

ADVISORY COMMITTEE REVIEW

February 2026

Introduction

Whatcom County has approximately 54 boards, commissions, committees, and task forces – collectively known as advisory groups - to which community members are either appointed by the County Executive and confirmed by the County Council or appointed directly by the Council. The majority of these groups are advisory to either the Executive, the Council, both, or other agencies entirely. Several other groups have non-advisory functions, however, including acting as an appeal body for regulatory decision-making or inspection and enforcement of local and state regulations.

Authority

Advisory groups are created under authority of an enabling statute, most often in County Code. Several advisory groups are mandated by the State, with varying levels of purpose, function, and/or membership required in the Revised Code of Washington (RCW). Occasionally, the authority for a particular advisory group may come from an interlocal agreement between or among multiple jurisdictions. These statutes define the parameters of the advisory groups' scope of authority, actions, and responsibilities.

In addition to these statutes, Whatcom County Code Chapter 2.03 has codified a basic set of rules regarding vacancy and appointment procedures and term length and limit requirements. This Code chapter originated from a 1980 resolution (Res 1980-013) to codify term length and term limit requirements in the County Charter and for the Board of Equalization. Chapter 2.03 had evolved over the years as new advisory groups were created to create uniformity in various aspects of the appointment process.

For those advisory groups that are enacted or required by the State, the County's role in making appointments is defined in the RCW. The County's responsibility for managing these groups varies. The RCW may simply require the local legislative authority to appoint members to an advisory group that is managed by another agency or jurisdiction. For example, the Whatcom County Council or Executive will appoint its representatives to a local or regional organization, such as the North Sound Behavioral Health Administrative Services Organization (NS BH-ASO) Advisory Board. In other instances, the State may require counties to have and manage a particular advisory group, such as the Planning Commission and the Veterans Advisory Board.

Funding and Staff Support

The amount of resources dedicated to an advisory group largely depends on the advisory group function and amount of technical or administrative staff support the County provides. For example:

- The Commission on Sexual and Domestic Violence is a locally-created, multi-jurisdictional agency created and funded by the City of Bellingham and Whatcom County, governed by an interlocal agreement that includes full-time staff.
- The Noxious Weed Control Board is required by the RCW. Management of the Board, which provides inspection and enforcement activities, operates under its own division within the Public Works Department and includes two full-time equivalent (FTE) staff.
- The Forestry Advisory Committee and the Surface Mining Committee were formed by the County to provide industry-specific review and recommendations on these topics. Technical and administrative staff are provided by the Planning Department.
- The Business and Commerce Advisory Committee was created at the request of and is managed by the Port of Bellingham. Similarly, the RCW requires the County to appoint members to the Rural Library Board, which is managed entirely by the Whatcom County Library System.

In general, groups formed by the County to be advisory to Council and/or the Executive require at least a minimal level of staff support. These staff are the advisory group facilitators who liaise between the group and the County.

1. Whatcom County has fostered a culture of requiring its boards and commissions to comply with the State's Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA). Advisory groups are also subject to the Public Records Act (PRA). These "sunshine laws" have compliance requirements that only County staff facilitators can carry out.
2. Additionally, practical requirements for advisory groups include hosting meetings in a venue that is open to the public. The County has limited space available around the county for meeting venues, so incurring a cost for venue rental may be inevitable.
3. Updates to advisory group webpages are necessary from time-to-time

These types of administrative costs must be considered and accounted for with all advisory groups. In addition to administrative costs, many groups require technical staff support as well, to educate and work with advisory group members. Technical staff who serve as advisory group facilitators may either rely on their department's internal administrative staff to assist with carrying out administrative functions of the advisory group, or be required to learn how to accomplish those administrative tasks themselves, which can take time away from their normal work obligations.

Appointments to Advisory Groups

The appointment process for advisory groups may be defined in the enabling statute, County Code Chapter 2.03, an interlocal agreement, or some combination thereof. Historically, the County Council Office undertook an annual appointment process each October through January for both Council- and Executive-appointed advisory groups. In 2024, Council amended the Code so that the Executive Office and Council Office are responsible for their own annual appointments. Due to unfilled vacancies or resignations, appointments may also occur throughout the rest of the year.

Advertising Vacancies and Recruiting

The County maintains a list of vacancies on all its advisory groups on the County website. During the annual appointment process, the Council Office has, for many years, paid to advertise the annual vacancies in the legal ads section of The Bellingham Herald. Beginning in 2022, however, advertising the annual vacancies has shifted to media sources with a wider reach in the community, such as social media. Council and the Clerk may want to consider shifting funding previously spent on the legal ad toward paid digital promotion of vacancies.

As appointment to Executive-appointed advisory groups falls solely on the County Executive, County administrations have historically been more flexible in actively recruiting applicants to vacancies on advisory groups. County Council has less flexibility in making its appointments. Councilmembers are, however, encouraged to ask potential qualified applicants to submit an application. The most effective recruiting tool is the direct request.

An advisory group's facilitator who has successfully built relationships in the community may also approach individuals who have the necessary interest, experience, and qualifications to potentially become a member of an advisory group. These networks are an important pathway for recruiting advisory group members, but also presents a challenge. Relying on these well-established networks may inadvertently result in a lack of diversity that is necessary to fully represent Whatcom County.

Application Process for Council-Appointed Advisory Groups

Applicants who live at least part time in Whatcom County can submit an application to an advisory group if there is a vacancy for which they qualify. During the annual appointment process, applications are collected by the deadline defined in the Code and presented to the Council for appointment at the first meeting in January. The application deadline for all vacancies is included in all vacancy notices. Applications considered during the January appointment process are not scheduled for Council Introduction.

