



Skagit County - Government Relations Report January 16, 2021

On the first day of the 2021 legislative session, the State Capitol building was protected by perimeter fencing and members of the national guard as legislators entered to meet in person for one day. Socially distanced, and wearing N-95 masks, they debated and adopted rules to allow for a virtual legislative session. Republicans challenged and voted against the virtual format, arguing it would result in limited public access and transparency. The rules passed despite this opposition.

The Legislators met virtually in committees for the remainder of the week, holding public hearings and work sessions. There are a few notable components to the new virtual rules related to the committee process. All committees will meet virtually, and anyone may submit testimony, written comments, and or express a position by “signing in” on a bill. In previous legislative sessions, a person had to be on the capitol campus to engage in these activities. While committee members will be able to see this input, the public will not be able to see the written comments or signed in positions unless they request this information directly from committee staff. This will make it challenging to see which stakeholders are supporting/opposing various legislative proposals in real time. In the Senate, committees will need to provide two days-notice that they plan to vote on a bill and must submit proposed amendments to bills one day prior to the bill being voted on. The House rules are less specific and leave more discretion to the Chairs of the committee.

Legislative Priorities

Skagit County Morgue

Skagit County is requesting \$135,000 in the capital budget for the construction of a new county morgue. This project would greatly increase caseload capacity for the County and provides regional benefit, including increased capacity for soft-tissue donation. Sen. Keith Wagoner (R- Sedro-Woolley) is sponsoring this request in the Senate, and this week, GTHGA secured the sponsorship of Rep. Dave Paul (D- Oak Harbor) in the House. We have been coordinating with County staff to complete capital budget forms for this project, which we aim to submit early next week. We are planning a virtual tour for Rep. Paul and Sen. Wagoner of the current morgue facility sometime within the next few weeks.

Didg^wálič Wellness Center

Skagit County is a strong advocate for statewide and regional investments in behavioral health. The County supports the Swinomish Tribe’s request for \$9 million in capital budget funding to expanding the existing didg^wálič Wellness Center. The request is part of Phase III of the Wellness Center, which includes the addition of detox, emergency housing, transitional and workforce housing components. GTHGA will be drafting a letter of support for the project on behalf of the County, which will be shared with the Swinomish Tribe’s lobbyist to pass along to legislators.

Re-Appropriate Funds for Sedro-Woolley E&T

Skagit County received \$1.5 million in the 2017-19 biennium and \$6.6 million in the 2019-2021 biennium in funding for the Skagit County Evaluation and Treatment Center. Sen. Keith Wagoner (R- Sedro-Woolley) and Rep. Carolyn Eslick (R- Sultan) relayed that they will ensure these funding



amounts are reappropriated; both legislators sit on their respective chamber's appropriations committee. As budget negotiations advance, we will work with other members of the delegation to demonstrate support for the project, likely providing written materials in support of the re-appropriation.

Levy Certification Timing

Skagit County is putting forward a proposal that would better align the dates by which the County must certify property tax levies and budget adoption. Currently, the County must adopt the budget before certifying property tax levies for all taxing districts, making compliance impossible. Rep. Carolyn Eslick (R- Sultan) has agreed to sponsor this proposal. GTHGA, Trisha Logue, and Laura Han from the County met with Rep. Eslick and House Republican staff this week to discuss the proposal. GTHGA worked with Ms. Logue to develop intent language and talking points to provide Rep. Eslick, who will share these items with her colleagues. At Rep. Eslick's request, GTHGA and the County reached out to other stakeholders possibly interested in the proposal to ensure there are no conflicts going forward. Though cities will not be impacted by the proposal, the draft bill was distributed to Sedro-Woolley, Arlington, Monroe, Sultan, and Mount Vernon. GTHGA also sent the bill draft to the County Assessors Association, the Association of Washington Cities, and WSAC. Besides some minor technical edits, there were no concerns with the bill raised. Rep. Alex Ramel (D-Bellingham) has agreed to sign on to the bill as a co-sponsor. The bill is likely to be referred to the House Finance Committee, and as a Finance Committee member, Rep. Ramel is well positioned to advance the bill.

Other Items

GTHGA is monitoring the following priority items on your behalf. We will provide updates on these items as legislative action occurs. We will continue to be in contact with you on legislative proposals relevant to these items.

REET 2 Flexibility

Skagit County requests that the Legislature allows temporary authority for jurisdictions to use REET 2 revenue for affordable housing operations and maintenance. This provision is included in [House Bill 1069](#), sponsored by House Local Government Chair Rep. Gerry Pollet (D- Seattle). Commissioner Ron Wesen testified in support of the bill at the hearing on Wednesday, Jan. 13th. Commissioner Wesen highlighted immediate need to house vulnerable individuals, especially during the pandemic. Commissioner Wesen offered the County's joint housing project with Catholic Community Services as an example of a project that would be funded with this flexibility. The bill was passed out of committee with an amendment removing lodging tax flexibility provisions on Friday, January 15th; REET 2 flexibility remains in the bill.

You may watch Commissioner Wesen's [testimony here](#).

COVID Relief and Recovery

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted local governments and the communities they serve. Funding provided to counties for COVID-19 response is used for essential programs, including local public health, emergency rental assistance, emergency homelessness assistance, and small business economic relief. Skagit County requests that the Legislature continue to provide sufficient funding to maintain COVID-19 response and other essential county functions.



As discussed at WSAC Legislative Steering Committee on Jan. 15th, the Governor-request regional public health restructure legislation has been introduced. As a reminder, this proposal is split in to two bills: a funding bill, which provides funding for foundational public health services, and the public health restructure bill. Both proposals are sponsored by Sen. June Robinson (D- Everett) in the Senate and Rep. Marcus Riccelli (D- Spokane) in the House.

