



**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Whatcom County Council  
**THROUGH:** Satpal Sidhu, County Executive  
**FROM:** Aly Pennucci, Deputy Executive  
**CC:** Kayla Schott-Bresler, Deputy Executive  
Brad Bennett, Finance Manager  
Randy Rydel, Finance Director  
**RE:** 2025-2026 Budget Recommendations  
**DATE:** October 8, 2024

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Development of the Executive's 2025-2026 Biennial Budget proposal is in its final stages. The Executive will present the Council with a budget that honors our commitments to serve the public, ensures organizational stability and resiliency, and aligns with our shared values and vision.

Following recent discussions with the Council about the budget challenges facing the County and the options to address those challenges, this memo describes what the Executive intends to include when transmitting the Proposed 2025-2026 Biennial Budget to the Council on October 18<sup>th</sup>.

**Background**

The discussions between the Executive and the Council to date put a spotlight on the structural budget imbalance the County faces, where the cost of providing needed services to the County's growing population and businesses are outpacing the County's revenues. We have shown that Whatcom County's history of low property tax rates and annual collections, that were in place even before the State imposed the 1% cap on annual property tax increases, combined with decisions to not take that 1% annual increase for many years, resulted in the County's annual property tax collections for general County services being comparatively low even as the economy has grown.

Even with these dynamics, for many years the County managed to maintain and, in some cases expand, services, relying on an extended period of growth in other revenue streams that support the General Fund (GF) (i.e., sales tax revenue, interest earning growth, and property tax revenue growth due to new construction), and use of one-time resources (i.e., ARPA funding

during the pandemic). With the flattening of those other sources of GF revenues and those short-term tools being mostly depleted, compounded by the historically high inflation rates that have increased the cost of providing County services, the choices today are either cutting services to reduce costs, or increasing revenues to maintain current level of service.<sup>1</sup>

Executive's Sidhu's recommendations for this biennial budget focus on reducing deficit spending, investing in areas that are under resourced, maintaining services for the community, and stabilizing the County's financial trajectory. This will allow the County to be better prepared to sustain future fluctuations in revenues, address emergent service needs and other occasional financial surprises, and deliver on commitments to the community in terms of current services and new capital facilities. Financial stability and resiliency are the core pillars of the Executive's proposal.

This recommendation includes proposing to use the banked capacity the County has available in both the General Property Tax levy and in the Road Fund levy. A recommendation to increase taxes is not taken lightly, and this change alone is not enough to fully address the structural imbalance that County faces over the longer term or the requests to increase investments in certain areas.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to stabilizing revenue, the Executive's starting point for the 2025-2026 Proposed GF Budget included a decrease in general fund expenditures from the previous biennium. The starting point for departments as they prepared their budget proposals for the 2025-2026 biennial was 7% less in 2025 and 6% less in 2026 than the 2024 amended budget. However, as departments prepared their budgets they determined that some cost increases could not be absorbed within those budget limits; most ASRs that increase expenses are requested to address those cost increases or to address ongoing resource needs to maintain current service levels (departments were not instructed to make service reductions in this biennium).

These initial reductions and a recommendation to use the banked capacity are combined with a commitment to engage in ongoing long-term financial planning for all funds, introducing fiscal note requirements to inform policy decisions, and to conduct a budget priority exercise in 2025 to identify efficiencies and ongoing spending reductions, or new revenue options, to further stabilize the County's finances. Those steps will allow us to thoughtfully identify areas of reductions that would have the least impact on the community, and approach the state regarding new long-term/ongoing sources of funds.

Failure to address the revenue side will only make the problem worse over time, requiring ongoing and increasing service reductions and limiting the ability for the County to respond to emergent needs. Further, it weakens our position as we consider issuing debt for major capital projects and asking the state and others to support investments in Whatcom County.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that while there has been some expansion, there has also been a pattern of underinvesting in certain areas of the County's operations (e.g., the mismatch between the growth and expansion of services in some County departments without an equivalent increase in resources in Administrative Services).

<sup>2</sup> Example: requests to significantly increase annual ongoing funding to address food insecurity or senior services in Whatcom County cannot be accommodated even after taking banked capacity unless there are reductions in other County services or new resources are identified.

There is still time to inform these recommendations and we look forward to continuing discussions with the Council as we finalize the proposal.

### **Recommended Option – Continuity of Services**

The Executive’s Office has spent considerable time during this budget process speaking with separately elected officials and department heads regarding resource needs, new state mandates, and public expectations on level of service (LOS). It is increasingly clear that this is an institution under stress, and despite the valiant efforts of our employees, this is affecting our ability to deliver critical internal and external services in a timely, efficient, and responsible manner. Further cuts would exacerbate this stress, affecting our levels of customer service, and our ability to recruit and retain high-quality employees.

In light of this, the Executive’s proposed budget is focused on stabilizing revenue to allow for continuity of service. The budget accommodates cost increases for current services (i.e. increased cost of materials and other cost maintenance activities), investments in Administrative Services and other areas of under-resourcing identified by County departments, and substantial investments in community priorities (i.e. fentanyl response, homelessness, childcare) through dedicated revenue sources outside the general fund.

The Executive proposes the use of banked capacity in the GF and Road Fund to move the organization towards stability. This is a first step toward addressing several decades of underinvestment. Benefits of this approach include maintaining levels of service to the community, stabilizing the fund balance and moving the County towards a structurally balance budget, and allowing the County to increase staffing in certain areas to meet demand and modernize our systems for efficient service delivery.

#### *Proposals for additional revenue:*

1. Apply the 1% annual property tax increase on the General Fund levy and road fund and the banked capacity for both levies.

This will allow the County to:

- Maintain investments in public safety departments added or made permanent in the 2023-24 biennium, including positions added to the Sheriff’s Office, Prosecuting Attorney’s Office, Public Defender’s Office, and Conflict Counsel;
- Address areas of under resourcing, including the Administrative Services divisions, allowing us to staff more adequately and modernize our processes and systems, and investment in the Treasurer, Auditor, and Assessor’s Offices
- Maintain modest ongoing investments in community programs (e.g., food bank and senior centers) through the general fund.
- Maintain an adequate fund balance in the GF to establish stability to support debt issuance for major capital project, consistent with recommendations from the County’s bond consultant and moving the County towards a structurally balanced budget.
- Mitigate some of the reductions that would otherwise be necessary for services and projects supported by the Road Fund. This includes restoring the following, which were cut in the PW Department’s proposed budget:

- \$2M in capital projects, which would restore the small area paver to its original \$750K budget, and restore the 2 resurfacing projects for Axton Road and Northwest Drive.
- \$2M in ER&R payments on the inequity deficit payments
- \$3.4M in operations, which would restore
  - \$1M annually in chip sealing,
  - \$110K in dust control
  - \$665K to restore pre-level
  - \$165K in shoulder work
- Restore the use of larger crew response during storm response by utilizing overtime
- The approval of a levy lift would allow us to restore the ASRs that increased the level of service beyond that of 2024 levels. Major items include:
- Restore the hiring of an additional 5 Road Maintenance Workers and 2 Senior Road Maintenance Workers, which would cost \$640K annually.
- Restore the implementation of a modern geographic information systems-centric enterprise asset management system, which would cost \$1.69M in one-time cost during the biennium, and \$300K in annual software maintenance costs

The banked capacity in the GF levy is \$3.9 million and about \$3.7 million in the Road Fund. Using this banked capacity is a long-term sustainable strategy to move the County toward a structurally balanced budget. Once banked capacity is levied, the County has the revenue annually without future legislative actions.

