



Skagit County

Legislative Report

March 11, 2023

SESSION CUTOFF CALENDAR

March 8, 2023	Chamber-of-Origin Deadline
March 29, 2023	Opposite Chamber Policy Committee Deadline
April 4, 2023	Opposite Chamber Fiscal Committee Deadline
April 12, 2023	Opposite Chamber Deadline
April 23, 2023	Session adjourns - Sine Die

Overview

The House and the Senate spent long hours on the floor voting on bills all last week up until Wednesday's house-of-origin cutoff deadline. With the exception of bills that are considered "necessary to implement the budget," or "NTIB," any bills that did not advance out of the chamber in which they were introduced are now no longer under consideration this legislative session. NTIB bills are exempt from the standard deadlines and will advance when budget proposals are released. Budget proposals will be released by the end of March.

Legislators returned to meeting in committees in the latter part of the week, holding public hearings, amending, and voting on bills approved by the opposite chamber. The next deadline requires bills to be voted out of the policy committee in the opposite chamber by March 29.

The Department of Ecology raised an estimated \$300 million at its first quarterly auction at the end of February for emissions allowances under the state's new Cap-and-Invest Program, a component of the Climate Commitment Act. Ecology released a summary report on March 7, available to view [here](#). All allowances were sold and the settlement price of the first auction was \$48.50 per allowance. The Legislature will spend these revenues on efforts to reduce emissions. Governor Inslee's 2023-2025 biennial budget proposal plans expenditure of about \$1.7 billion in revenue from the allowance auctions,

but if the allowance price remains consistent, the sales could generate significantly more than the state's estimate.

Funding Requests

The County's budget requests have been submitted to budget leadership by delegation sponsors. We expect to see budget proposals in the last weeks of March, following the March 20 revenue forecast and will not have more to report on these items until budget proposals are released.

Skagit County Crisis Stabilization Center (SCCSC)

Skagit County is requesting \$12.7 million in the capital budget for Phase II of the Skagit County Crisis Stabilization Campus. This request would complete the funding for design and construction of a facility hosting 16 crisis stabilization beds and 32 co-occurring treatment and acute detox beds. The request forms have been submitted in the House and Senate. We sent a letter to Capital Budget writers from members of the Skagit County delegation this week in support of the project to encourage the inclusion of funding in capital budget proposals.

Skagit County Culvert Package

We are working with Representative Lekanoff on a request for \$1.8 million to backfill increased costs for the County's design for 11 culverts, funded in the 2022 legislative session. The request has been submitted both as a capital and transportation funding request. We will have more to report on this item once budget proposals are released, in March.

Voluntary Stewardship Program Funding

A request has been submitted by Senator Ron Muzzall (R- 10th LD) for \$1 million for Skagit County under the Voluntary Stewardship Program. The funding would be used for riparian plantings on Skagit agricultural lands.

Samish Island Road Resiliency Study

Representative Lekanoff submitted a transportation budget request for \$350,000 for the County to complete a resiliency study for Samish Island Road in response to sea-level rise.

Requests for Support & Funding Initiatives

Support Salmon Recovery Efforts Utilizing a Collaborative Approach

Standing joint committee on salmon recovery: [House Bill 1686](#), sponsored by Representative Debra Lekanoff (D- 40th LD), continues to advance. The bill creates a Joint Salmon Recovery and Reform Committee to review and research salmon recovery and reform programs to educate and promote the dissemination of salmon recovery and reform research to state and local government policymakers. The bill advanced out of the House Agriculture and Natural Resources last week and was referred to the House Appropriations Committee, which held a hearing on the bill this week and voted to

approve the bill on February 23. The bill did not advance out of the House Rules Committee in time for the house-of-origin deadline this week.

Additional Legislative Issues

Support Public Safety and Reduce Court Backlog

State v. Blake decision/controlled substance possession: *State v. Blake decision/controlled substance possession:* [Second Substitute Senate Bill 5536](#) sponsored by Senator June Robinson (D- 38th LD) increases the penalty for knowing possession of controlled and counterfeit substances to a gross misdemeanor and creates a pretrial diversion program for individuals charged with possession. It requires courts to impose minimum jail sanctions on defendants convicted of possession who refuse substance use disorder treatment and to vacate possession convictions for defendants who complete required treatment. On March 3, the Senate passed the bill with several amendments:

- Requiring the individual to substantially comply with, rather than meaningfully engage with, recommended treatment to complete pretrial diversion.
- Authorizing a prosecutor to make a motion to terminate pre-trial diversion if the defendant is charged with simple possession subsequent to acceptance into pretrial diversion.
- For individuals participating in pre-trial diversion, requiring the court to reinstate 45 days of their suspended sentence if the individual willfully abandons or demonstrates a consistent failure to comply with treatment on their third or subsequent instance of being sentenced for possession.
- Provides that courts may not sanction an individual for failing to comply with recommended treatment if the individual has made a reasonable effort to comply but a lack of available treatment or, if indigent, a lack of funding for treatment.
- Requiring Washington State Patrol (WSP) to complete analysis of suspected drugs in possession cases within 45 days. The bill provides funding to implement this requirement. Clarifies that WSP's failure to complete drug analysis does not constitute grounds to dismiss a criminal case.
- Requiring the state to make resources available to assist defendants in obtaining a substance use disorder evaluation within 7 days of agreeing to participate in pre-trial diversion.

