

ORDINANCE NO. _____

**ORDINANCE TO ESTABLISH AN INDEPENDENT REVIEW
OF THE COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

WHEREAS on January 21, 2020, the Washington State Department of Health confirmed the first case of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in the United States in the State of Washington, and, COVID-19, a respiratory disease that can result in serious illness or death, is caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which is a new strain of coronavirus that had not been previously identified in humans, which easily spreads from person to person; and

WHEREAS on January 31, 2020, the United States Department of Health and Human Services secretary Alex Azar declared a national public health emergency arising from COVID-19; and

WHEREAS on March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic with global spread, impacts, and health risks; and

WHEREAS in March 2020, Whatcom Unified Command (WUC) was activated to provide an integrated, coordinated, multi-jurisdictional response to the threat of COVID-19 locally, in partnership with the Whatcom County Health Department; and

WHEREAS the staff of the Whatcom County Government; the cities of Bellingham, Lynden, Ferndale, Blaine, Nooksack, Everson, and Sumas; the Lummi and Nooksack Nations; PeaceHealth; medical providers; fire districts; businesses; non-profit and faith-based organizations; community groups; and countless citizens all stepped forward to collectively fight the pandemic; and

WHEREAS in all prior emergencies the County has faced, we could rely on neighboring communities or states to provide us with materials and skilled workers to help us cope – but as this was a truly global disaster, for a time we had to rely on our own internal County sourced resources to manufacture PPE, distribute food etc.; and

WHEREAS Whatcom County can expect future emergencies to arise, of a yet unknown type, which could include future pandemics, floods, fire, earthquake, cyber-attack, widespread communications loss, and perhaps even things we have not yet imagined; and

WHEREAS in the book “The Great Influenza” the story of the Spanish Flu pandemic the author concludes:

“The final lesson of 1918, a simple one yet one most difficult to execute, is that...those in authority must retain the public's trust. The way to do that is to distort nothing, to put the best face on nothing, to try to manipulate no one. Lincoln said that first, and best. A leader must make whatever horror exists concrete. Only then will people be able to break it apart.”; and

WHEREAS this is not humanity’s first pandemic, nor will it be our last; and

WHEREAS citizens will be less likely to blame their government for future disasters caused by factors outside our control, but will have good reason to be critical if their government fails to plan, prepare and learn from past experiences; and

WHEREAS the Pandemic has truly tested our structures and processes for dealing with disaster, and in doing so has provided us an ideal opportunity to evaluate, to recognize what we did well and where we have an opportunity to improve; and

WHEREAS the Pandemic response has inspired various requests to review: the

makeup of the County Health Board; Unified Command; the County Emergency Management Plan; and County policy related to communications with the public; and

WHEREAS the people most qualified to provide feedback on our response are those who actively worked on answering the needs of the community; and

WHEREAS this year we will have several key members of our community retiring and we would like to hear from them before they become unavailable; and

WHEREAS the best way to determine the lessons to be learned from the Pandemic is to appoint a Special Commissioner to interview the key participants, to document the lessons learned, to better inform the community on how we can ensure the things we did right, what will be likely to occur again, where we need to improve, and what to avoid next time.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED that the Whatcom County Council establishes a County Commission to review our community's response to the COVID-19 Pandemic; and

BE IT FURTHER ORDAINED that County Council shall select, and Whatcom County shall hire, an independent Special Commissioner with the requisite qualifications (ideally a retired senior lawyer familiar with the county) to ~~head the Commission~~ **to conduct the inquiry**; and

BE IT FURTHER ORDAINED that such Special Commissioner be compensated at the normal market rate for such work, and be provided the necessary resources including office space and one or more full-time support persons to manage meetings and documentation; and

BE IT FURTHER ORDAINED that they shall include, but not be limited to examining: the makeup of the County Health Board; Unified Command; County policy related to open communications with the public; expanding the designated senior county emergency advisory positions (i.e. manufacturing, logistics, communications) and the community sectors represented; and

BE IT FINALLY ORDAINED that the person shall complete and deliver their report to the County Council, County Executive and County Sherriff by ~~October 31st, 2021~~ **March 31, 2022**, to enable the county to incorporate their findings in future updates to the county's existing emergency response plan.

ADOPTED this ____ day of _____, 2021.

ATTEST:

Dana Brown-Davis, Clerk of the Council

**WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON**

Barry Buchanan, Council Chair

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

Civil Deputy Prosecutor

**WHATCOM COUNTY EXECUTIVE
WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON**

Satpal Sidhu, County Executive
() Approved () Denied

Date Signed: _____