Applying for Multiple Positions. Several advisory groups have positions with required qualifications attached to them. Both the online and hardcopy application forms ask applicants to identify which position they're applying for. In instances where an applicant may qualify for multiple vacant positions, it should be a standard practice to secure an applicant's permission before Council appoints the applicant to a position that is different from the one for which they have applied. As more advisory groups are created with these position-specific qualifications, it may be worthwhile to consider amending the applications. Council would have more flexibility when making appointments if the applications request that an applicant identify all the positions for which they qualify rather than apply to just one position.

Application Deadline. When a new advisory group is created or when a mid-year appointment occurs to an outstanding vacancy, receipt of at least one application will be introduced to Council. This procedure is not a County Code requirement, but is a courtesy meant to trigger the deadline clock and give notice to the community that applications for the vacancy will be considered at the upcoming meeting.

The County Code deadline of 10:00 a.m. the Tuesday before the Council meeting was set in 2014. Prior to that, the deadline was 4:00 p.m. on the day of the Council meeting. The original deadline often resulted in many applications arriving in the Council Office just a few hours before the beginning of the Council meeting, not allowing councilmembers sufficient time to consider them and no time to potentially interview the applicant, as County Code allows.

Interviewing Applicants: Council staff does not vet applicants beyond checking the address to see if they are a resident in Whatcom County. Deciding whether or not an applicant is qualified to fill a position is the sole responsibility of the Council.

Whatcom County Code allows councilmembers to contact and possibly interview applicants. Historically, some councilmembers have occasionally reached out to individual applicants on their own. Council as a whole has not exercised the option to arrange for an applicant interview. One factor councilmembers may want to consider when contacting or interviewing applications is their ability to commit to participating regularly with the advisory group for the full term, which can be two to four years. The number of mid-term resignations have increased in recent years. These mid-term resignations create challenges for staff and the advisory groups, such as the need to orient new member to work that has been ongoing.

Removal of Appointees

When an advisory group member no longer qualifies for their position or is unable to attend and regularly participate, their resignation will create a mid-term vacancy. From time-to-time, an appointee disengages from participation with the advisory group without notice or explanation. When this happens, the group's staff facilitator will attempt to work with the appointee to participate regularly if possible. It is always in the best interest of the group to keep its members as engaged rather than resort to creating a mid-term vacancy. However, that's not always possible. If staff is unsuccessful, they will reach out to Council staff for help. Council staff and the Council Chair will also reach out to the absent member. In all but one instance, the efforts of the staff facilitator, Council staff, and the Council Chair have been successful in reaching a resolution with an absentee advisory group member. As a last resort, County Code 2.03.025 provides the Council the authority to remove from office a member of an advisory group prior to the expiration of the advisory group member's term of office.

Expectations of Advisory Group Members

In 2012, the County Council and County Executive adopted a set of guidelines for appointees to County advisory groups. This document is updated with signatures of the current Council Chair and Executive as needed. It is also included with the appointment letter to everyone Council has appointed to an advisory group. The Expectations of Advisory Group Members is Attachment A to this review.

Agricultural Advisory Committee

Purpose

The Agricultural Advisory Committee (AAC) provides review and recommendations to the Whatcom County Council on issues that affect agriculture. The AAC also provides a forum for farmers and others interested in enhancing and promoting the long-term viability of Whatcom County agriculture.

Activities

The Planning and Development Services Department staff this committee, which acts as a sounding board on agricultural issues. They reviewed the agricultural portion of the resource section of the comprehensive plan. They also review code change related to agriculture. The Committee meets monthly October to May, and doesn't meet during the summer's prime farming season.

The ACC updated the agricultural strategic plan for the county in 2018. In 2019, the committee produced the Whatcom County Rural Land Study 2019 Update: A Collaborative Report Identifying Rural Areas of Agricultural Significance and Tracking Changes Over Time.

ADA Compliance Committee

Purpose

Provide guidance to the County regarding making its facilities and programs accessible to those with disabilities. The committee also reviews the ADA coordinator's complaint resolution decisions and makes necessary recommendations for improvements to accessibility.

Activities

The Human Resources Division of the Administrative Services Department staffs this committee, which meets quarterly to receive reports on Whatcom County's facilities and discuss facility-related projects that impact ADA compliance. If an ADA complaint is filed, the ADA coordinator investigates the complaint and recommends a remedy. If the complainant is dissatisfied with the coordinator's remedy, an appeal goes to the ADA Compliance Committee for a decision. Further appeal goes to the County Council, which is the final arbitrator.

Behavioral Health Advisory Committee

Purpose

The Committee advises the Whatcom County Health and Community Services Department on general priorities for behavioral health programs, including substance use disorder and mental health services. In 2017, the Behavioral Health Advisory Board merged with the Behavioral Health Revenue Advisory Committee, and this committee was the outcome of that merger.

Activities

The committee meets quarterly to provide policy guidance and oversight on mental health and substance use disorder issues and programming. It ensures compliance with state law and monitors the local sales and use tax, property tax, and two percent liquor profits and excise taxes used to fund behavioral health services. These services are provided for the intended purpose as outlined by state

statute and county code. The committee reports annually to the County Council.

Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee

Purpose

The Bicycle / Pedestrian Advisory Committee's purpose is to assist the county in the planning, funding, development, and implementation of facilities and programs that will result in the increased safety and use of bicycle and pedestrian travel as a significant and beneficial mode of transportation and recreation.

Activities

This committee meets monthly. It developed the Whatcom County Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan and works to further those efforts.

