



Satpal Singh Sidhu
Whatcom County Executive
BSc, BSEE, MBA, Fulbright Scholar



Executive Report, January 9, 2024

Good evening Council member and all the constituents.

I would like to start by welcoming the two new council members Jon Scanlon and Mark Stremmer. Thanks for stepping up to serve your community.

Congratulations to returning councilmember Ben Elenbaas for your re-election to the Council.

I would like to congratulate our new Auditor, Stacy Henthorn, and returning Treasurer Steve Oliver and Assessor Rebecca Xczar.

Like they say, we have a new sheriff in town!

Congratulations to Sheriff Donnell Tanksley, who has been on the job since New Year's Day.

I would like to give an open invitation to each councilmember that I will be happy to set up one-on-one meeting to review current topics and projects at your convenience.

Priorities

The **Justice Project** will be a big focus not just for the coming year but for the next five plus years.

We have a team working on the 23-hour crisis relief center. This is a new type of facility for Washington State, so it will require some time to complete the design process. I want to explore the possibility of creating some interim capacity for this purpose while the center is being developed.

We are working on the underlying agreement with the cities for the construction of the jail facility and associated behavioral care center. We are also moving ahead on the many other projects in the Justice Project Implementation Plan.

Successful implementation of the **Healthy Children's Fund** is another top priority. After making significant investments in childcare using federal ARPA funds, we are moving ahead with additional funding opportunities in this coming year using the Healthy Children's Fund.

Adjudication and Solutions Table – We are working with the Administration of the Courts to ensure that we have court facilities and staff prepared to handle this enormous and lengthy legal proceeding. Our State legislators have introduced bills in the House and the Senate to add a Superior Court judge and the required support staff.

In parallel, after the adjudication is filed, I want to move forward on the collaborative work of the Solutions Table to restore salmon and provide farmers with water security.

Flood Hazard Mitigation – We experienced two major floods in my first term, and we cannot let those lessons be forgotten. Our River & Flood team will continue work through the FLIP process. We need to see this work through to its completion and advocate for state and federal funding to support solutions that will keep our communities safe from Deming and Sumas to Ferndale and the Lummi Nation.

Housing – I look forward to working with Council to use the tools that are available to us to address problems across the entire spectrum of the housing market – from low income housing to workforce housing and the broader market. I have had conversations with Mayor Lund and I anticipate working closely with the City of Bellingham on this issue.

Wetlands Bank – This is a long-term project that will result in habitat improvements and also expand opportunities for housing development as well as business. The fruits of this effort may not come for many years, but if we do not start those fruits will never come.

Comprehensive Plan – The Comprehensive Plan update presents an opportunity to think deeply and clearly about where and how we want to grow. Our future housing and business development needs, as well as climate resiliency and flooding threats, must be considered in this process.

Permitting process improvements – Over the past year I've heard many requests to improve our permitting process. I want to place a renewed emphasis on this issue and empower our permitting staff to take a more proactive approach to problem solving and decision making.

Administrative process improvements – Over the past several years, the County has significantly expanded its scope of services, and we are on the verge of undertaking a series of major projects. Our administrative structure, staffing, and policies need to be improved and strengthened to meet today's demands. In the next several months I expect to bring proposals to Council to address this need.



Submitted by: Executive Satpal Sidhu, County Executive