

March 16, 2026

Kaylee Galloway, Chair of the Whatcom County Council
Barry Buchanan, Councilmember
Elizabeth Boyle, Councilmember
Ben Elenbaas, Councilmember
Jessica Rienstra, Councilmember
Jon Scanlon, Councilmember
Mark Strempler, Councilmember

Greetings Honorable Councilmembers,

We want to take this opportunity to thank you for hearing the concerns we, the mayors of Whatcom County, brought to your attention in our letter to you dated July 4, 2022.

Since writing that letter many positive things have transpired, the main one being the passage of the 0.2% public safety tax in 2023. Now planning for the new corrections facility and behavioral health center is under way. Also, the realities of finances for these projects are front and center. Cost estimates are coming in much higher than we predicted. To get the desired outcome, more capital for construction will be required.


To help with the capital cost of the new facilities we, as cities, collectively agreed to give 75% of our share of the public safety tax back to the County for 4-6 years. It now appears that we may need to extend this for another 4 years, or to 2035. Without this we will not get the facilities we planned for. For this additional cash infusion, we request that the County Council not lose focus on why we are giving our cash to the project:

- We need a correction facility large enough that we do not face booking restrictions for the foreseeable future, with an understanding that facility capacity depends on more than a simple bed count.
- We want the facilities to function in a way that encourages diversion rather than incarceration and recognize that the behavioral health center is critical to this need.
- We want a correction facility built in a way that efficiently uses our labor force. Effective and efficient use of our employees will have positive impact on per diem rates in the future.

The current jail use agreement is likely to need an update. When drafting the update, these values are the city's priorities that need to be incorporated in the document.

We are ready and willing to be involved in this process and would encourage the Council to move quickly as any delays will result in increased costs, money we cannot afford to lose. We recognize that changing circumstances have created a new financial reality that impacts our policy decisions, and we are here in partnership to seek a consensus that is based on guidance from experts and our shared priorities and desired outcomes.

Sincerely,



Kim Lund
Mayor of Bellingham



Mary Lou Steward
Mayor of Blaine



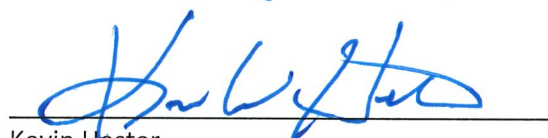
John Perry
Mayor of Everson



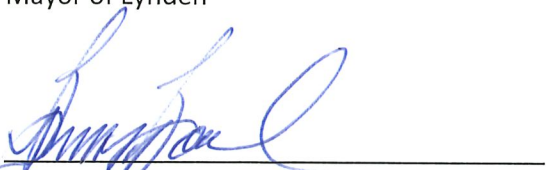
Greg Hanson
Mayor of Ferndale



Scott Korthuis
Mayor of Lynden



Kevin Hester
Mayor of Nooksack



Bruce Bosch
Mayor of Sumas