Birch Bay Watershed & Aquatic Resources Management (BBWARM)

Advisory Committee

Purpose

The Committee was created under the jurisdiction of the Flood Control Zone District. When appointing members, the Council is acting as the District's Board of Supervisors. The Committee represents the residents of the subzone and makes recommendations to the Board of Supervisors regarding the implementation of the Birch Bay Watershed and Aquatic Resource Management (BBWARM) District stormwater program. The Committee also serves as the advisory committee for the Birch Bay Shellfish Protection District. The purpose of the shellfish protection district is to provide services to citizens experiencing nonpoint pollution of surface water drainages and coastal waters and to implement those portions of the Birch Bay closure response strategies necessary to allow removal of the Birch Bay downgrades and maintain year-round shellfish harvest.

Activities

This committee is managed by the Public Works Department and meets quarterly to set strategic goals and work plans, prioritize capital improvement projects, and recommend budgets for the BBWARM stormwater program. The Committee advises on capital improvement projects, maintenance projects, water quality monitoring, and habitat improvement. The BBWARM has an active education and outreach program for the community. The BBWARM fund budgeted revenue for 2023 was nearly \$1,500,000.

Birch Bay Community Advisory Committee

Purpose

The Committee was created in 2024 to review and make recommendations to the County Council and Executive on issues related to the Birch Bay community and the Birch Bay urban growth area (UGA). Committee meetings provide a forum for public engagement and feedback from the Birch Bay community. The committee's advice is intended to help the county maintain and enhance the Birch Bay urban growth area as a safe, attractive, and sustainable environment in which to live, work and play.

Activities

This committee meets quarterly, and its very first meeting was held February 27, 2025.

Board of Equalization

Purpose

The Board of Equalization hears property tax appeals and complaints regarding the Assessor's real property value determination. The Board is responsible for ensuring that all properties are valued at 100% of market value and that comparable properties are assessed at comparable values. The Board may either lower, raise, or sustain the land or building assessments.

Activities

The Board of Equalization convenes each assessment year and continues in session during regular Council office hours until all taxpayer appeals are heard or otherwise resolved. Hearings are generally held on Wednesdays and Thursdays at the Whatcom County Council Office, and are open public meetings on an as-needed basis.

Boundary Review Board

Purpose

The Boundary Review Board reviews and makes decisions concerning boundary changes, including annexation, specific water sewer extension, incorporation, dissolution and disincorporation of jurisdictions and creations, partial mergers and consolidations of special purpose districts.

Activities

Under an interlocal agreement with Whatcom County, the Whatcom Council of Governments provides staff to the Boundary Review Board. The Boundary Review Board meets as needed with regular meetings in January and July, if there are items of business. Meetings are held either remotely and/or at the Whatcom Council of Governments.

Business and Commerce Advisory Committee

Purpose

The committee reviews County issues, including regulations and policies that could impact local businesses, industry, or economic development. It reviews and provides recommendations on comprehensive plans, regulations, economic development efforts, and on proposals which directly impact business and economic conditions in Whatcom County. The committee will also provide recommendations on efforts to improve business conditions, environment, and infrastructure. It will develop recommendations for comprehensive economic development efforts of Associate Development Organizations (ADOs) and other issues impacting business in Whatcom County. The committee develops recommendations and strategies for ensuring the county applies a client-focused approach to support businesses with regulations, permitting, and planning.

Activities

The Port of Bellingham provides technical and administrative support to the committee, which meets monthly. The Committee has created a number of topic-specific subcommittees that also work on land use, housing, transportation, and the upcoming 2025 Comprehensive Plan update.

Child and Family Well-Being Task Force

Purpose

The Task Force will continually review Whatcom governmental impacts on children and families, and make specific recommendations for improvements for all departments. The Task Force will consider input from diverse families throughout Whatcom County and evidence-based and promising practices. It reports on and makes recommendations to County Council, the Executive, and other appropriate officials regarding implementation of recommendations in the Whatcom Working Toward Well-being: An Action Plan for County Government (Action Plan) as adopted on February 4, 2020.

Activities

This Task Force is managed by the Health and Community Services Department. Created in 2020, its initial assignments were to develop recommendations for County infrastructure to promote child and family well-being and to review initiatives and impacts that impact children and families. The Task Force promotes a “children and family first” approach for County policy and funding decisions, and promote accountability. The Task Force completed its Phase III Report to the County Council in May 2023. Moving forward, the Task Force will provide a report and recommendations to the County Council and County Executive twice per year.

Civil Service Commission

Purpose

The Civil Service Commission creates and administers the rules and regulations for personnel administration in the County Sheriff's Office. The Commission shall do practical testing for persons to determine the capacity to perform duties that a person may be appointed to perform. The Commission shall investigate, report on, and hold hearings on all matters regarding the administration of personnel. They shall determine appeals or complaints respecting the allocation of personnel positions.

Activities

This is a statutorily required commission. It meets monthly to provide oversight to the Sheriff's Office in the hiring of commissioned staff. They also handle appeals of decisions made by the Civil Service Examiner. They play an advisory role, helping guide Sheriff's Office staffing policies.

Climate Impact Advisory Committee

Purpose

The Whatcom County Climate Impact Advisory Committee provides review and recommendations to the Whatcom County Council and Executive on issues related to the preparation and adaptation for, and the prevention and mitigation of, impacts of climate change.

Activities

This committee is managed by the Public Works Department and meets monthly to support the County's climate action efforts and work with county staff on related topics. It often receives presentations from industry experts on a variety of climate change technology and issues. In 2021, it completed the Whatcom County Climate Action Plan.

