

Executive Report to Council

May 5, 2020

Satpal Sidhu County Executive

Good afternoon Council

First of all, I would like to start by thanking all the employees from Whatcom County, City of Bellingham, Other Cities, Port of Bellingham, PUD, many private companies' employees like BP Cherry Point, Phillip 66 and other volunteers, for their dedicated service to stand up the Unified Command. They not only made it operational but did an excellent job for safety of our community giving comfort to all residents that we are in good hands. Hats off to all of you for your sacrifices and thanks for taking risks for the sake of our community.

You all may have seen a large flock of birds flying with high intensity and going in many directions. When you look at them casually, it looks like state of confusion and chaos. Actually, if you observe them closely, they are very organized, each individual bird knows their role and direction and purpose in the full swarm. So was the scene for first couple of weeks and some concerns were expressed. However, soon the organization took control and everything fell in place. Thanks to everyone for your resilience and perseverance.

Thanks to the new format of the same organization and many volunteers are still there performing the same services. We will need you for many months to come.

Approaching Harvest Season for Local farms

I would like to share very somber conversation I had with farming community last week. Some six thousand transient workers will be in our county during the next harvesting season starting early June and lasting till early September. In addition to this there is comparable local families and, students and family members who work during the intense harvest season. These workers work at many farms and many places all the way from Skagit County to Eastern Washington on weekly basis. They live together in close quarters. This is their seasonal opportunity to make income for rest of the year. They want to work at any cost.

This can be a serious situation for the workers and the farm families. Any COVID 19 hot spot or community outbreak can be overwhelming. A letter from farming community was shared with the Council earlier today.

Water adjudication, Agricultural Water Board and Planning Unit:

You must have read the letter I wrote in response to the AG Water Board's position paper on the DOE Water Adjudication process. I think this is a matter of same significance as the Point Elliot Treaty of 1855 and it will impact all segments of our community for many decades in future. I take this as an opportunity to work through the DOE process and settlement discussions at the same time. I am urging the Council to take lead on this issue and work with Planning Unit to engage in meaningful discussions and provide direction on implementation of Water Management Plan of 2005. I will be sending another letter to the Council and The Planning Unit Caucuses soon on the matter of making Planning Unit more effective and useful for WRIA 1 water issues of future.

I am asking Council to consider my draft letter requesting the Governor for a variance on holding certain virtual meeting of certain Boards, Commissions and Committees. It is important for the Governor to provide input on "necessary and routine, so we can engage on important policy issues.

Opening of Whatcom County economy:

We are all watching very emotional and sometime heated discussions about opening up our economy. Merely opening the front door is not sufficient to spur the economic activity. It depends upon the customers who walk through the front door. An ADO or Health Department can facilitate the process but it all depends upon how consumers / businesses are ready and able to spend the money.

- We are into first 2 months of this 12-18 months crisis. Like few minutes of a football game.
- No one is yet sure of the real impact of COVID 19 on our local and national economy.
- We are all guessing and arguing whose guess it better
- One in Four workers in our state are unemployed
- The Federal Stimulus money has no yet fully distributed.
- Businesses are in wait and see mode. No one is ready to spend their cash reserves.
- Businesses, possibly will start at may be 15-25% of their capacity and watch what happens next.
- There are few businesses which are direct part of local economy like restaurants, hair dressers, construction and few others. Large majority of businesses produce goods and services for other businesses or people outside of our county, state or country. Their

business viability depends upon if someone else is ready to buy their products or services.

- It is the larger economies like Seattle which will lead the way to recovery. We are a small microcosm of a larger economic network.

I am saying all this to put our local efforts in perspective. I am in full support of working together to re-start our local and state's economy as fast as we can safely do.

Our ADO and Health department have been busy since last couple of weeks to develop a joint strategy to open our businesses in a safe manner. You will hear more on this from Director of Health department on this topic and on our current status on testing capability, contact tracking teams, PPE availability and preparation for quarantine facility needs.

I would also like to engage the Council in other policy matters in the near future.

Thanks for your attention.