



Whatcom County Executive Presents 2021-2022 Budget

The budget maintains fund reserves, preserves County workforce integrity and offers new initiatives to address pressing community issues.

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Today Whatcom County Executive Satpal Sidhu submitted his recommended 2021-2022 biennium budget to the County Council. The budget maintains adequate reserves for County operations while preserving a sufficient workforce to continue providing a high level of services to Whatcom County residents. The budget also includes new initiatives addressing racial equity issues, water settlement negotiations, and services for children and families.



County Executive Satpal Sidhu presents budget to County Council Chair Barry Buchanan

“Local governments across the nation have been forced to rethink and revise plans at every turn to respond to a dynamic situation and, to the credit of *our* employees, department heads and elected leaders, Whatcom County government has performed admirably in these difficult circumstances,” Executive Sidhu said in his budget message. “It is in this context, acknowledging both the limitations of our foresight and the need for flexibility, that I present my proposed budget for the 2021-2022 biennium.”

The budget anticipates a modest decline in revenue compared to pre-COVID levels, driven mostly by a decline in sales tax collections. With a hiring freeze in place since March 2019, as well as other cost-saving measures, the county has been able to keep expenditures in check and avoid

additional staff reductions. The projected end-of-year General Fund balance will remain above the benchmark of a balance greater than 15% of the previous year's revenue. Federal CARES Act funds have played an important role in covering COVID-related expenditures, thus preserving fund balances.

"My budget includes several new items to address important and time-sensitive issues needing attention from County Government. While they do not involve a significant commitment of funds, the future returns on these investments will be substantial in both tangible and immeasurable ways," Executive Sidhu said, introducing three new program proposals.

Child & Family Services: Services focused on the critical first 1000 days of a child's life; program to be developed within the Whatcom County Health Department; City of Bellingham and nonprofits to partner with County; expenditure request – \$300,000 over the biennium.

Water Settlement Negotiations: Appointment of dedicated negotiations manager from the County responsible for outreach to tribes and other stakeholders; County to pursue financial support from State Legislature; expenditure request – \$500,000 over the biennium.

Racial Justice Commission: Establishment of commission to identify sources of racial inequality in Whatcom County and develop strategies to address them; City of Bellingham is expected to support this joint effort; expenditure request – \$130,000 over the biennium.

The County Executive recognized the continuing need for dexterity in responding to the uncertain economic conditions. "Today I am confident that our shared experience of 2020 has made County Government more resilient and better prepared for changes we'll see over the next biennium. Together, we will regularly revisit our budget assumptions and stand ready to respond accordingly," Executive Sidhu said.

The complete recommended budget, including the County Executive's budget message, [can be found here](#).

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