Commission on Sexual and Domestic Violence

Purpose

The Commission is the community forum on domestic violence, and creates a mechanism for identifying issues, concerns, needs and resources. It develops and implements a coordinated comprehensive domestic violence plan that is monitored, evaluated and updated on a regular basis. It promotes coordinated and increased collaboration of institutions, systems, and services as they respond to offenders, victims, children and others who have been impacted by domestic violence. The Commission works to increase community awareness and understanding about domestic violence, and serve as an advisory board to local government agencies and the community. It develops community benchmarks for monitoring domestic violence and reports its work annually.

Activities

The Commission is created and funded jointly between Whatcom County and the City of Bellingham. It employs two staff, the Director and an Administrative & Projects Manager, and meets every other month. The Commission and its staff developed the 2023-2024 Work Plan. It authors an annual data report and regularly produces a safety audit and community assessment reports.

Conservation Easement Program Oversight Committee

Purpose

The Conservation Easement Program (CREP) Oversight Committee provides oversight and evaluation for the Whatcom County Conservation Easement Program, to enhance the protection of the county's farmland, enhance the long-term viability of agricultural enterprises within the county and provide public benefit by retaining properties in permanent resource use. This committee's role is to advise the Council in the selection of eligible lands offered for Conservation Easement acquisition.

Activities

The County Planning and Development Services Department manages the Committee and the CREP Program. The Committee meets monthly to review program applications, investigate conservation programs, and plan for outreach to the community about the program.

Criminal Justice Treatment Account Panel

Purpose

This committee is required by the RCW to create an expenditure plan for State money that is set aside for substance use disorder treatment and treatment support services for offenders, including those offenders in the drug court program. Seventy percent of amount appropriated to the authority from the

account is distributed to counties. Thirty percent is distributed as grants for purposes of treating offenders against whom charges are filed by a county prosecuting attorney.

Activities

This panel is managed by the Health and Community Services Department. It generally meets annually to develop a plan for fund expenditure of all the funds provided from the criminal justice treatment account within Whatcom county. The plan is submitted to County Council for approval and ultimately submitted to the State panel for final approval.

Development Standards Technical Advisory Committee

Purpose

The Development Standards Technical Advisory Committee reviews all proposed standards and modifications that propose project designs deemed by the technical administrator not to be in strict compliance with development standards. The Committee operates to ensure compliance with land use regulations and comprehensive plans, consistency with accepted professional practices, and consistency with objectives through evaluation of technical and dimensional requirements.

Activities

Members of this committee all have professional expertise that is relevant to development standards. They review and recommend changes to the development standards; review all proposed standards, modifications and permit applications which propose project designs that are not in strict compliance with the standards; and hear appeals of decisions made by technical administrator of standards. The committee makes recommendations to the Executive.

Developmental Disabilities Advisory Board

Purpose

The Developmental Disabilities Board is advisory to the Department of Developmental Disabilities Services, i.e. the Health and Community Services Department, on the work of the Developmental Disabilities Program. The Board plans services for and coordinates services for individuals with developmental disabilities.

Activities

The Developmental Disabilities Board is a state required board that meets every other month to advise the county on the use of state and local funding for developmental disabilities. The Developmental Disabilities Program contracts with various agencies in the community to provide child development, employment, school, and family support services.

County staff develops annual plans to conform with state funding requirements for developmental disability. The Board reviews the plans to ensure they are responsive to public need, providing high level priorities and goals. They also help prioritize the programming of local funding.

Economic Development Investment Board

Purpose

The Washington State Legislature in 1997 authorized rural counties like Whatcom County to retain a portion of the sales tax collected to finance public facilities. The Economic Development Investment (EDI) Board was created to review project applications that invest in economic development and public facilities that further the goals for promoting the ongoing operation of business in Whatcom County.

Activities

This board meets twice annually to review EDI requests and make recommendations for funding project applications to the County Council.

EMS Executive Oversight Board & Technical Advisory Board

Purpose

The Whatcom County Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Oversight Board make recommendations to Whatcom County, the cities, and fire districts of Whatcom County regarding administration, operations, levels of service and EMS budgets. The EMS Technical Advisory Board serves as advisors and makes recommendations to the EMS Executive Oversight Board (EOB) and to EMS providers in Whatcom County regarding operational, educational and logistical components of basic through advanced life support services.

Activities

These boards meet regularly to monitor all aspects of EMS services in Whatcom County. The Oversight Board assists in the preparation of EMS levy plans and produces an annual report on programs and services. The TAB reviews provider contracts, funding, the status of first responder services around the county, and the educational pathway for paramedics.

Ethics Commission

Purpose

The Ethics Commission receives complaints of ethics violations and otherwise administers the Code of Ethics.

Activities

The Commission is primarily staffed by the County Executive's Office. In the event of a complaint against the Executive's Office, Council Office staff will manage the Commission. The Commission meets annually to conduct routine commission housekeeping and as needed when it receives a complaint of ethics violation.

Flood Control Zone and Subzones

Purpose

The Flood Control Zone District Advisory Committee makes recommendations to the District's Board of Supervisors on flood damage repairs, maintenance, improvements, and minimizing future flood damage. The subzone advisory committees perform similar tasks at the subzone level.

Activities

The advisory committees for the countywide district and the flood subzone districts operate under the jurisdiction of the Flood Control Zone District and are staffed by the River and Flood Division. When appointing members, the Council is acting as the District's Board of Supervisors. It advises on system-wide policies and planning related to flood control, helps develop the District's budget, and gives Council recommendations on projects, including cost-sharing plans with other agencies.

