



Whatcom County

COUNTY COURTHOUSE
311 Grand Avenue, Ste #105
Bellingham, WA 98225-4038
(360) 778-5010

Agenda Bill Report

File Number: AB2023-791

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:

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

HISTORY OF LEGISLATIVE FILE

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	

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.
21

22
23
24 **APPROVED** this 5th day of December, 2023.

25
26
27 ATTEST:

28
29
30
31 
32 Dana Brown-Davis, Clerk of the Council

33
34 WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
35 WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON

36
37 
38 Barry Buchanan, Council Chair
39

34 APPROVED AS TO FORM:

35 /s/Karen Frakes approved via email on 12/6/2023/MR
36
37

38 Civil Deputy Prosecutor
39

1 **EXHIBIT A: SCOPE OF WORK**

2
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.

43
44 Cost

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