Homeowners in unincorporated areas of the County would see the biggest impact to their property tax bills because the Road Fund only applies to unincorporated areas. The impact of the combined increases to an average homeowner in unincorporated Whatcom County with an assessed value of \$650,000 would be about \$127 annually; in incorporated areas of the County, where only the GF increase applies, the impact would be about \$42 annually).<sup>3,4</sup> Again, the discrepancy between unincorporated and incorporated areas is due to the delivery of the County's road fund services to unincorporated areas; incorporated areas would see these costs reflected through their city property tax levies.

2. Use the one-time Local Assistance and Tribal Consistency Funding (LATCF)

The County has \$2.7 million in one-time funding from the LACTF that has not been budgeted to date. The purpose of the LATCF program is to serve as a general revenue enhancement program where there have been fluctuations in revenues.

3. Increases in the Unified Fee Schedule.

The proposal includes increases to some service fees in the Unified Fee Schedule as recommended by County departments who provide fee funded services, to better reflect

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<sup>3</sup> According to data collected by Redfin, in August 2024, the median sale price for a home in Whatcom County was \$669k. <https://www.redfin.com/county/3105/WA/Whatcom-County/housing-market>. Zillow estimates the average The average Whatcom County, WA home value is \$603,556,( <https://www.zillow.com/home-values/2086/whatcom-county-wa/>).

<sup>4</sup> Senior citizens or persons with disabilities in Washington State may qualify for a property tax reduction under the property tax exemption for senior citizens and people with disabilities program. See <https://www.whatcomcounty.us/265/Property-Tax-Exemption> for more information.

the cost of those services (though would still not achieve full cost recovery in most cases). The budget instructions provided to departments in preparing their budgets and consistent with County Policy AD123400Z, request that department heads propose fees to cover the cost of the service provided. The proposed increases in the biennial try to balance cost recovery with impacts to users (to receive full cost recovery across all fees would likely require a significantly greater increases). Examples of changes and the potential impacts are provided in Appendix 1.

### *Proposed changes to GF Expenses:*

Changes to GF expenses includes a combination of reductions, adding in cost increases to base budget services (e.g., Tort costs are estimated to increase by about \$1.2 million per year compared to the last biennium), supporting ASRs to maintain current services levels and address areas of under-resourcing, and establishing a modest reserve to address pending liability and other areas that we know will need resources in this biennium.

#### 1. Reducing GF Expenses

In terms of reductions, the proposed budget will cut \$700,000 of GF expenses that are in the initial base budget. This includes cutting the \$500,000 annual contribution to a capital reserve fund in this biennium, and reducing funding for annual vacation cash out program from \$400,000 to \$200,000. This is in addition to reductions already assumed when assigning budget targets to departments (i.e., the GF allocation to the Department of Health and Community Services was reduced annually by about \$1 million compared to 2024).

In addition, the proposal will include a 3-5% lapse assumption in 2025 and would work to identify reductions in GF expenses or identification of new external funding of about \$4-6M in 2026, following a budget prioritization exercise. This will be necessary to continue to maintain services and address emergent needs.

#### 2. Supports ASRs to maintain current services levels and address resource needs

The proposed budget will include resources to support ASRs submitted from the Departments; this includes direct GF expenses, and GF resources that would be transferred from the GF to the Administrative Services fund to support resource needs in Administrative services (including facilities); at this time, we estimate that about half of those costs represent spending that will need to be absorbed within existing budgets if addition revenues are not available. Please see Appendix 2 for a more detailed list of the Additional Service Requests (ASRs) related to the GF that this proposal could support (note that this list may be modified as we finalize the proposed budget).

#### 3. Creating a reserve for pending liabilities

The Executive may propose establishing a reserve over the biennium to address pending liabilities (e.g., PD caseload standards; needed replacement of our telecommunications system that is still being defined, open labor contracts) and areas we know will need additional investment in this biennium but the details are not yet fully developed for a specific budget addition (e.g., additional investments in the Human Resources division,

including countywide resources to address employee morale and ensure our employees feel safe and are supported so they can deliver and continuously improve services to the community). As the budget details are finalized the Executive will determine if there are resources available to create this reserve.

### **Alternative Option (not recommended) – Reduction in Services**

If the Council rejects the proposal to apply the banked capacity in this biennium, the alternative approach is to cut expenses in both the general fund and road fund in this budget cycle. This is not recommended because it would negatively impact the community by reducing services, and would continue and worsen the structural imbalance in both funds.

#### *Revenue changes*

This alternative option would not use the banked capacity but would apply the 1% annual property tax increase on the GF levy and Road Fund and assumes using the one-time LATCF (\$2.7 million) for GF expenses. Property taxes for the average homeowner in unincorporated Whatcom County with an assessed value of \$650,000 would increase by about \$8.50 annually; in incorporated areas where the Road Fund Levy does not apply, the increase would be about \$3.60.

In addition, this alternative option would also assume increases to most service fees in the Unified Fee Schedules to better reflect the cost of those services included in the recommended option.

#### *Expense changes*

Without the banked capacity, any mandatory cost increases or critical new investments from the GF or the Road Fund need to be absorbed within existing budgets. Under those conditions, with budgets so tight, it is not advisable to include any lapse assumptions in the budget which means that expenses must be reduced to absorb cost increases and maintain an ending fund balance in the GF of at least 15% of prior year's revenues; in this scenario the Executive would still recommend that the fund balance target should be closer to 20%.

The current estimate is that GF expenses will need to be cut by about \$7 million annually (about 6% of the GF base budget expenses); this would allow the estimated \$3.5-4.5 million of mandatory cost increases to be absorbed (e.g., the Tort costs), make some investments in the Administrative Services department, and limits the use of fund balance for ongoing expenses to an amount that will result in an ending fund balance that meets or exceeds the 15% requirement. In addition, without using the banked capacity in the Road Fund, the cuts described by Director Kosa at the September 10, 2024, Committee of the Whole meeting cannot be mitigated.

If using the banked capacity is rejected by the council, the Executive would make the following GF reductions:

1. \$700,000 of cuts also assumed in the recommended option

Pausing the \$500,000 annual contribution to a capital reserve in this biennium and reducing funding for annual vacation cash out program). This is in addition to the reductions already assumed when establishing base budget limits described in the previous section.

2. Approximately \$1.5M in reductions to public safety and criminal justice labor costs

- Sheriff's Office – ~\$1M cut (equivalent to 4 patrol deputies, 4 corrections deputies);
- Prosecuting Attorney's Office – ~\$200,000 cut (equivalent to 1-2 FTE)<sup>5</sup>; and
- Superior Court, Superior Court Clerk, District Court and District Court Probation – 1% cut.

Public Safety departments comprised 26.7% of the County 2023-2024 Biennial Budget overall and 52.8% of the 2023-2024 General Fund's budget. Achieving a \$7M reduction in GF expenses is difficult without impacting those departments. Please see Appendix 3 for additional details about the impacts of reductions in Public Safety.

3. Cut ~\$3M annually from GF labor costs, achieved through furloughs, closure days, or layoffs.

If this option is necessary, the Executive's preferred approach is to use closure days or furloughs. This avoids rushed layoff decisions without time to thoughtfully balance the impacts on delivery of services to community and on County employees.