There are three subzones: Acme/VanZandt, Lynden/Everson and Sumas/Everson/Nooksack. BBWARM is technically also a subzone, but functions differently. The subzones advisory committees' meeting schedules vary, usually meeting 1-4 times per year as needed. This is generally in response to a flood issue or budgeting. They also participate in system planning in their area and make recommendations on what projects to undertake.

Food System Committee

Purpose

The purpose of the Whatcom County Food System Committee is to draft, implement, provide oversight for, and regularly update a countywide Food System Plan. The food system plan is a long-range planning document that strengthens the regional food system. It includes a baseline assessment of how we grow, distribute, consume, and dispose of food. It identifies concrete actions to improve the policies, programs, and investments that shape how food moves throughout our community.

Activities

This Committee is managed by the Health and Community Services Department. The members of the Committee created a 10-year Food System Plan, which was adopted by the Whatcom County Council in July, 2023. The Plan was created by updating the Community Food Assessment, reviewing other County plans and food system plans, and engaging the community in a robust engagement process. The Food System Plan Now in the implementation phase.

Forest Advisory Committee

Purpose

The Forestry Advisory Committee provides review and recommendations to the Whatcom County Council on issues that affect the forestry industry. The Forestry Advisory Committee also provides a forum for all sectors of the forestry community to contribute to discussions on the future of forestry in Whatcom County.

Activities

The Committee is staffed by the Planning and Development Services Department and meets monthly to provide policy guidance, review changes to the Comprehensive Plan and the Climate Action Plan, and review other forestry-related projects that arise in the county. The full Committee has created subcommittees that work on several work products, such as the Forestry Profile Subcommittee and Carbon Subcommittee.

Horticultural Pest and Disease Board (Inactive)

Purpose

The Horticultural Pest and Disease Board was created at the request of the Washington State University Extension Office to enable Whatcom County to more effectively control and prevent the spread of horticultural pests and diseases. The board has the following powers and duties: receive complaints; inspect; enforce; employ persons and purchase goods and equipment as necessary; educate the public; and administrate.

Activities

This Board is administered by the Washington State University Extension Office. It was last active in 2020. Were this board active, it would hear complaints related to horticultural pests, investigate such complaints and order landowners to take actions to control the spread of pests (landowners can be charged for expenses per RCW 15.09.080). It would also play a role in educating the public about the risks associated with horticultural pests.

Housing Advisory Committee

Purpose

The Housing Program provides opportunities in the community to create safe, affordable, and stable housing. The committee works with community partners to reduce homelessness in the community. The committee will recommend grants to local service organizations and participate in local and regional planning efforts.

Activities

Administered by the Health and Community Services Department, this committee advises the Department and the Executive on policy decisions that ensure spending is consistent with state law and regulations related to low-income housing and homelessness. They also advise on housing programs and ensure that performance goals are being met. The Housing Program awards funds to community programs; facilitates community-wide planning and participates in regional planning; updates and oversees the implementation of the Plan to End Homelessness; conducts annual Point in Time Count of homeless people; acts as liaison to Department of Commerce; represents the community as Continuum of Care lead, and; provides housing and service related advocacy on behalf of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Housing Authority of Whatcom County

Purpose

The Bellingham Housing Authority (BHA) and the Whatcom County Housing Authority (BWCHA) work together to provide needed housing in the community. They serve low-income families, elderly people, those with disabilities and working families in need of affordable housing in Whatcom County. Their mission is to offer opportunities for people to thrive by ensuring access to quality, affordable homes in Bellingham and Whatcom County.

Activities

Both Whatcom County and City of Bellingham make appointments to this joint board. The Board operates with its own staff.

Incarceration Prevention and Reduction Task Force/Law & Justice Council - and - Justice Project Oversight and Planning (JPOP) Committee

Purpose

The purpose of the Incarceration Prevention and Reduction Task Force is to review Whatcom County's criminal justice and behavioral health programs to make recommendations to safely and effectively reduce incarceration of individuals struggling with mental illness and substance use disorder, and minimize jail use by pretrial defendants who can safely be released. The Law & Justice Council is required by the RCW. Because its membership and mandate are similar to that of the IPRTF, the IPRTF has taken on the role of the Law & Justice Council. The JPOP Committee is a subcommittee of the IPRTF, however the County Council has reserved its right to appointment members to the JPOP Committee as outlined in the Justice Project Implementation Plan. The purpose of the JPOP Committee is to help track progress on the Implementation Plan, help the IPRTF and County administration to ensure the Plan is updated as needed, and that public engagement and communications are robust.

Activities

The Incarceration Prevention and Reduction Task Force meets regularly to review criminal justice and behavioral health plans and programs that reduce the risk of incarceration. It has created a number of subcommittees to focus directly on certain aspects of this broad mandate. The IPRTF reports twice per year to the County Council and Executive. The JPOP Committee meets monthly to learn about the ongoing status of the 15 Justice Project Implementation Plan projects and engage with the community about its priorities, problems, and potential solutions for criminal justice and behavioral health services as related to the 15 projects.

Law Enforcement Officer and Firefighter (LEOFF)-1 Disability Board

Purpose

Whatcom County administers the Whatcom County Law Enforcement Officers' and Firefighters' (LEOFF) Plan 1 Disability Board. The Board's powers are granted by the State. The State created an actuarial reserve system for the payment of death, disability, and retirement benefits to law enforcement officers and firefighters and their beneficiaries and dependents. The Board has jurisdiction over the police and fire agencies in Whatcom County, excluding the City of Bellingham Police and Fire Departments. The LEOFF Board reviews and approves all eligible disability and medical claims submitted by LEOFF 1 members.

