



MEMORANDUM

To: Whatcom County Executive Satpal Sidhu
Through: Satpal Sidhu, County Executive
From: Jed Holmes, Public Affairs Manager
Subject: Executive Appointments to the Whatcom Racial Equity Commission
Date: January 15, 2026

Background and Purpose

The Whatcom Racial Equity Commission (WREC) was established in October 2022 through Whatcom County Council Ordinance 2022-065 to address the community-wide costs and impacts associated with racial inequity and disparities, including negative health care outcomes, increased health care costs, reduced economic opportunity, increased government services costs, poor education outcomes, disproportionate incarceration rates, and housing insecurity. The Commission serves as a conduit for ongoing community collaboration, engagement, and education to gather, review, and evaluate data and make recommendations on eliminating racial inequities throughout Whatcom County. The Commission has 19 voting members representing a variety of communities and sectors, plus four non-voting members who hold elected office throughout the county.

Per Whatcom County Code 2.107 (Whatcom Racial Equity Commission), Commission members shall be recommended by an Appointment Committee to the County Executive and Mayor of Bellingham. The Executive and Mayor propose appointments for confirmation by the Whatcom County Council and Bellingham City Council.

The Appointment Committee has unanimously approved the seating of four new WREC members after an application and review process. They are:

Benny Spencer – District 1 – Social Justice Advocate
Neesha Randeo – District 5 – Student Community Member
Sara O’Conner – District 5 – Human Services Provider¹
Sharayah Lane – District 2 – Subject Matter Expert (mental health, substance use)

Their applications are included in the agenda packet.

The Appointment committee considered the following factors when evaluating applicants:

- Requirements of the enabling ordinance for eligibility for appointment for each role.
- The requirements of the Mayor and Executive as outlined in the enabling code and creating recommendations that were supportive of that.

¹ Sara O’Conner currently serves on the Commission in the role of a community health representative with experience serving Hispanic and Latino individuals and communities.



- 2.107.070 “In seeking and selecting members for commission appointments, the mayor of Bellingham and county executive shall seek to represent the broadly diverse communities across Whatcom County with consideration to geography, income level, and a demonstrated commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.”
- The materials submitted by applicants and the lived and learned experiences represented in the recommendations.
- The overall composition of the Commission including the Representative Member slate.

The appointment committee comprised of Zeenia Junkeer, Rachel Rodriguez, Rika Valladares, Swil Kanim, Deborah Bineza, Danielle Humphreys, and WREC Executive Director Miriam Karamoko.

On December 16, Executive Sidhu and Mayor Lund met with the three recommended applicants who would be new to the Commission. Per the enabling code, Mayor Lund is also seeking confirmation of the recommended applicants by the Bellingham City Council

If confirmed, these Commissioners will join other appointed members, representative members who are appointed to serve by their organizations, and liaison members representing the County, City of Bellingham, and small cities.