The County would save about \$200,000 of GF for every 1 closure or furlough day; about 15 days would be required to save \$3 million annually. Any decisions about furloughs and the layoff process that impacts represented employees would need to be bargained. Furloughs would not include most positions in the Sheriff's Office.

Although it is not a viable ongoing strategy, there is about \$3 million in the Community Priorities Fund that was allocated for specific purposes but is not yet committed to any specific project or organization. This could be a one-year strategy to avoid furloughs, or other cuts described here, if the Council wished to re-examine its ARPA spending plan.

4. Cut ~\$500,000 from Non-department funding

Eliminating what has been ongoing non-departmental funding in the County's base budget for the Food Bank, Northwest Regional Council, and the Domestic Violence Commission (note that one-time resources provided from federal COVID relief funds are not considered part of the County's ongoing base budget commitments)

5. Cut ~\$1-1.5 million GF from the following Departments: Parks and Recreation, Planning and Development Services, Public Works, and Health and Community Services

- 3% reduction to the Parks and Recreation Department, including eliminating all funding for Senior Services and the East Whatcom Regional Resource Center included in Parks annual base budget.
- 1-2% reduction to Planning and Development Services budget. Director Personius reports that any reduction in funding—or if basic ASR's for SB 5290 permit fee refund opt-out options are not granted—would require a reduction in core permit services.
- Additional \$460,000 cut to Health and Community Services budget that would reduce funding for the Nurse Family Partnership, and in 2026 could cause us to lose external matching funds

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<sup>5</sup> We would work collaboratively with the separately elected officials in the Sheriff's Office and PA's Office to determine if they would propose alternative cuts to achieve the same savings.

that support this work, and cutting 1 Community Health Improvement staff, among other reductions related to data and evaluation services.

- Potential elimination of the Climate Action Program in Public Works. While this is important work it is discretionary and would zero out GF resources that go to public works. This would eliminate the Climate Action Program manager who coordinates key climate priorities and programs as identified by the 2021 Whatcom County Climate Action Plan, working closely with County departments and external partners to ensure that the County is leading efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate impacts. Halting this work also means eliminating staff support for the Climate Impact Advisory Committee.

(See Appendix 3 for information provided by department leadership on the potential impacts of budget cuts in 2025-2026).

#### 6. Rejection of ASRs that would be included in the recommend option

As noted previously, mandatory or critical ASRs would need to be absorbed within existing budgets and through the GF cuts. This would mean that proposals for modest inflationary increases, or in some cases new resources, could not proceed, including investments in new training resources provided through our Human Resources Division; additional policy staff in the Council office; funding for the Incarceration Prevention and Reduction Task Force; funding for the Racial Equity Commission; investments to support technology investments for the Assessor; investments in needed positions and technology in the County Clerk's office and Superior Court.

See Appendix 2 for a list of GF ASRs that would be included in the recommendation option and would be rejected if the Council chooses this path. ASRs that represent mandatory cost increases would have to be absorbed within existing budgets, supported at least in part by the \$7M of GF cuts.

The Council could recommend making different or additional cuts to accommodate some of these ASRs. In addition to the above-mentioned uncommitted funding in the Community Priorities Fund, the Council has the authority to reconsider awards made out of the Community Priorities Fund for specific projects that have not yet been expended (e.g., Meridian School District Childcare project, etc.). This would mean reversing previous organizational commitments, award letters, and council policy decisions.

#### 7. Cut Road Fund expenses by about \$23.1M over the biennium, and reject most ASRS

This would include:

- \$2.8M of cuts in capital expenses, deferring projects to outward years, such as two resurfacing projects and reducing the small area paver work from \$750K to \$300K
- \$4.6M of cuts in operational expenses, deferring maintenance, running programs at baseline levels, the major cuts included:
  - Cut out all pre-level for the biennium at a cost of \$1.33M (Defers maintenance, shortens the life, and increases capital costs in the future as the activity aids in chip sealing, repairs, reinforces, and removes the bumpy uncomfortable ride)
  - Reduced dust control by 50% gravel roads, work would be limited to Berry production areas only (avoid loss of crop). This results in a cost reduction of \$110K
  - Cut chip seal work by \$1M annually
- Rejection of most ASRs, totaling \$15.7M in cuts, the cuts include:
  - Making ER&R equity deficit catch-up payments for replacement vehicles between \$750K-\$1M annually until the Road Fund has caught up on their obligation.



- Additional Pre-level work of \$245K in 2025 and \$625K in 2026, above the pre-cut levels.
- Hiring an additional 5 Road Maintenance Workers and 2 Senior Road Maintenance Workers, which would cost \$640K annually.
- Implementing a modern geographic information systems centric enterprise asset management system, which would cost \$1.69M in one-time cost during the biennium, and \$300K in annual software maintenance costs
- Limit after-hours storm response to straight-time shifts, rather than incur non-reimbursable overtime.
- Reduced key core services; examples include:
  - Reducing chip-seal funding by \$1M annually (7-year rotation has been deferred to an 11-year rotation, defers maintenance shortens the life, increases capital costs in the future)
  - Cut out all pre-level entirely (Defers maintenance shortens the life, increases capital costs in the future)
  - Reduced dust control by 50% gravel roads, limit to Berry production areas only (loss of crop)
  - May have to look at storm operations moving forward, and reduce the level of service on snow response in order to avoid overtime
  - Cancelled the procurement of Asset Management software – no gained efficiencies with or operations, loss of potential future savings (pays for itself)

The Executive’s Office is concerned about these impacts and wants to highlight our concerns, particularly, regarding furloughs or closure days from an organizational wide perspective. Furloughs or closure days amount to about a 6% pay cut for most County employees. This unduly impacts the 342 county employees who already make less than \$75,000 per year and the additional 87 employees who would now make less than \$75,000 per year, if furloughed. For an employee making \$75,000 per year, a 6% pay cut means \$375 less per month to spend on groceries, housing, or childcare.

Furloughs, closures and/or layoffs also negatively impact recruitment and retention, hampers our ability to effectively deliver services (i.e., permitting, severe weather shelter), and puts us at risk of not fully utilizing available grant resources. We have further heard concern from Department Heads that in past rolling furlough and closure day environments, employees became overworked “covering” for those not on-site, contributing to burnout.

In sum, though this option does not raise taxes now, it will still require the County to do so at some point in the future. It also harms community members through reduced public safety, longer permit timelines, reduced access to senior programming, reduced resources to the food bank, and other negatives impacts. The Executive does not recommend pursuing this pathway.

## Appendix 1 – Examples of Department Proposed Changes to the Unified Fee Schedule

### *Health and Community Services Proposed Changes*

Health and Community Services requested Unified Fee Schedule increases for fees associated with Environmental Health programs. The Environmental Health programs are run on a cost recovery basis and the requested increases are necessary to keep up with inflation and Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) increases.