Activities

This Board is managed by the Human Resources Division of the Administrative Services Department and meets as needed.

Lodging Tax Advisory Committee

Purpose

The Committee advises the County Council and Executive on the allocation of lodging tax funds as allowed in the RCW to support tourism, which in turn generates revenue for the community.

Activities

Administered by the County Executive's Office on an annual application and funding cycle, the Committee solicits proposals from agencies and groups actively engaged in the promotion and enhancement of tourism in Whatcom County. The Lodging Tax Advisory Committee will review applications and make funding recommendations to the County Council. Once approved, Whatcom County will issue contracts for projects, reimburse expenses, monitor contract compliance.

Marine Resource Committee

Purpose

The Marine Resource Committee (MRC), guided by the Northwest Strait Commission, addresses local marine issues and recommends remedial action to local authorities. The committee builds awareness of issues and gathers support for remedies. The MRC works to protect and restore marine resources in the Puget Sound area through scientific monitoring, nearshore restoration projects, and community education.

Activities

Staffed by the Public Works Department, this committee is Whatcom County's portion of the Northwest Straights (NWS) Initiative. The initiative is a federally funded program. The Whatcom Marine Resource Committee receives funding annually to support its activities. The MRC receives base funding through grant agreements with the NWS Commission to accomplish priority restoration and protection work in the local area.

Activities include:

- Education and outreach: host or attend events, including booths at community events and organizes Whatcom Water Week
- Projects: beach cleanup, water quality monitoring, nearshore species monitoring, and restoration programs. The board decides what projects to take on each year and how to use their funding.

North Sound Behavioral Health Organization Advisory Board

Purpose

The North Sound BH-ASO provides a regional system of crisis and treatment services and recovery supports for individuals with behavioral health challenges. Its Advisory Board provides independent and objective advice and feedback to the North Sound BH-ASO Board of Directors, local jurisdictions, and county advisory boards and service providers. Chartered by the State for the region of Snohomish, Island, Skagit, San Juan and Whatcom counties.

Activities

The Advisory Board is managed by the North Sound BH-ASO staff. The Advisory Board champions the coordinated regional approach to behavioral health service delivery to ensure services meet regional care needs through community and legislative advocacy. The Board provides advice to the North Sound BH-ASO Board of Directors, five Apple Health Managed Care Organizations, and to the North Sound BH-ASO staff to improve access to behavioral health services for persons in need of treatment and recovery. Board members maintain close ties with their local communities so they can act as informed voices for persons who need behavioral health services.

Northwest Senior Services Board

Purpose

The Northwest Senior Services Board serves as advisors to the area agency on aging, which is the Northwest Regional Council (NWRC) locally, in order to develop and enhance a comprehensive service delivery system that meets the physical, social, and psychological needs of older people. The Northwest Senior Services Board advises the NWRC on what programs to develop and the use of discretionary funding. It represents NWRC in our communities and to elected officials.

Activities

Managed by the Northwest Regional Council, the Board meets every other month.

Noxious Weed Control Board

Purpose

The Noxious Weed Control Board ensures that noxious weeds are controlled to the greatest extent possible in Whatcom County. It promotes public education on management of listed noxious weeds such as tansy ragwort, knapweed, purple loosestrife, knotweed and their impacts on natural resources. The Weed Board helps the Public Works Department administer its Noxious Weed Program to ensure that landowners control noxious weeds on their properties, as required by Chapter 17.10 RCW.

Activities

This board adopts the County noxious weed list, hears appeals from property owners subject to noxious weed removal and provides oversight to the noxious weed control program. If necessary, the Weed Board may hire a contractor to eliminate noxious weeds on a property and bill the landowner for work.

Open Space Advisory Committee (Inactive)

Purpose

The Open Space Advisory Committee represents the active farming community within the county to serve in an advisory capacity to the county assessor in implementing assessment guidelines as established by the department of revenue for the assessment of open space, farms and agricultural lands, and timber lands.

Activities

Traditionally, the Committee meets once annually to advise the assessor on trends in the agricultural real estate market. The Committee is currently inactive with only one member.

Parks and Recreation Commission

Purpose

The purpose of the Whatcom County Parks & Recreation Commission is to advise the Parks & Recreation Director on parks, recreation, and senior services issues. The commission provides recommendations in the development and review of acquisitions, plans, programs, policies and funding for parks and open space. The Commission serves as a liaison between the County and citizens and works to promote parks, recreation and senior services programs.

Activities

The Commission meets monthly and rotates its meeting venue to different park properties around the county. It hears updates on park facilities and programs and monitors all aspects of Parks Department operations.

Planning Commission

Purpose

The Planning Commission assists the Planning and Development Services Department in carrying out its duties, including assisting in the preparation and execution of the Comprehensive Plan and recommendations to the department for the adoption of official controls and/or amendments. The Planning and Development Services Department shall transmit the recommendations of the Planning Commission to the County Council with such comments and recommendations the department deems necessary.

Activities

The Planning and Development Services Department manages the work of the Planning Commission, which is scheduled to meet twice per month.

Point Roberts Community Advisory Committee

Purpose

The Point Roberts Community Advisory Committee was created to provide advice and recommendations to the County Executive and the County Council regarding needs and issues specific to the Point Roberts community. The Committee has also taken over the duties of the Point Roberts Character Plan Advisory Committee and will review commercial development and signs in Point Roberts for consistency with the Point Roberts Character Plan.

Activities

The committee utilizes its ties to the community to identify community needs and to develop and propose methods to address those needs. Most recently, the Committee produced the "State of Point Roberts" report in January 2024.

