

RESOLUTION NO. \_\_\_\_\_

**ADOPTING A STATEMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH, SAFETY, AND JUSTICE  
FACILITY PLANNING PRINCIPLES FOR WHATCOM COUNTY**

**WHEREAS**, Whatcom County and its municipalities and Tribes desire to coordinate, contribute, and cooperate in enhancing public safety, and in particular our communities' behavioral health and criminal justice systems; and

**WHEREAS**, the County Council is taking leadership on the issue and would like to engage the community and other legislative bodies to guide future behavioral health and public safety/justice facility planning, and will seek constructive engagement with the public and other elected officials throughout the county; and

**WHEREAS**, all parties believe there is a need for an improved County jail, and that voters will approve a proposal that addresses the communities' full range of needs and values with a combined public health and public safety initiative that focuses on reducing our need for jail by funding treatments options first, and is built with community input.

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Whatcom County Council updates the principles established in Resolution 2016-008 and adopts the attached Statement of Incarceration Prevention and Reduction, Behavioral Health, Criminal Justice, and Public Safety/Justice Facility Planning Principles.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that due to a large number of other infrastructure investments that the County needs to make, the life and safety issues in the existing jail facility and the ever escalating costs of such investments, the Whatcom County Council intends to begin the process of developing a proposal for the voters, with our community values used as guidance, as soon as possible.

**BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED**, that the Whatcom County Council asks the other legislative authorities that have a stake in our shared behavioral health and criminal justice system to, as soon as possible, also adopt this Statement of Incarceration Prevention and Reduction, Behavioral Health, Criminal Justice, and Public Safety/Justice Facility Planning Principles, or similar statements that make clear how incarceration prevention, criminal justice, and public safety/justice planning needs to proceed.

**APPROVED** this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2019.

**ATTEST:**

**WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL  
WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dana Brown Davis, Clerk of the Council

\_\_\_\_\_  
Rud Browne, Council Chair

**APPROVED AS TO FORM:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Civil Deputy Prosecutor

## **Principles of Public Health, Safety, and Justice Facility Planning**

The Whatcom County Council would like to establish guiding principles for public health, safety, and justice facility planning, and requests the participation of the Lummi Nation, Nooksack Tribe, and all the Cities of Whatcom County.

We believe our communities are united in our commitment to public safety, justice, fiscal responsibility, harm reduction, healing, and prevention as public priorities.

We should strive for conditions where the cycle of incarceration is broken rather than perpetuated. With continued support and focus on mental health and substance abuse treatment and diversion rather than incarceration, we see an opportunity to continue to improve our criminal justice system and reduce incarceration. An increased focus on diversion and jail alternatives by diverting, where safe and appropriate, individuals who are charged with crimes into programs that allow them to stay with their families, like electronic home monitoring.

We, as a community, are fortunate that the Incarceration Prevention and Reduction Task Force (IPRTF) has researched and recommended many of these improvements. The Task Force includes a broad range of participants including representatives from organizations involved in criminal justice and law enforcement, policy makers, service providers, members of the public, and consumers of services throughout Whatcom County.

The IPRTF has shown support and leadership on many accomplishments that take a more holistic view of criminal justice and behavioral health issues including:

- Pretrial Services Unit in Whatcom County Superior Court, and
- Crisis Stabilization Facility (in process) to allow for increased diversion opportunities for those with behavioral health issues, and
- Ground-level Response and Coordinated Engagement (GRACE) program to reduce unnecessary incarceration, and
- Information and Needs Data exchange committee to increase the consistency and transparency of criminal justice data, and
- Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) program
- Sheriff's Office Behavioral Health Diversion Program

We also know that there are multiple deficiencies with the downtown public safety (jail) facility that include life-safety issues.

The cost of addressing the most significant issues are too high to continue into the future and the need for an appropriately sized replacement facility continues to be the most burdensome and needed capital issue that we face.

We continue to engage the constituents of Whatcom County to gather input that started with the Whatcom County Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee's Listening Tour. During that tour many participants agreed that there needs to be a public safety and justice facility for people who are violent and at risk of harming others and that the facility needs to be a safe and humane place for the corrections staff and those individuals who are housed there. People have also voiced that it's critical to prioritize treatment over punishment. We also heard strong support for a smaller jail located in downtown Bellingham.

Therefore, in order to guide the public process and County administrative plans and actions in the future, we do hereby put forward the following set of Incarceration Prevention and Reduction, Criminal Justice, Behavioral Health and Public Safety/Justice Facility Planning Principles for our communities:

1. The people of Whatcom County, the Lummi Nation, the Nooksack Tribe, and the Cities are best served by a shared public safety (jail) facility or a combination of shared facilities, and by a coordinated and integrated response to behavioral health issues that can reduce the use of the criminal justice system at a lower cost.
2. The following are inextricably linked: responsible stewardship of public funds, ensuring public safety, and providing adequate countywide behavioral health services.

3. The IPRTF's specific recommendations have influenced the direction of our future crisis stabilization facility, pre-booking and pre-trial diversions, jail alternatives, and behavioral health programming, and others outlined above and in the annual reports published by the IPRTF.
4. We will continue to commit funding towards community-based preventive services. We need post-release support to maximize successful re-entry and minimize recidivism. These actions now can hold down recurring criminal justice costs in the future.
5. We will continue to look towards behavioral health facilities beyond the construction and operation of the recent 32 bed crisis stabilization facility, to further our investment in prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and alternatives to jail.
6. Departments will provide data to decision-makers and the public, including relevant demographic, statistical, and jail usage information. Data collection will be enhanced in an open and transparent way by working with the INDEX committee of the IPRTF.
7. The size of jail facilities should be based on a comprehensive analysis of treatment, diversion and local criminal justice policies and the requirements of law. While accurate measures of current incarceration rates adjusted for future population growth are important, we also must equally consider national, state, and local trends towards improvements in prevention, alternatives, behavioral health, and re-entry support.
8. We will locate any new jail facility where it can work best for all of our partners, the public, and related businesses (attorneys, bail bonds, etc.). We should re-analyze an option of locating the facility at a downtown Bellingham location.
9. We consider the Irongate minimum security facility as a valuable piece of the criminal justice continuum. This facility could be retained for certain existing jail populations and programs, or expanded to include a crisis triage facility, a re-entry support facility, a behavioral health facility, or medical facility.
10. We will apportion construction and operating costs separately and fairly among jail users based on actual use or best estimates of actual future use.
11. We will continue to work with the County Prosecutor's Office, the District Court, Superior Court, and Lummi Tribal Court leadership to reduce the current use of bail and on probation procedures, as well as broader criminal justice issues that affect the size of the jail population but which are not under County legislative control.
12. We will issue an RFP for a Behavioral Health/Criminal Justice Planner. While the work of our IPRTF and community groups remains valid and vital, it is essential to hire a professional Criminal Justice/Behavioral Health Planner to evaluate the additional aspects of our system and our jail needs. Considerations such as financial commitments, jail location and size, diversion programs, and bail and prosecution reforms must be examined and reported on by an established, impartial expert.
13. We recognize the need to provide a safer, more secure, and healthier environment for those who work, visit, and are incarcerated within the public safety/justice facility; therefore, we will work to have a funding proposal on the ballot with a goal of no later than November 2020.
14. We commit to a transparent process of planning with opportunity for community input to the best of our ability every step of the way.