Examples of needed increases:

#### **Drinking Water Program**

This program is 96% personnel costs and in 2023 the program under collected by \$22,300 to fully recover the administrative indirect for the program. The proposed fee increased to the Drinking Water Program would only help to close that gap by 26%. Currently the program is being inequitably subsidized by other health programs in the general fund.\*

#### **Living Environment Program**

This program is 66% personnel costs and in 2023 the program under collected by \$45,700 to fully recover the administrative indirect for the program. The proposed fee increased to the Drinking Water Program would only help to close that gap by 10%. Currently the program is being inequitably subsidized by other health programs in the general fund.\*

*\*This analysis does not account for the increased costs of ER&R and Administrative Cost Allocation.*

### *Parks and Recreation Proposed Changes*

**The Parks Department's approach to UFS revisions for 2025 included considerations to:**

1. Simplify fee structures for
  - a. clarity and ease of understanding for the public
  - b. improved efficiency for implementation
  - c. eliminate unnecessary tiered fee structures
2. Addressing inflationary costs associated with utilities, goods and services, and staffing necessary to provide the services
3. Consideration to market rate for services provided by other municipalities, etc.
4. Maintain higher rates for non-county residents as compared to county resident rates which has been a long-standing county practice... ultimately, from an efficiency perspective, the Department would prefer a single rate that applies to all patrons.
5. Removal of fees for services not provided
6. Consider the range of adjustment between current and proposed rates; ensure that proposed adjustments do not present a significant, and generally cost prohibitive, increase that price patrons out of the market.

**Outcomes include:**

- A starting point of 10% increase for inflationary costs
- Comparison of the inflation adjusted rate to market rates, with some rates being adjusted up or down based on market conditions.
- Combining of Facility Rental and Refuse Removal Fees for each rental facility

- Elimination of separate rental rates and tiers for each type of water craft to a single Water Craft Rental rate based on rental time durations

**Impact to Parks patrons:**

Modest increase in rates that account for inflationary costs that are below market rates as compared to other municipalities and governmental service providers. Examples, under the proposed rate increases, include:

- Washington State Parks charges between \$27.00 and \$37.00 per standard campsite per night, while a comparable campsite at Silver Lake Park is \$25.00 per night for county residents and \$30 for non-county residents.
- Washington State Parks charges between \$35 and \$45 per night for partial utility campsites, while a comparable campsite at Silver Lake Park is \$32 per night for county residents and \$40 for non-county residents.
- City of Bellingham vendor at Bloedel Donovan Park charges \$25-\$35 per hour for watercraft rental. Whatcom County proposed resident rate is \$17.00 per hour.
- City of Bellingham charges \$500-\$800 per day for indoor facility rentals. Whatcom County Parks indoor facility rentals range from \$286 to \$324 per day for county residents and \$308 to \$346 for non-county residents

*Planning and Development Services Changes*

In preparation for the 2025-26 Budget Submission, PDS Division Managers did an analysis of the comparable counties to ensure as we consider any fee increases that they are appropriate as compared to other jurisdictions. It has been several budget cycles since PDS has raised their fees and the result of the analysis showed the majority of our fees are currently lower than our comparable counties.

Our PDS fee structure currently only covers 50-60% of costs, and a fee increase has been proposed to help bridge the gap on cost recovery and reduce the burden on the General Fund, though the proposed increases would not approach full cost recover but would be closer to a 60-65% cost recovery plan.

Below are some basic examples of year-to-year cost comparisons—these estimates represent the “base” fees for applications and permits and do not encompass all the review fees that might be required to meet the scope of the project.

<b>Permit or Land Use Application Type</b>	<b>2023-24</b>	<b>2025-26</b>
Hourly Rate (last hourly rate increase was 2019)	120.00	140.00
<u>Building Permit (Building Permit &amp; Plan Review Fees)</u>		
Single Family Residence (2,752 Sq Feet)	4,967.26	5,438.76
Commercial Structure (new mini-storage unheated)	4,475.33	4,921.72
Mechanical or Plumbing Replacement-Base Fee	40.00	50.00
Manufactured Home(Double Wide on residential lot)	670.00	740.00
Detached Residential Structure (Ag Pole Barn 3,200 Sq Ft)	1,676.10	1,955.91

<u>Natural Resource Base Application Fees</u>		
Site Plan Review	420.00	650.00
Shoreline Exemption	300.00	450.00
<u>Current Planning Base Fees</u>		
SEPA Checklist	440.00	600.00
Short Plat	630.00	750.00
Administrative Use	1,440.00	2,000.00
Conditional Use	3,240.00	4,500.00
Lot of Record	460.00	560.00

## Appendix 2 –GF ASRs to Include in Executive’s Proposed 2025-2026 Biennial Budget

*ASRs related to the GF that are under final review for inclusion in the Executive’s Proposed 2025-2026 Biennial Budget. Please note that as of 10/7/2024 the Executive is still working with the AS-Finance Division to finalize costs and technical details; this list is subject to change prior to the Executive transmitting the final recommended biennial budget.*

Department	Request Information	2025	2026
Assessor	7216 - Reclass - Appraiser III	7,375	7,711
Assessor	7217 - Reclass - Appraiser IV (JMS)	8,005	9,920
Assessor	7218 - Reclass - Appraiser IV (JS)	4,425	4,425
Assessor	7219 - Reclass- Appraiser IV (Downgrade from Appraiser V)	(17,943)	(17,943)
Assessor	7220 - Spatialest - online public information	75,840	79,632
Assessor	7221 - Harris - PACS maintenance	13,000	13,000
Assessor	7222 - ESRI	10,827	10,827
Assessor	7223 - Experian	10,827	10,827
Auditor	7094 - Position Reclass in Licensing division	4,388	4,158
Auditor	7107 - SKEP Program - Licensing	1,227	9,929
Auditor	7106 - SKEP Program - Recording	8,219	10,527
Auditor	7500 - Elimination of split position from general funds	(38,492)	(44,848)
County Clerk	7067 - Office Supplies	13,300	13,850
County Clerk	7070 - Senior Deputy	151,782	156,697
County Clerk	7209 - County Clerk Dues, Travel, & Training	6,300	6,500
County Clerk	7232 - Increase Contracts for Conflict Counsel	200,000	250,000
County Clerk	7233 - Equipment Rental	5,000	6,000
County Clerk	7258 - Truancy/ Chins / ARY Counsel	50,000	51,500
County Clerk	7260 - Civil Contempt/Domestic Appointed Attorney	9,000	9,250
County Council	7238 - Overtime for Charter Review, Comp Plan, BOE	13,000	
County Council	7240 - Temporary Extra Help for Charter Review, Comp Plan	13,000	-

