

Observer Guide

Diana Bradrick
Whatcom County Auditor



Whatcom County Auditor's Office—Election Division
311 Grand Avenue, Suite 103
Bellingham, WA 98225

Hours: Monday - Friday 8:30 am - 4:30 pm *excluding holidays*
On every election day, we are open until 8:00 pm

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Web: www.whatcomcounty.us/1574/Elections

Introduction

Welcome to Whatcom County Elections. We appreciate your participation as an interested member of the public, or as an Official Party Observer. The presence of observers increases transparency and helps to enhance voter confidence in the process.

Anyone has the right to observe any part of the election process. Observers may include the media, representatives of the political parties, campaigns, and the general public.

The official observer program is dictated by State law. If you have questions, direct them to the **Auditor, Chief Deputy Auditor, or Election Supervisor**. They are authorized to represent the county in matters of elections. Temporary election team members perform specific tasks and duties during election processes and do not have the authority to speak for the Auditor or County.

Election Division Supervisory Personnel

Auditor	Diana Bradrick	dbradric@co.whatcom.wa.us	360-778-5105
Chief Deputy Auditor	Stacy Henthorn	shenthor@co.whatcomm.wa.us	360-778-5130
Election Supervisor	Amy Grasher	agrasher@co.whatcom.wa.us	360-778-5133

Observer Responsibilities

1. To provide an independent perspective of the Election. You have the right to witness the proceedings to confirm that the statutes and the rules are properly carried out. Violations of, or exceptions to, procedures should be reported to the supervisory personnel (Auditor, Chief Deputy, or Election Supervisor).
2. To take an oath prior to observing, sign in and out when observing, and follow the Observer Guidelines.
3. Direct questions to the Auditor, Chief Deputy Auditor, or Election Supervisor.
4. To observe ballot processing, occurring daily between 8:00 am and 4:30 pm unless otherwise noted on our website calendar.
5. Coordinate scheduling with political parties if representing a political party.

Observer Guidelines

As an observer, **you may**:

- Sit or stand in the areas designated for observation
- Ask questions of the Auditor, Chief Deputy Auditor, or Election Supervisor
- Store belongings (coats, purses, etc) in the drawers designated for observers

As an observer, **you may not**:

- Touch or handle ballots, equipment, or storage containers
- Interact with temporary election workers
- Disrupt the election process
- Have food or drink with you in the Election Center
- Answer phone calls in the Election Center
- Have conversations with other observers

Observer Guidelines:

1. Observers are to watch the process, not participate in the process, and are expected to remain objective and independent of the Election Division.
2. Privacy of information observed on computer screens must be maintained and no record may be made of any information (either written or photographic). No written or media record of names, addresses, or other information from outside the ballot envelope or other ballot material is allowed.
3. Ask supervisory personnel before taking photographs or videos. Photography is allowed only to show the work atmosphere, not the actual work product.
4. Avoid the use of fragrances.
5. If, at any time, the conduct of the observers, media or public becomes a distraction, the supervisory personnel reserves the right to request that person to leave. The Auditor reserves the right to designate observation area(s) and may limit the number of persons observing any aspect of the process whenever it is necessary to preserve order and to safeguard the integrity of the process. (RCW 29A.64.030)
6. These guidelines may be modified by the Auditor at any time. If they are modified, new guidelines will be posted on our website.
7. Observer training is provided each year, but is not required to observe election processes. The training is recorded and available on our website for viewing.
8. Each political party is responsible for recruiting and scheduling their official party observers. Ballot processing will occur even if there are no observers present.

How to Observe Election Activities

Election activities may be viewed:

- **Online** via the Ballot Processing Live Webcam
- **In-person** in the Election Center, during business hours, and signature verification in the Auditor's Office

Elections in Whatcom County

Population: 228,000 (2020 census data)

Active Registered Voters: 155,184 (as of 05/12/2022)

Precincts: 173

The Whatcom County Auditor's Office conducts elections for the following jurisdictions:

- Federal
- State
- Congressional
- Legislative
- Judicial
- County
- Port of Bellingham
- Public Utility District 1
- Cities
- Schools
- Fire Protection & Authorities
- Water
- Cemetery
- Park & Recreation
- Public Hospital
- Library
- Precinct Committee Officers
(only contested races appear on the Primary in even years)

There are 4 possible elections each year (RCW 29A.04.330):

February Special* Held the second Tuesday in February

April Special* Held the fourth Tuesday in April

August Primary Occurs on the first Tuesday in August in:

Odd years Nonpartisan offices with 3 or more candidates will be on the primary election ballot, with the top 2 vote-getters moving on to the general election.

Even years Partisan offices always appear on the primary election ballot, even if there is only one candidate. Public Utility District 1 is the only nonpartisan office that runs in even years in Whatcom County.

November General Occurs on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November

***May occur if local district files a ballot measure**

Election Activities Overview

The work to hold an election starts in the months prior and continues in the weeks following the election.

Tasks Completed before Election Day:

- **Voter Registration** is a year-round process that follows statutory guidelines
- **Candidate Filing** is completed in May
- **Ballot Measure Submissions** are reviewed and accepted by resolution deadlines in statute
- **Designing the Ballot** and confirming that all races and measures are correct
- **Testing of Equipment & Software** to ensure everything is working properly
- **Mailing of Ballots** 20 days prior to Election Day
- **Processing Returned Ballots** starting the day ballots go out

Tasks Completed on Election Day:

- **Processing Returned Ballots**
- **Tabulation of Ballots** occurs after 8:00 pm when results are uploaded to the Secretary of State, and available on our website (Current Election tab)

Tasks Completed After Election Day:

- **Processing Returned Ballots** continues until the day before Certification (postmarks are verified)
- **Manual Hand Count & Auditing of Results**
- **Certification of Election Results**
- **Recounts** are conducted if necessary

Logic & Accuracy Test

The Logic & Accuracy Test is the process of testing the programming of the vote tallying system and Accessible Voting Units (AVU) used in the primary, general or special election. The test verifies the system will correctly count votes cast for all candidates and measures that appear on the ballot and that the machines are functioning to required specifications for that election. A pre-approved test deck of ballots is created and used for the test. The test is conducted at least 3 days prior to an election. The general public, local political parties, and the press are notified through a press release of the date and time the test will occur (also on our website, Current Election tab). Observers are welcome to attend. After testing is complete, the Certification is signed by all attendees. The test ballots and printed results, shall be securely sealed and stored.