Public Defense Advisory Committee

Purpose

The Public Defense Advisory Committee shall advise the County Executive and County Council on matters regarding the defense of the indigent, and shall submit its observations of the public defender system to the Executive and the County Council not less than annually.

Activities

This committee meets twice per year to discuss the public defense program with the department director.

Public Health Advisory Board

Purpose

The Public Health Advisory Board advises the Board of Health and Health and Community Services Department on all issues related to the County Health and Community Services Department and its programs.

Activities

This Board meets monthly to provide policy guidance and review to the Health and Community Services Department and the Board of Health. This includes supporting the budget process. It will:

1. Provide input to the local board of health in the recruitment and selection of an administrative officer and local health officer, pursuant to the RCW;
2. Use a health equity framework to conduct, assess, and identify the community health needs of the jurisdiction, and review and recommend public health policies and priorities for the local health jurisdiction and advisory board to address community health needs;
3. Evaluate the impact of proposed public health policies and programs, and assure identified health needs and concerns are being met;
4. Promote public participation in and identification of local public health needs;
5. Provide community forums and hearings as assigned by the local board of health;
6. Establish community task forces as assigned by the local board of health;
7. Review and make recommendations to the local health jurisdiction and local board of health for an annual budget and fees; and
8. Review and advise on local health jurisdiction progress in achieving performance measures and outcomes to ensure continuous quality improvement and accountability.

Salary Commission

Purpose

The purpose of the Salary Commission is to fix the salaries of the county council, executive, assessor, auditor, prosecuting attorney, sheriff, and treasurer in accordance with the county code, county charter and state law. The Commission studies the relationship of salaries to the duties of the elected officials and fixes the salary for each position.

Activities

Created through an initiative, this commission sets the salary rate for elected officials. It meets several times January through April every two years to set the rates for the following two years.

Shellfish Advisory Committees

Purpose

Whatcom county has three shellfish advisory committees: Birch Bay, Drayton Harbor, and Portage Bay. The BBWARM serves as the advisory committee for the Birch Bay Shellfish Protection District. Therefore, there are two Shellfish Advisory Committees: Drayton Harbor and Portage Bay. They advise the County Council on the proposed actions and operations relating to the restoration of water quality in the specific watersheds. Each shellfish protection district represents a body of water that has had its commercial shellfish harvesting area shut down due to water quality problems (fecal coliform). The enabling statute allows the County to create advisory committees when it makes such a district. District boundaries are the watersheds for body of water.

Activities

Public Works Department staff provide technical and administrative assistance to the advisory committees and collaborate with local, tribal, state, and federal agencies and citizen groups to recover water quality and shellfish growing areas in Whatcom County. The committees also participate in the Pollution Identification and Correction (PIC) system and use that information to guide their recommendations. They also engage in public outreach by advising staff on messaging to the general public and identifying the issues that are most important to the community.

Solid Waste Advisory Committee

Purpose

The Solid Waste Advisory Committee (SWAC) provides for coordination and information exchange among groups and agencies about solid waste issues. It provides ongoing public input and advice to Whatcom County on solid waste management issues.

Activities

This Committee is staffed by the Health and Community Services Department and meets quarterly to provide policy guidance on the Solid Waste Management Program and review the program budget prior to its inclusion in the biannual budget.

Surface Mining Advisory Committee (Inactive)

Purpose

The Surface Mining Advisory Committee advises the Whatcom County Planning and Development Services Department and the Whatcom County Council on implementing a surface mining regulatory program consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. The Committee addresses action items of the mineral resource element of the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan.

Activities

The Committee has not met regularly since 2019, and has not met at all since November 2020. Six of the 11 positions are currently vacant. In light of the upcoming 2025 Comprehensive Plan Update process, the Planning and Development Services Department may attempt to revitalize the committee. The Committee would provide advice to Council on issues related to surface mining and the preservation of resource lands for those purposes.

Veteran's Advisory Board

Purpose

The Veterans Advisory Board was created pursuant to the RCW to advise the County Council on the needs of local indigent veterans, make resources available to local indigent veterans, and provide programs that could benefit the needs of local indigent veterans and their families. The County Council and County Executive shall consult with and solicit recommendations from the advisory board to determine the appropriate services needed for local indigent veterans.

Activities

This board meets every other month to oversee and advise on programs for indigent veterans funded through a millage related to veteran's relief, as authorized by RCW 73.08. The Board is managed by the Health and Community Services Department. Funds are used to staff and operate a number of veterans' services programs including assistance for homeless veterans (rental assistance and case management); civil law advocacy for veterans; and transportation services. The board helps prioritizes funding and programming, provides oversight, and participates in outreach.

Whatcom County Ferry Advisory Committee

Purpose

The Whatcom County Ferry Advisory Committee (WCFAC) provides review and recommendations to the Whatcom County Council and Executive on issues that affect the ongoing operations and infrastructure of ferry service to Lummi Island.

Activities

This Advisory Committee meets monthly to review proposed changes to ferry operations and fares; annually review the ferry fund; monitor the demands of and improvements to ferry services; and ferry replacement options. The Committee also provides a forum for those who depend upon Lummi Island ferry service to voice their ideas and concerns about the ferry service.

Whatcom County Library System's Rural Library Board of Trustees

Purpose

The Whatcom County Library System's (WCLS) Rural Library Board adopts policy for governing the rural library district, supervises district properties, employs the library director, carries out planning and sets an annual budget as well as conducts other work necessary for the orderly, efficient and sustainable operation of the library as outlined in the RCW.