Department	Request Information	2025	2026
County Council	7241 - Travel - Other	5,000	5,000
County Council	7242 - Travel - District 4 (Stremler)	3,000	3,000
County Council	7243 - Travel - At-Large B (Scanlon)	3,000	3,000
County Council	7244 - Travel - District 5 (Elenbaas)	3,000	3,000
County Council	7245 - Travel - District 1 (Galloway)	3,000	3,000
County Council	7246 - Travel - District 2 (Donovan)	3,000	3,000
County Council	7247 - Travel - At Large A (Buchanan)	3,000	3,000
County Council	7248 - Travel - District 3 (Byrd)	3,000	3,000
County Council	7249 - Books, publications, and subscriptions	500	500
County Council	7250 - Advertising	3,000	3,000
County Council	7251 - Hearing Examiner	6,000	14,000
County Council	7252 - Reclassification	10,571	14,972
County Council	7253 - Legislative Coordinator - Policy	102,465	106,054
County Council	7254 - IPRTF Communications & Outreach	25,000	-
County Council	7255 - IPRTF - Advertising	10,000	15,000
County Council	7256 - Enhanced Security for evening meetings	14,000	14,000
County Council	7257 - BOE Per Diem and Temp Extra Help	30,000	30,000
County Executive	7455 - Government Representation	34,800	34,800
County Executive	7131 - Base budget included incorrect wage amount	16,663	17,252
District Court	7035 - Jury Printing and Postage	20,000	20,000
District Court	7036 - Office Equipment/Maintenance	5,000	5,000
District Court	7038 - Jury Fees	15,000	15,000
District Court	7039 - Jury Meals and Refreshments	2,000	2,000
District Court	7040 - Interpreter Services	-	-
District Court Probation	7073 - Electronic Equipment Program	150,000	150,000
District Court Probation	7151 - Therapeutic Court State Funded Expenses	(69,692)	-
Health and Community Services	7319 - Cellebrite Premium	22,563	24,143
Health and Community Services	7320 - Professional Services for Investigations	12,000	12,000
Health and Community Services	7321 - Ballistic Vest Replacement	34,800	20,400
Health and Community Services	7329 - Digital Forensics Infrastructure - Phase 1	150,000	-
Health and Community Services	7335 - H.S.I. Reimbursable OT	-	-
Health and Community Services	7337 - US DOJ DEA SLOT	-	-
Health and Community Services	7341 - WTSC DRE Reimbursable OT	-	-

<b>Department</b>	<b>Request Information</b>	<b>2025</b>	<b>2026</b>
<b>Health and Community Services</b>	7345 - WTSC - HVE Reimbursable OT	-	-
<b>Health and Community Services</b>	7421 - Reimbursable Overtime - Contracts	-	-
<b>Health and Community Services</b>	7413 - FPHS CD&E	-	-
<b>Health and Community Services</b>	7347 - DOH PHEP	-	-
<b>Health and Community Services</b>	7411 - FPHS Communication	-	-
<b>Health and Community Services</b>	7387 - Community Health Reclass FPHS	-	-
<b>Health and Community Services</b>	7388 - Community Health labor pool companion	-	-
<b>Health and Community Services</b>	7389 - DCYF Grant Budget Increase for NFP Program	-	-
<b>Health and Community Services</b>	7390 - DD State Contract Increase-admin costs	-	-
<b>Health and Community Services</b>	7391 - DD State Contract Increase-contractual services	-	-
<b>Health and Community Services</b>	7392 - Vape Settlement Program Funding	-	-
<b>Health and Community Services</b>	7393 - Marijuana Prevention Funding Grant	-	-
<b>Health and Community Services</b>	7394 - NSASO Budgeted Expenditure Correction	-	-
<b>Health and Community Services</b>	7414 - FPHS CH&HS	-	-
<b>Health and Community Services</b>	7408 - Disposal Facilities Cost Maint	1,500	1,500
<b>Health and Community Services</b>	7409 - Solid Waste Handling Facility Permit Reapplication	(9,500)	(9,500)
<b>Health and Community Services</b>	7410 - Meth Investigation Fee	(4,395)	(4,395)
<b>Health and Community Services</b>	7415 - FPHS Environmental Health	-	-
<b>Health and Community Services</b>	7348 - Health Admin- Assistant Director	-	-
<b>Health and Community Services</b>	7384 - HIA Data Needs Reclass	-	-
<b>Health and Community Services</b>	7385 - HIA labor pool companion	-	-
<b>Health and Community Services</b>	7395 - Public Health Infrastructure Grant	-	-

Department	Request Information	2025	2026
Health and Community Services	7403 - EH indirect Companion	(42,292)	(88,341)
Health and Community Services	7412 - FPHS Technology	-	-
Health and Community Services	7494 - Health Admin- Assistant Director- Companion	-	-
Juvenile Court	7081 - Detention Staff Overtime	27,519	27,519
Juvenile Court	7090 - Detention Extra Help	11,320	11,320
Non-Departmental	7429 - Software Maintenance - Granicus	4,008	6,508
Non-Departmental	7430 - Whatcom Racial Equity Commission	100,000	-
Non-Departmental	7432 - Employee Recognition	3,000	3,000
Non-Departmental	7434 - NW Clean Air Per Capita Assessment increase	16,413	17,000
Non-Departmental	7447 - Salary Commission	14,000	-
Non-Departmental	7457 - Membership and Association dues	55,000	55,000
Non-Departmental	7458 - What-Comm Annual Increase	64,914	148,808
Non-Departmental	7464 - TFR for Non-Wage Items - Crim Justice Cost Center	14,100	6,900
Non-Departmental	7470 - Medical Examiner	(261,330)	(421,330)
Non-Departmental	7493 - DV Commission - Increase continued for 25-26	30,000	30,000
Non-Departmental	7525 - Medical Examiner Staffing	255,537	266,139
Non-Departmental	7532 - Premium Pay & OT Increase for ME On-Call Staff	20,189	20,993
Non-Departmental	7501 - Obligated Animal Control and Shelter Services	32,631	32,631
Non-Departmental	7522 - Council of Governments Membership Increase	5,000	5,000
Non-Departmental	7502 - Boundary Review Board	5,000	5,000
Non-Departmental	7529 - Companion to Court Audio Visual Systems Project	432,000	-
Non-Departmental	7531 - Permit System Implementation Companion to 7198 GF	137,500	-
Non-Departmental	7537 - TR&R Replacement Increase Companion to 7535	100,000	100,000
Non-Departmental	7505 - Companion to 7504 Jail Nursing Increase	300,000	-
Non-Departmental	7506 - Companion to DEM Requests 7148 and 7149	33,500	33,500
Non-Departmental	7437 - Organizational Contingency	60,000	60,000
Parks & Recreation	7054 - Ongoing Costs From Positions Approved in 2024	8,925	8,925
Parks & Recreation	7055 - ERR Costs for Fleet Additions Approved in 2024	32,400	32,400
Parks & Recreation	7228 - Parks Trailer Additions	18,000	-
Parks & Recreation	7236 - ERR Rates for 2025 Parks Trailer Additions	1,620	3,240
Parks & Recreation	7261 - Park Facilities Extra Help Wage Increase	9,908	9,908
Parks & Recreation	7262 - EWRRRC Building Maintenance	10,000	10,000
Parks & Recreation	7268 - Increase in Revenue and Expenditure Authority	3,711	(3,789)
Parks & Recreation	7274 - Operating Cost Increases Approved in 2024	60,200	60,200
Parks & Recreation	7279 - EWRRRC Contract Adjustment	50,000	51,500

