceration rates, population demographics, incarceration prevention and reduction efforts, and the health and welfare needs of those involved in the criminal legal system.

- **Identifies gaps** in the current community response to health and public safety needs, both inside and outside the Whatcom County jail.
- **Considers what it would take to fill those gaps** in order to improve health ad public safety.
- **Makes recommendations** to address the community's public health, safety, and justice concerns.

Recommendations in the Needs Assessment focus on three interrelated elements of public health, safety, and justice:

- Systems Goals, include shifts in practices, policies, and funding that facilitate efficient functioning of the criminal legal system,
- Services Goals, which are the types of supports that need to be in place to prevent and reduce people's involvement with the criminal legal system, and
- Facilities Goals, which include a jail and a variety of residential and non-residential facilities and settings for legal and healthcare treatment services.

The recommendations in the Justice Project Needs Assessment Report are critical and time sensitive, and are intended to work together towards a new, strategic and balanced approach that honors the diverse needs and priorities of our community and leads to real change.

Council Resolution of Acceptance

A resolution of acceptance will be brought forward for Council consideration at the February 21st meeting. Before then, please find at least an hour of time to read through the report. Please pay special attention to the needs and recommendations as well as the Appendix, which demonstrates the breadth of work that went into creating this report.

Implementation Plan

To move the recommendations forward, the County Executive Office and Justice Project Planning Team will develop an implementation plan that includes:

- Potential jail facilities concepts, including location and planning level costs,
- Identification of a specific site and building concept for the main jail,
- Proposed services and systems efforts and their costs,
- Identification of County Departments, Community Leaders and Organizations to lead implementation of recommendations, and
- A funding approach.

The implementation plan will be developed through workshops with county staff and key stakeholders as well as outreach to the public. ([see AB2023-025](#))