Test Deck

Ballots marked in a pattern, pre-approved by the Secretary of State, will be put through the tallying system during the official logic and accuracy test. The deck shall be marked in such a way that it tests the ability of the tabulating system to correctly count the ballots. The deck shall test the system's ability to accurately count all candidates, measures, write-in votes, overvotes and blank ballots along with ballots marked by the Accessible Voting Units (AVUs).

Ballot Processing Steps

1. Collect

Teams of **two people** collect returned ballots, either by;

- a. walking to the Post Office to pick up from designated secure location AND
- b. traveling to the official ballot drop boxes. Ballots are transported using numbered seals/logs, and remain securely sealed until their arrival at the Election Center.

2. Sort

Return envelopes collected at drop boxes are sorted into trays facing the same direction. Envelopes are kept together in trays based on how they were returned (for example, Ferndale Drop Box, or Mail).

3. Scan First Pass on Agilis Envelope Sorter & Manual Batch Processing

Return envelopes are scanned using the Agilis envelope sorter. Envelopes are marked as *Received*. The Agilis envelope sorter also takes a photograph of the signature on the envelope. The sorter will divert envelopes into pockets.

Some return envelopes are manually processed if an envelope is unable to be scanned using the Agilis ballot sorter.

4. Signature Verification

All signatures are checked *before* the ballot can be counted. We compare the signature on the return envelope with the signature(s) we have on file for each voter. Envelopes are *Accepted* if the signature matches.

5. Scan Second Pass on Agilis Envelope Sorter

Return envelopes are scanned for a second time using the Agilis envelope sorter. On the second pass, the sorter will divert return envelopes that have been rejected.

The sorter will create groups of ballots that have been accepted, and slice the return envelope open. A target card containing a group number will be placed with each group of ballots. The target card helps track the ballots during processing.

6. Signature Review

Return envelopes that have been diverted for signature issues are organized and reviewed.

If the signature does not match, or the envelope is unsigned, the voter will be mailed a letter to correct the issue and will be contacted by phone after Election Day. Voters have until the day before certification to respond and have their ballot counted.

Ballot Processing Steps

7. Separate

The security sleeve containing the ballot is removed from the return envelope. Ballots returned without a security sleeve are counted. Sleeves (with the ballot inside) are sorted facing the same direction, and shuffled before the group is completed.

Empty return envelopes are stored by group number in the boxes at the back of the room. Workers ensure the envelopes are empty by looking through the holes.

8. Open & Inspect

Ballots are removed from the security sleeve and inspected. Workers are inspecting the ballot to ensure the votes marked will be read by the scanning equipment. Ballots needing additional adjudication are flagged for review.

Workers lay the ballot flat and count the ballots. The total needs to match the total on the target card. Workers initial, date, and write the total number of ballots on the target card.

9. Audit (*duplicate if necessary*)

Groups of ballots are reviewed and audited at random. Duplication of ballots may occur if necessary.

10. Scan

The ballots are scanned. Images are stored on a secure and air-gapped system (no internet access). Once scanned, the ballots are kept in a sealed, tamper-evident bag.


11. Adjudicate

The electronic images are reviewed. Reviewers are looking at overvotes, undervotes, and write-ins. Workers use the Washington State Voter Intent manual to ensure decisions are made consistently. Any unresolved ballots are reviewed by the Canvassing Board.

12. Reporting results

Results are unknown until 8:00 pm election day. Tabulation occurs at 8:00 pm election night, and posted to our website soon after. Results are uploaded daily after election day as long as there are more than 500 ballots to be counted. The election is certified three weeks after a general, and ten days following a special or primary.


August 3, 2021 - Primary Election



GROUP 001

Step	Date	Initials	# of Ballots
Accepted Ballots			
Separator			Skip Count
Opener			
Scanner			

Paper Ballots: # or All paper
Needs: Adjudication Duplication
Ad. Team: Initial Initial Date
Verify Team:

Forced for Review:

August 3, 2021 Primary Election

GROUP 001

August 3, 2021 Primary Election

GROUP 001

Manual Hand Count (audit)

Random Batch Audit – takes place no later than forty-eight hours after election day. Six batches of ballots are randomly selected by political party observers. Observers also select the contest to be audited at random. The audit compares the hand count of the selected batches and contest to the electronic results of the contest. The random check procedures include a process for expanding the audit to include additional ballots if the random check results in a discrepancy.

Canvassing Board

Canvassing Board makes all decisions on voter intent not specifically contained in the Secretary of State Voter Intent Statewide Standards on *What Is A Vote*. Only the Canvassing Board can reject a ballot. Canvassing Board certifies final election results. Meetings are open to the public and the schedule is posted.

Membership on the board is defined by statute:

- County Auditor, or delegate
- County Council Chair, or delegate
- County Prosecuting Attorney, or delegate

Certification

Certification of Election – takes place 10 days after a Special Election, 14 days after a Primary and 21 days after a General Election. The Canvassing Board is presented with the final tally of votes and supporting documentation. Once the Canvassing Board adopts final reports, the election is certified by the Board and is officially closed.