Department	Request Information	2025	2026
Parks & Recreation	7057 - Ongoing Software Costs Approved in 2024	6,000	6,000
Parks & Recreation	7237 - Admin Complex Utility Cost Increases	9,550	9,550
Parks & Recreation	7276 - Administrative Supv Position Reclassification	-	-
Parks & Recreation	7239 - Bellingham Senior Center Parking Lot Cost Increase	126	130
Parks & Recreation	7264 - Senior Services Extra Help Rate Increase	729	729
Parks & Recreation	7265 - Senior Center Utilities & Repair & Maintenance	11,900	11,900
Parks & Recreation	7277 - Senior Centers Contract Adjustment	88,296	98,592
Planning & Development Services	7158 - Contingent Planning & Development Position	-	-
Planning & Development Services	7161 - Fire Inspector Operational Safety Gear	7,200	1,000
Planning & Development Services	7157 - On Call Consultant Funding	75,000	75,000
Planning & Development Services	7159 - Phase 2 Offsite Critical Area Buffer Mitigation	184,000	-
Planning & Development Services	7156 - 2025 Comp Plan Update Funding	(50,000)	-
Prosecuting Attorney	7091 - Realignment for Chris Quinn and Erik Sigmar	40,752	40,752
Prosecuting Attorney	7291 - Prosecutor by Karpel Database Maintenance Fee	1,500	5,000
Prosecuting Attorney	7496 - Bellingham Towers Lease for DCS (Companion ASR)	-	-
Public Defender	7041 - Additional Funding to Support 17 staff positions	68,663	69,163
Public Defender	7047 - Professional Services Supplemental	37,000	37,000
Public Defender	7049 - Contract Services for RALJ Appeals	20,000	20,000
Public Defender	7050 - Transcripts for RALJ Appeals	12,000	12,000
Public Defender	7051 - Westlaw Contract Increase	3,480	3,584
Public Defender	7053 - Summer Law School Interns Extra Help	47,500	47,500
Public Defender	7060 - AXON Auto Transcribe Subscription	20,000	21,000
Public Defender	7061 - Postage Cost Increase	3,000	3,000
Public Defender	7062 - Workers Comp costs for volunteers	1,000	1,000
Public Defender	7171 - Interpreter Services	5,000	5,000
Public Defender	7476 - SPAR Grant Fund	-	-
Public Defender	7092 - Position ID #100 Re-Alignment	13,509	13,423
Public Defender	7093 - Position ID #101 Realignment	12,399	12,314
Public Defender	7270 - Position ID 1065 SKEP Wages	4,019	3,890
Public Defender	7272 - Position ID #1090 SKEP wages	6,147	6,558
Public Defender	7269 - Position ID #165 Wage Increase for 2026 only	-	2,437
Public Defender	7271 - Position ID #1050 SKEP wages	6,147	6,558
Sheriff	7309 - Spillman Flex Maintenance 2025-2026	4,513	4,513
Sheriff	7310 - Training Tracker Software - Sheriff	4,200	4,200



Department	Request Information	2025	2026
Sheriff	7318 - Ammunition - Duty and Training	5,000	5,000
Sheriff	7322 - EVOC Vehicle Repairs	5,000	5,000
Superior Court	7063 - Commissioner Pro Tems	50,000	50,000
Superior Court	7098 - Office Equipment and Training	4,600	4,650
Superior Court	7175 - Upgrade Court Audio Visual Systems (Ongoing)	5,000	5,000
Superior Court	7280 - Interpreters	50,000	50,000
Superior Court	7281 - Universal Guardianship Act	20,000	30,000
Superior Court	7282 - Family Law Mediation Services	20,000	20,000
Superior Court	7283 - Supervised Visitation	20,000	20,000
Superior Court	7284 - Set Up Costs- Superior Court Services Manager	5,000	-
Superior Court	7285 - Superior Court Services Manager	142,215	142,480
Superior Court	7288 - FJCIP Amended	-	-
Superior Court	7286 - Pro Tem Commissioner Coverage and Copier Rental	35,668	35,668
Treasurer	7101 - Axiom Mobile Armored Car Service	1,000	1,000
Treasurer	7102 - Postage Increase	17,450	20,000
Treasurer	7103 - Harris Govern Software Maintenance	26,978	31,978
Treasurer	7111 - Senior Investment Officer - Current Expense	(307,626)	(407,630)
Treasurer	7129 - SymPro Debt module software maintenance	1,050	1,200
Treasurer	7143 - Spread Sheet Server	2,180	2,180
WSU Extension	7162 - Building Lease Line Item Increase	4,800	6,500
WSU Extension	7164 - Telephone/Internet Cost Increase	970	970
WSU Extension	7211 - Intergovernmental Professional Services	8,221	5,645
WSU Extension	7212 - Sustainable Landscaping Outreach Support	-	-
WSU Extension	7213 - Community Horticulture Program Support	-	-
WSU Extension	7214 - Strengthening Families Program Support	-	-

### Appendix 3 – Feedback from Departments about impact of GF Cuts

In September, the Executive asked all departments and separately elected offices to describe what the impact of a 3-5% GF reduction would in their respective departments. Below is what we heard from the departments and separately elected offices that would be impacted by the alternative, not recommended, option described in this memo:

#### *District Court and Probation*

1. Elimination of (or significant reduction in) the electronic equipment program (alcohol monitoring), current budget of \$150,000. This program is run in partnership with WC Jail Alternatives. The program allows pre and post-conviction (high-risk) individuals, who may otherwise be held in custody, the ability to remain out of custody while also being held accountable for their sobriety. These devices monitor any alcohol consumption 24 hours a

day. Any violation is promptly brought before a Judicial Officer. Currently between 35-40 individuals are on the program at any given time.

2. Freezing or eliminating a vacant PO position (DCP). With a reduction in staff, our focus would have to be directed towards managing oversized caseloads. Doing so would lead to elimination of internal programming such as MRT (Moral Reconciliation Therapy), DVMRT and Anger Management. These programs are run internally, by trained Probation Officers, to fill resource gaps within our community. Further, cuts to DVMRT would seriously impact our Family Justice Calendar. This calendar is a court focused review calendar for higher risk DV offenders. This calendar has been effective in reducing domestic violence and assisting with family unification and stability. Cuts to this program would not only affect the offender but potentially families who benefit from seeing defendants complete DV treatment and are held accountable.
3. Freezing or eliminating a vacant Court Clerk position (DC). Like DCP, District Court's budget is personnel heavy, leaving very little options other than eliminating FTE(s).
  - a. District Court has seen a 80% increase in trials post-Covid as compared with the same time period pre-Covid. For example, this year we're expecting to hear around 50 trials. Should we experience cuts with personnel or need to reduce program expenditures, I expect we would have to consider offering only one trial per week versus two. Reducing trials is a serious impact to individuals access to justice.
  - b. Recently, we have managed to catch up on the civil processing backlog. The civil workload has increased and has continued to become much more complicated due to legislative changes. Protection orders have increased and the processing time is more than one person can manage. Without the appropriate staffing levels needed, we will not be able to complete work processing timely and within legal requirements.
  - c. We also have many projects the court has been working on which benefit multiple departments. Those projects include, newly formed warrant quash days, proactive steps in vacating Blake cases, preparing for WA states new case management system (JIS replacement), implementing a debit cards system to pay jurors and installing a new Judgement and Sentence. Without proper staffing levels we will not be able to manage the associate workload.