- Funding Bill: [House Bill 1201](#); [Senate Bill 5149](#)
- Restructure Bill: [House Bill 1152](#); [Senate Bill 5173](#)

This is the first time we have seen bill language for these proposals. WSAC provided a summary of both proposals in their Jan. 15th issue paper, as follows:

[House Bill 1152](#) creates a work group that will make recommendations to the Secretary of the Department of Health a system for counties to form comprehensive public health districts using existing regionalized health structures as a model, including performance measures and adequate funding.

- By **January 1, 2023**, counties must form comprehensive public health districts as determined by the work group.
- Counties with populations over 1 million may be considered a comprehensive public health district without joining with other counties. (King County)
- After January 1, 2023, foundational public health services funding will be distributed only to the Department of Health, the state Board of Health, Indian health programs, and comprehensive public health districts certified by the department.
- Members of district boards of health will include one commissioner from each county; one elected city official from a larger city and a smaller city; one tribal representative; a number equal to the city and county seats for hospital representatives, practicing physicians and nurses, consumer representatives, and the district health officer.
- A district advisory committee must also be established to include up to 15 members with at least one of the following: teacher, consumer representative, two consumer representatives from communities experiencing health inequities.

[Senate Bill 5149](#) requires the Insurance Commissioner to assess health carriers, Medicaid managed care organizations, and third-party administrators a per member per month assessment of \$3.25 beginning in Fiscal Year 2023 to be deposited into the foundational public health services account. The fiscal note is not yet available.

WSAC is looking for specific feedback from counties on how this proposal will impact existing public health operations.

Support Capital Budget Funding for:

- Heritage Grant Program
 - o Kji Kelly, Executive Director of Historic Seattle, testified in the Senate Ways and Means Committee and the House Capital Budget Committee in support of the Governor's proposed investments in the Heritage Grant Program this week.
- Washington State Housing Trust Fund
- Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office Grants
- Brian Abbot Fish Barrier Removal Board



Upcoming Events

Environment & Energy (House) - Virtual, - 1/19 @ 8:00am

HB 1099 - Public Hearing - Improving the state's climate response through updates to the state's comprehensive planning framework. (Remote testimony.)

Housing & Local Government (Senate) - Virtual, - 1/19 @ 8:00am

SB 5006 - Public Hearing - Concerning local parks funding options. (Remote testimony.) (Support)

SB 5221 - Public Hearing - Concerning regulation of accessory dwelling units located outside of urban growth areas. (Remote testimony.)

Finance (House) - Virtual, - 1/21 @ 8:00am

HB 1025 - Public Hearing - Concerning local parks funding options. (Remote testimony.) (Support)

Health Care & Wellness (House) - Virtual, - 1/21 @ 10:00am

HB 1152 - Public Hearing - Supporting measures to create comprehensive public health districts. (Remote testimony.) (Oppose)

Environment & Energy (House) - Virtual, - 1/21 @ 1:30pm

HB 1117 - Public Hearing - Promoting salmon recovery through revisions to the state's comprehensive planning framework. (Remote testimony.)

Bill Summaries

Outlined below are relevant bills GTHGA is tracking for the County. Bills that are in the "lobbying" category are those that GTHGA is taking action to either advance or stall; bills that are marked as "monitoring" are those that GTHGA is keeping track of but not actively lobbying.

Lobbying

<u>Bill Details</u>	<u>Status</u>	<u>Sponsor</u>	<u>Position</u>
<u>HB 1025</u> (SB 5006) Local parks funding options Concerning local parks funding options.	H Finance	Wicks	Support
<u>HB 1069</u> Local gov fiscal flexibility Concerning local government fiscal flexibility.	H Local Govt	Pollet	Support



[HB 1152](#)
(SB 5173) **Comp public health districts** H HC/Wellness Riccelli Oppose
Supporting measures to create comprehensive public health districts.

[SB 5006](#)
(HB 1025) **Local parks funding options** S Housing & Loca Van De Wege Support
Concerning local parks funding options.

Monitoring

<u>Bill Details</u>	<u>Status</u>	<u>Sponsor</u>	<u>Position</u>
<u>HB 1056</u> Public meetings/emergencies Concerning open public meeting notice requirements and declared emergencies.	H Local Govt	Pollet	
<u>HB 1070</u> Housing/local tax revenue Modifying allowed uses of local tax revenue for affordable housing and related services to include the acquisition and construction of affordable housing and facilities.	H Finance	Ryu	
<u>HB 1099</u> Comprehensive planning Improving the state's climate response through updates to the state's comprehensive planning framework.	H Env & Energy	Duerr	
<u>HB 1110</u> Local boards of health Concerning the composition of local boards of health.	H HC/Wellness	Riccelli	
<u>HB 1117</u> Comp. planning/salmon Promoting salmon recovery through revisions to the state's comprehensive planning framework.	H Env & Energy	Lekanoff	
<u>HB 1201</u> (SB 5149) Found. public health funding Funding foundational public health services.	H Finance	Riccelli	
<u>HB 1202</u> Police misconduct/civil rem. Addressing meaningful civil remedies for persons injured as a result of police misconduct, including by allowing for an award of attorney fees in addition to damages and injunctive and declaratory relief.	H Civil R & Judi	Thai	



GMA actions effective date S Housing & Loca Salomon

[SB 5042](#) Concerning the effective date of certain actions taken under the growth management act.

[SB 5149](#) **Found. public health funding** S Health & Long Robinson
(HB 1201) Funding foundational public health services.

[SB 5221](#) **Accessory dwelling units** S Housing & Loca Gildon
Concerning regulation of accessory dwelling units located outside of urban growth areas.
