



*Satpal Singh Sidhu*  
*Whatcom County Executive*



**Whatcom County Executive & County Council 2024 State Legislative Priorities**

*This agenda is not comprehensive and may be modified. Whatcom County may support or oppose other emerging legislative priorities during the 2024 Washington State legislative session.*

**POLICY REQUESTS**

- **HB 1987 (Low, Ramel) - Clarify the allowed use of .09 Funding (Economic Development Investment Program funding) for workforce housing.** A lack of workforce housing is a significant inhibitor of economic development. In recognition of this, in 2022, the Legislature amended RCW 82.14.370 to allow use of funding for affordable workforce housing infrastructure and facilities. However, the amendment was incomplete, with the statute still requiring long-term public ownership of these facilities. We ask the legislature provide a technical fix to the statute so rural counties can utilize this funding with nonprofit partners to build workforce housing.

**OPERATING REQUESTS**

- **Support AOC's request to meet Whatcom County judicial needs.** Whatcom County Superior Court employs 4 judges and 3 commissioners. The Judicial Needs Estimate of 2020 projected an estimated need of 8.46 judges. We support the AOC request for Whatcom County Superior Court, including an additional judge, court commissioner, staff support, courtroom construction and equipment. Whatcom County also supports the agency's requested statutory amendments to add judicial capacity and provide necessary clarity as the water adjudication process moves forward (HB 1992/SB 5827; HB 1993/SB5828).
- **Family Shelter Initiative.** Whatcom County has established a successful family motel shelter program, in partnership with Lydia Place, DVSAS, and the Opportunity Council. 68% of families exit the program to permanent housing, with a cost much lower than traditional emergency shelter (\$37 per person per night). We request \$360,000 in funding to increase the number of families we can help.
- **Office of Healthy Housing.** Navigating the housing market is difficult – for tenants who want a healthy, affordable place to live and for landlords who want to comply with an increasingly complex web of regulations. Whatcom County requests \$500,000 in funding to define the scope of work and sustainable funding model for an interjurisdictional coordinating body focused on housing market issues (renter/landlord education, health housing regulation, and housing supply issues) and to begin implementation of initial priority initiatives.
- **Implement the 90-day Medicaid waiver for jail-based health and jail transitions.** The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has approved Washington State's 90-day Medicaid re-entry waiver that will allow for re-entry and healthcare services for individuals leaving a prison, jail, or youth correctional facility. We urge the legislature to authorize the Health Care Authority to proceed with full implementation of the 90-day waiver and support the Governor's proposed re-entry capacity building program to assist with implementation.

- **Preservation of Water Solutions and Technical Assistance funding.** During the 2023 session, Whatcom County was awarded two provisos for Water Solutions stakeholder work (\$300,000 / \$700,000). Due to the delay in adjudication filing and Ecology contracting, Whatcom County requests flexibility to rollover the first half of this funding to the 2024-2025 state fiscal year.

## 2024 CAPITAL REQUESTS

- **23-Hour Crisis Relief Center Gap Funding.** Whatcom County was thrilled to receive \$9M in state funding during 2023 for its 23-hour crisis relief center project, which will provide much needed behavioral health urgent care and crisis services. Due to rapidly escalating construction costs and a commitment to create a trauma-informed medical facility, we anticipate total project costs at \$15.5M. Whatcom County has committed \$4.2 in local funds toward this project, leaving a gap of \$2.3M. We request the State's supporting in providing the necessary gap funding to bring this high priority service online.
- **Point Roberts Tourism Promotion.** As Point Roberts recovers from the economic devastation of the pandemic, public boating access can promote tourism, economic development, and greater connectivity for the community. Whatcom County requests \$80,000 to support design and planning costs for a boat ramp at the Point Roberts Marina.

## FUTURE CAPITAL REQUESTS

Whatcom County anticipates 2025 capital requests to support the Justice Project Implementation Plan and continued state coordination, including:

- **Behavioral Health Facilities.** Whatcom County is working to construct a 23-hour crisis relief center and wishes to further to build off its track record of successful completion of behavioral health facility projects. We will work with the community to address gaps in our continuum of care and intend to seek state funding for additional behavioral health facilities as this work progresses.
- **Swift Creek Cleanup.** Whatcom County and the Washington State Department of Ecology are under a consent decree to mitigate asbestos at Swift Creek. We are working in partnership with Ecology on the next stage of project planning. While no additional funding is needed this biennium, we expect to make a large capital budget request during the 2025 legislative session to fulfill the mutual commitments of the county and state agreed upon in the consent decree.
- **Floodplain Buyouts, Planning and Mitigation.** Whatcom County requests additional funding for floodplain buyouts, planning and mitigation in areas that were damaged during the 2020 and 2021 flood events.



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### **HIGH PRIORITY ISSUE AREAS**

Whatcom County wishes to advance funding and policy solutions in the following high priority issue areas:

- LAMIRD Reform
- Opioid response and behavioral health
- Housing affordability, homeless services, and severe weather shelter (e.g. smoke, heat, cold)
- Climate Action and salmon recovery, including fish passage barrier removal funding
- Sustainable funding for Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) and other diversion programs
- Watershed acquisitions, including Stewart mountain Phase 2
- Cost-recovery fees for County Treasurer services
- Broadband
- Foundational public health services and investments to address social determinants of health
- Childcare
- Fully funding indigent defense and implementation of medical examiner accreditation requirements
- Fiscal sustainability and funding any state mandates
- State support for high-needs school districts and junior taxing districts reliant on timber revenue

### **COMMUNITY PARTNER REQUESTS**

Whatcom County supports community-based partners in their requests to the state for capital funding. In particular, Whatcom County sees an opportunity for state and local partnership on the following projects:

- Meridian School District Childcare, Behavioral Health, and Workforce Development Center
- Lake Whatcom Treatment Center's Maplewood & Birchwood Projects
- Capital and capacity building requests from behavioral health and homeless service agencies