Activities

The Board is managed by the Whatcom County Library System and is responsible for budget oversight and setting policy for WCLS. Day-to-day management is entrusted to the Executive Director, who is hired by the Board. Regular public meetings are held monthly.

Whatcom Racial Equity Commission

Purpose

The Whatcom Racial Equity Commission (WREC) is a conduit for ongoing community collaboration, engagement, and education within the broader context of diversity and inclusion. The purpose of the WREC is to gather, review, and evaluate data and to make recommendations on eliminating racial inequities, in all its forms, throughout Whatcom County. The vision of the WREC is that all races in Whatcom County live, thrive, and belong for who they are, as they are, without fear, every day.

Activities

The WREC is a new advisory group being created on contract with the Chuckanut Health Foundation. They are currently seeking applications for commission membership.

Wildlife Advisory Committee

Purpose

The Wildlife Advisory Committee advises the Whatcom County Planning and Development Services Department staff and the Whatcom County Council on the value of wildlife and habitat management issues as they relate to the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan, with the goal of integrating wildlife management and protection into the community planning process.

Activities

The Wildlife Advisory Committee is staffed by the Public Works Department and is currently meeting monthly. It has begun review of the Comprehensive Plan and will participate in the 2025 Comprehensive Plan Update process.

EXHIBIT A

PROPOSED BY: Council
INTRODUCED: 1/14/2025

RESOLUTION NO. 2025-005

AMENDING THE COUNTY COUNCIL AND EXECUTIVE EXPECTATIONS FOR ADVISORY GROUPS

WHEREAS, the County Council approved the "County Council and County Executive Expectations for Boards and Commissions" on February 13, 2013 and reaffirmed the Expectations on March 22, 2022, and;

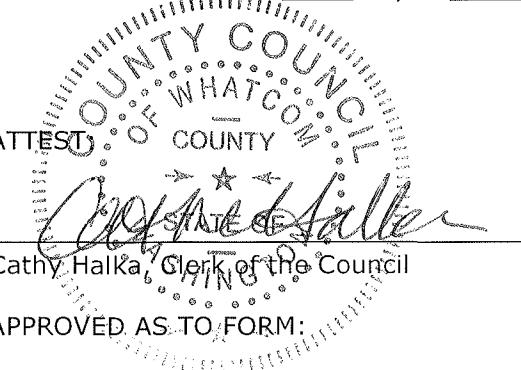
WHEREAS, the document is sent to all individuals appointed to County advisory groups, and;

WHEREAS, there has been higher mid-term turnover on many advisory groups in recent years for a variety of reasons, which requires clarification that appointees are expected to serve their full terms and how resignations, if necessary, should be handled.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Whatcom County Council amends the "County Council and County Executive Expectations for Boards and Commissions" is updated as shown in Exhibit A, and;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the "County Council and County Executive Expectations for Boards and Commissions" will be re-signed each time a new Council Chair and/or County Executive is seated. |

APPROVED this 14th day of January, 2025.

ATTEST,

Cathy Halka, Clerk of the Council
APPROVED AS TO FORM:

George Roche, via email
George Roche, Civil Deputy Prosecutor

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON


Kaylee Galloway, Council Chair



County Council and County Executive Expectations for Advisory Group Members

Thank you for serving as an appointee and member of one of Whatcom County's advisory groups. You play a vital role by bringing citizens' perspectives to assist us as policy makers by studying critical issues and forming well-developed, thoughtful recommendations to aid us in decision-making. We value the perspective and service contributed by the many volunteers who contribute to our leadership.

In County government, we operate in a complex legal context and follow a series of principles to promote public trust as expectations for your services:

- All advisory group meetings are to be conducted in public session, and public notice of meetings shall be given in accordance with State law and as advised by County legal counsel.
- A quorum of members will not deliberate about advisory group work and issues via e-mail or in unnoticed "side meetings" or "gatherings" if these actions may be in violation of open meeting laws.
- Individual advisory group members and the collective group will be fair, impartial, professional, and respectful of the public, staff, and each other.
- Individual advisory group members and the collective group will adhere to the County Charter, County Code, and state laws. Specifically, members shall not discriminate on the grounds of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, sexual orientation (including gender identity), disability, or veteran status. Furthermore, members shall not engage in harassment that interferes with another person's work performance or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment.
- Members may not use their position to secure special privileges or exemptions for themselves or others.
- Members may not give or receive any compensation, gifts, or gratuities from entities or individuals who are or have been engaged in items of business under consideration before the board or commission to which they are appointed.
- Members may not formally represent an advisory group unless given express direction to do so by a majority vote of the advisory group.
- Members may not, at any time, formally act as a representative of Whatcom County government unless expressly commissioned to do so in writing by the County Executive or by formal action of the County Council.
- Appointed members are expected to regularly attend meetings and are not allowed to designate proxies to serve in their place unless allowed by the enabling statute.

- Appointees are expected to serve the entirety of their term, unless there are extraordinary circumstances that require a member to resign. If an appointee no longer qualifies to serve on the advisory group due to a change in residence outside of Whatcom County, they are expected to notify the facilitator and/or appointing authority (County Council or Executive) via letter or email.
- If an appointee anticipates an extended absence from regular participation, he/she shall notify the advisory group facilitator and/or the applicable appointing authority (County Council or Executive).
- If an appointee can no longer regularly attend advisory group meetings, they are expected to send notice of their resignation to the appointing authority. If an appointee becomes absent from regular attendance without notifying the County, the appointing authority may take steps to vacate the position.

Dated this 16TH day of January, 2025.

Satpal Sidhu
Satpal Sidhu, County Executive

Kaylee Galloway
Kaylee Galloway, County Council Chair