### *Health & Community Services*

2025: cut additional \$460,000

- 1 Nurse Family Partnership (NFP) nurse, reducing caseload to at-risk families
- 1 nurse working with nursing homes and long-term care facilities when they have disease outbreaks
- 1 accounting clerk, slowing processing of payment to contractors
- 1 data analyst, which would halt our ability to update the overdose dashboards and GRACE/LEAD outcome data

2026:

- 1 NPF nurses, which may result in losing our match from the NFP program (requires 50% local match)
- 1 Community Health Improvement staff, who facilitates the CHIP and Healthy Whatcom
- 2 clerks, which would force reduced hours of service to the public
- 1 nurse in Tuberculosis program, reducing our ability to curtail spread of disease

### *Parks and Recreation*

The potential cuts would be very detrimental to service delivery in part due to historical lack of adequate investment in Parks' general fund – a situation that has resulted in Parks operating at the margins of effective service delivery today. That said, the Department's response to the proposed budget reduction prioritizes preserving existing FTEs, ensuring public health and safety, supporting revenue-generating activities, maintaining long-term facility and grounds health, and delivering customer service that aligns with available funding. The level of proposed reduction forces difficult choices to safeguard public health and safety, and attempting to support critical revenue-generating activities. However, maintaining the long-term health of facilities and grounds will be severely compromised, and customer service will be significantly reduced to reflect the diminished resources. These cuts will create dire challenges in sustaining core operations.

A reduction at the proposed level would result in:

- **Reduction in Seasonal Extra Help staffing** by 18-23 positions, affecting parks maintenance, operations, and administration. These positions are essential for maintaining grounds, facilities, concessions, and customer service. Impacts include:
  - Less frequent and lower-quality cleaning of restrooms, campsites, and facilities, leading to unsanitary conditions.
  - A 75% reduction in grounds maintenance, with minimal or no upkeep in low development and undeveloped areas.
  - Limited capacity to support revenue-generating activities, causing an estimated loss of revenue of \$83,000.
  - An anticipated increase in customer dissatisfaction related to reduced level of service.
  - Reduction in services at Plantation Indoor Range.
- **Reassignment of maintenance staff** to regions, in support of public facing operations, leading to:
  - A 70%-80% reduction in the ability to handle routine and on-demand maintenance during peak season, increasing deferred maintenance.
  - Reduced capacity to address public health and safety repairs.
  - Reduced maintenance efforts at Senior Services facilities.
- **Holding the Land Management Supervisor position open**, hindering the department's ability to:
  - Implement the Lake Whatcom Forest Management Plan process.

- Oversee 79 miles of trail maintenance and manage new trail construction.
- Address unsanctioned trails on park lands.

### Planning and Development Services

- PDS would remind Council that our FTE staffing levels (funded by the GF) are almost the same as the department had in the year 2000—almost a quarter century ago. We have stayed lean over the years while seeing significant increases in statutory obligations, development activity and public expectations of increased levels of service.
- Any reduction in funding—or if basic ASR's for SB 5290 permit fee refund opt-out options are not granted—would require a reduction in our core customer services. At a minimum, in an effort to meet the new SB 5290 permitting timelines it would be necessary for PDS to reduce open hours and change our non-fee based customer service structure to very brief interactions and anything requiring more staff time would need to be by appointment. This would reduce the ability to answer the hundreds of questions from the public and development community (in person walk-ins, telephone and email) that we manage on a weekly basis in a timely manner. It would require us to severely restrict our open hours to reduce the public interaction load on staff and preserve that time for staff to focus on permit reviews to meet the new more stringent state-mandated timelines for issuing final permit decisions starting January 1, 2025.
- The only feasible way for PDS to meet an overall budget cut of 3-5% would be to lay off staff positions. This would lead to the same problem of a reduction in services. Our budget just does not have a great deal of non-essential funding. A 3% reduction in an \$8M dollar budget is \$240,000 which is a minimum to 2 staff positions, possibly 3, if funds cannot be taken from other line items. A 5% reduction would be \$400,000 and equate to 4 staff positions. To even potentially approach offsetting the loss of GF revenue needed to maintain current staffing levels, PDS would have to move to a much higher cost recovery model and significantly increase fees to cover statutory obligations. That approach would result in further exacerbating the affordable housing challenges the county faces and likely lead to increased demand for code enforcement if more people elect to do development work without permits.
- If we have to reduce our vehicle inventory; it would limit staff's ability to manage field work and field inspections or building inspections might have to be delayed as we manage vehicle availability.

### Prosecuting Attorney's Office

#### 1. **Staffing Reductions and Case Backlog:**

With a 3-5% reduction, we would likely need to consider reducing our prosecuting attorney and support staff positions. This would significantly slow down the processing of criminal and civil cases, leading to a growing backlog that could delay trials, extend pretrial detention, and prolong civil case resolutions. The public, victims, and defendants would experience longer wait times for justice, which could erode community confidence in the judicial system.

**2. Service Reduction and Operational Efficiency:**

Reduced staffing and resources would severely limit our ability to provide critical services such as victim advocacy, diversion programs, and specialty court support. We would need to scale back services aimed at crime prevention and rehabilitation, which are essential to reducing recidivism and supporting community safety. Additionally, reduced capacity would strain our office's operational efficiency, leading to less time for thorough case preparation and investigation.

**3. Community and Political Impacts:**

Decreased capacity to prosecute cases, particularly serious offenses like violent crime, domestic violence, and drug-related cases, would pose direct risks to community safety. The public may lose confidence in the County's ability to effectively address these critical issues. Furthermore, these reductions could have broader political implications, as crime and public safety are closely watched by community stakeholders and elected officials.

**4. Compliance and Legal Risks:**

Reduced capacity would directly impact our civil division and affect our ability to provide timely legal counsel to other County departments. This could increase the County's exposure to liability, compliance failures, and costly litigation, especially in relation to land use, employment law, and contract management. Additionally, our office would struggle to meet public records requests, further compounding compliance risks.

**5. Collaboration with Law Enforcement and Other Agencies:**

Cuts in our budget would inevitably strain our collaboration with law enforcement agencies and other County departments. Slower case processing times and reduced prosecutorial support would hinder the ability of law enforcement to effectively address and resolve cases, particularly in areas such as drug enforcement, domestic violence, and mental health-related incidents. This could lead to frustration among partner agencies and diminished overall effectiveness in serving the community.

These impacts would have both immediate and long-term consequences for the Prosecutor's Office and the broader justice system. We recognize the complexity of the decisions ahead and sincerely appreciate the thoughtful time and effort being dedicated to addressing them. Should you, the Executive, or the Council need further information or clarification, we are available for to meet and discuss further.

**Public Works:**

General Fund - Public Works has one General funded program, Climate Action

- The total amount of GF allocated to Climate Action is \$247,119,
  - the climate action special projects manager position makes up \$147,119, leaving \$100,000 of GF to make the reduction from.
- The impact of a 3-5% reduction will reduce opportunities for scoping projects and the ability to leverage state and federal grant opportunities. Specifically, it would result in the elimination of up to two additional scoped projects from consideration in each climate action work plan for 2025 and 2026.

## Sheriff's Office

A 3% to 5% yearly reduction in our budget would significantly impact the Whatcom County Sheriff's Office's operations and service deliverables. The Sheriff's Office has been understaffed in our Patrol Division for many years. In fact, in general, Washington state has the lowest number of law enforcement per capita of any state. In addition, we have vacancies in Corrections that should be filled and not be impacted by a hiring freeze or budget reduction. These are critical positions that are needed to effectively and efficiently provide services to detainees per Washington state laws. Lastly, our support staff positions are lean, and losing even one staff member would be a detriment to our operations. **This list is a snapshot of a budget reduction's potential effects on the Whatcom County Sheriff's Office and the community.**

### **Bureau of Corrections:**

- **Staffing/Overtime Reductions:** The Corrections Bureau relies heavily on personnel, and a budget cut might necessitate reducing staff through layoffs, furloughs, or cutting overtime. This would strain the remaining staff, increasing workloads, potentially leading to safety risks, decreased morale, and higher staff turnover
- **Reduced Inmate Services:** Programs such as mental health counseling, substance abuse treatment, educational courses, or vocational training would be scaled back or eliminated. This should not be an option.
- **Facility Maintenance and Upgrades:** Maintenance of this aging facility and equipment should not be delayed. Delaying maintenance increases the risk of failures in security systems, plumbing, or HVAC systems, which could create unsafe or unsanitary conditions and increase liability risks.
- **Delayed Medical and Health Services:** Medical services for detainees could be reduced or delayed, leading to serious health issues or complaints. Lack of adequate medical care would likely result in legal challenges and potential lawsuits.
- **Security Compromises:** Budget reductions would affect security measures like surveillance upgrades, access control systems, or emergency preparedness. This could increase the risk of security breaches, including escape attempts or internal incidents.

