

**WHATCOM COUNTY
EXECUTIVE'S OFFICE**

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Satpal Singh Sidhu
County Executive

Memorandum

To: Whatcom County Council

From: Kayla Schott-Bresler, Deputy Executive

Date: September 30, 2025

RE: Request for Councilmember appointments to Joint Advisory Workgroup

Background

In early September, Whatcom County entered into a contract with a joint venture between Clark Construction and RAM Construction, which will lead a team responsible for designing and building the County's new jail and behavioral care center.

The County is using the progressive design-build model of construction, which allows the construction and architectural teams to work together with the County throughout the process to accelerate the timeframe and keep the project on budget.

As the County begins its engagement with the design-build team, we will be faced with multiple decision points, and robust communication among stakeholders is needed to ensure timely and full consideration of tradeoffs and options. All major decisions will be presented in open public meetings of the Finance and Facility Advisory Board (FFAB) and County Council; however, coordination between these meetings is critical to review questions and ensure the project team is preparing adequate information for decision makers.

Joint Advisory Workgroup

To this end, the Project Team is convening a Joint Advisory Workgroup (JAW) that will be closely consulted in the design process and provide well-informed recommendations to the project team (Executive and Sheriff), FFAB, and County Council. The purpose of the JAW is to ensure all stakeholders are adequately represented, provide flexibility to expedite recommendations, and function as a trusted advisory body that guides project discussions without replacing the decision-making authority of the Executive or Council.

The Executive is requesting participation from Council, FFAB, IPRTF, Small Cities, and City of Bellingham with Lummi and Nooksack coordination, if the Tribes wish to be involved. Each of the chartered groups of the Justice Project Communications Plan are asked to appoint a representative or representatives to participate actively in JAW meetings and deliberations.

Request for Motion

The Executive's Office recommends that the Council Chair, Chair of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee and one other Councilmember be appointed to participate in JAW. Ideally, the third appointee would be Councilmember Elenbaas or Councilmember Stremmer to avoid quorum issues and provide continuity into 2026.

It is expected the group would meet frequently (more than monthly, potentially bi-weekly) beginning this Fall through mid-2026, requiring a significant time commitment for participants.