### **Patrol Division:**

- We currently have minimal discretionary funding for the Sheriff's Office Patrol Division. The costs of our supplies (ammunition, training equipment, etc.) have increased over the last two years. The training requirements for law enforcement have continued to rise, and unfunded mandates require more training for our entire agency. We have seen an increase in the amount of calls for service requiring multiple deputies. A reduction in the budget will reduce the training necessary for our deputies and the ability to acquire the equipment needed to effectively, efficiently, and safely perform law enforcement duties. This could harm community expectations and increase the risk of injury to deputies or community members, thus increasing risk and liability.

### **Investigation and Civil Division:**

- A budget decrease will severely hinder the WCSO's ability to continue the technical and forensic capabilities that we are implementing. WCSO purchased Cellebrite Premium, which allowed detectives to extract data from cell phones and computers for critical investigations. Before this recent implementation, we had to rely on other law enforcement agencies to do this work. However, those agencies are inundated with their caseloads and will no longer perform those investigative services for different agencies. If we cannot extract data, the prosecutor's office will face challenges with discovery, exculpatory evidence arguments, and speedy trial. Most serious felonies often include someone possessing an electronic device such as a smartphone, using a vehicle, or utilizing some other technology (computers) from which law enforcement can now extract data. Phones, for example, don't just make calls and text. A budget decrease means a new program, such as Cellebrite Premium, will be lost with new licensing fees coming in 2025.
- At the beginning of the year, we assigned some of our detectives to investigate 57 cold cases involving unsolved homicides, missing people, and unknown remains as far back as 1970. A budget decrease would limit the ability to continue funding for private lab use and genealogy toward these archived cases. Of those 57 cases, detectives recently submitted quotes from the existing budget for body exhumation, genealogy, and private lab work (DNA) on three separate investigations. In 2025, detectives planned to continue working within budgetary measures to continue this work and two other active WCSO investigations. We are charged with the responsibility to solve these crimes and advocate for the victims and their families, in addition to identifying unknown remains or missing people from Whatcom County; a budget decrease will stall that process.

### **Superior Court**

Budget cuts and/or absorption of costs for 2025/2026 would significantly impact access to justice and would pose a significant hindrance to the provision of mandated services. The court is bursting at the seams in its effort to ensure access and maintain services with current staffing and budget. For context, the volume of cases have increased substantially since the last budget cycle.

Most of the courts costs are mandatory. For example, GAL's, Interpreters, Attorneys, probation services, detention. The only place to reduce costs that are not mandatory would be administrative staff (all of whom support ensuring mandatory functions are maintained) or programs such as Pre Trial Services, Recovery Court or support for Supervised Visitation.

Here are some examples of the potential impacts if the budget were reduced and we were to have to absorb any new costs:

- Reduction in funding for Supervised Visitation (contracted out to Dispute Resolution Center) would mean parents whom the court has determined require a neutral visit supervisor to ensure child safety who are not able to pay for this service would not have

visitation with their child. Currently WDRC is the only local agency that provides supervised visitation services at no cost. Participants are able to visit one hour per week with their child(ren) at no cost. There is not currently a waiting list (and the court is not the only funding source) but at the current volume needed by the community, they are not able to offer more than one visit per week. Reduction in this service would negatively impact parent-child relationships.

- If we reduce funding directed to alternative dispositions, such as Recovery Court, this could mean more jail time for individuals or lack of engagement in services to address SUD needs. Continued use could result in future criminal activity, impacts on children (such as DCYF intervention), relapse risk, community safety and individual safety concerns and continued barriers to housing. Continued use could result in increased use of EMS services or hospital services. It would also be in opposition to current Incarceration Prevention Task Force Goals.
- Any reduction in current staffing numbers with Juvenile Court would result in children not having representation from a Title 13 GAL in dependency proceedings, the inability to provide probation supervision services as required within caseload standards (lack of meaningful engagement, support and services aimed at rehabilitation and reducing recidivism) , reduction in support/services for the in excess of 325 truancy youth and families working with probation to connect with community services and increase school attendance or create wait times for youth seeking Child in Need of Services Petitions (temporary out of home placement to allow youth and parent to work through challenges at home) or wait times for parents seeing At Risk Youth Petitions. At the current levels, staff members have full caseloads. There would also be an impact on the ability of Juvenile Court to support alternative disposition programs, detention alternatives and diversion. Early intervention, addressing needs and skill building is a key factor in reducing incarceration and substance use in adulthood. Currently, there is a significant lack of services available in the community for our teenage population.
- If we were to reduce costs associated with Pre Trial Services, it would mean a reduction in staffing. Currently the office is staffed by two individuals. A reduction of staffing would have a negative impact on connecting adults to services and would mean a cap on the number of individuals who could be placed on Pre Trial. This would be in opposition to the goal to reduce incarceration (which is a much greater expense). Depending on how the limits were set, it could also inadvertently create additional racial disparities, despite the efforts to decrease them through the use of the PSA/Pre Trial Services.
- Reduction in administrative staff would impact the daily functioning of the court, such as impacting the courts ability to ensure interpreters are at hearings (RCW 2.43.090), ability to ensure invoices for services such as interpretation or court visitors which are public expenses are paid timely (thus also impacting the willingness for individuals to be on registries/interpreter lists), supporting the community in navigating the court process, juvenile sealing, juvenile warrants, juvenile case processing, ensuring up to date information is available to the public, coordination of pro tems etc.



- With the changes in laws surrounding protection orders, the court has added three overflow calendars per week. These are staffed by pro tem commissioners as Superior Court is at the maximum number of Constitutional Commissioners allowable. Cutting funding to pay for pro tems would have a negative impact on access to justice. It would also increase court costs as it would necessitate more continuances. every continuance means (at minimum) a clerk, judge, judicial assistant, attorney, court reporter etc. will be required at a subsequent hearing. Judicial Officers are working to cover calendars as they are able, but this volume is in addition to all the rest of the cases already being heard by judicial officers. If we moved judicial officers off of other calendars, it would negatively impact the resolution of cases.

Legislative changes have a profound impact on the court. It is unknown what new legislative changes will increase court costs. These are outside the courts control. Most recently, changes in protection orders have increased costs, as have guardianships. RCW's mandate timeliness of court and the requirements such as Court Visitors by which the court must abide. Most of these changes do not come with funds to support increased court costs. If asked to absorb all future costs for the next two years, this is the wild card. We don't know what legislative changes will mean for the court. The two examples above resulted in a significant increase in costs for the court.