The vote was 28-21, with a bipartisan mix of votes on both sides of the vote tally.

Vehicular pursuits: [Senate Bill 5352](#) sponsored by Senator John Lovick (D- 44th LD) lowers the evidentiary threshold for engagement in vehicular pursuits from probable cause to reasonable suspicion that a person in the vehicle has, or is, committing a criminal offense. While this bill was not heard in committee, the Senate elected to suspend the rules to allow for a floor debate on March 8, the final day for bills to advance out of their house-of-origin. There was robust policy debate, with some Democrats stating that the current vehicular pursuits standard has saved lives, while Republicans asserted that the bill does not allow enough flexibility for peace officers to decide whether to engage in a pursuit. Still, legislators on both sides of the aisle offered comments that the proposal represents progress over the status quo, and therefore they

could support it. The Senate passed the bill by a vote of 26-23, with a bipartisan mix of votes on both sides of the tally.

Addressing the forensic pathologist shortage: [Substitute Senate Bill 5523](#) sponsored by Senator Manka Dhingra (D- 45th LD) creates a loan repayment program for board-certified forensic pathologists who work in identified shortage areas of the state for four years. It requires the Washington Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners to conduct a study of the critical shortage of board-certified forensic pathologists. The bill was passed unanimously by the Senate on March 6.

Requiring the Criminal Justice Training Commission to recruit and train a pool of applicants for hiring by law enforcement agencies: [Engrossed Substitute House Bill 1387](#) sponsored by Representative Bill Ramos (D- 5th LD) requires the Criminal Justice Training Commission to convene a work group to study and make recommendations on the recruitment and training of a pool of candidates who may be hired as peace officers by various law enforcement agencies. On March 3, the House of Representatives passed the bill unanimously.

Behavioral Health

Trueblood settlement- Competency evaluations and restoration services to persons suffering from behavioral health disorders: [Engrossed Second Substitute Senate Bill 5440](#), sponsored by Senator Manka Dhingra (D- 45th LD), establishes forensic health behavioral health treatment pathways to attempt to reduce caseload for forensic cases needing restoration in a state-owned behavioral health hospital. The bill was significantly amended on the floor with a striker removing several provisions, including all reference to “clinical intervention units” that would be located within a County jail. Instead, the bill establishes clinical intervention specialists, which are DSHS employees, that will be embedded within a County jail opting into the program. These specialists will provide direct services, enhanced oversight, and monitoring of the behavioral health status of forensic jail residents. Clinical intervention specialists will evaluate necessary prescriptions, ensure medication compliance, and ensure supportive behavioral health services are provided to forensic residents. They will also notify DSHS if an individual is no longer requiring forensic restoration services. The bill also establishes a state-funded grant program to renovate existing state, county, city, or non-profit owned facilities to be used for competency evaluation, restoration, civil conversion, or treatment for individuals acquitted by reason of insanity. The bill also establishes a diversion program, which allows individuals with 2 or more competency evaluations ordered within 24 months on separate charges, to complete a diversion program that would include outpatient treatment. If the individual agrees, their criminal charges are dismissed. The Court can also file for a defendant to participate in this diversion treatment program if there is a preponderance of evidence that the defendant is amenable to the program, and they may safely receive services within the community. Finally, the bill directs the Health Care Authority (HCA), subject to funds, to require contracts with providers to increase compensation for staff in outpatient competency restoration treatment to be more competitive. The Senate moved the bill out of the chamber 44-5, with Republicans casting the votes in opposition. The bill was referred to

the House Civil Rights and Judiciary Committee, which will hold a hearing on March 14 and is scheduled to advance the bill out of committee on March 17.

Contracting and procurement requirements for behavioral health services in medical assistance programs: [Second Substitute House Bill 1515](#), sponsored by Representative Nicole Macri (D- 43rd LD), requires the Health Care Authority to make certain changes to the managed care procurement process, including adopting regional standards for behavioral health networks managed by managed care organizations (MCOs), providing for behavioral health provider participation in the process, and evaluating options to reduce provider administrative burden. On March 2, the House of Representatives passed the bill unanimously with an amendment clarifying that the network adequacy standards for behavioral health providers are statewide standards assessed on a regional basis, and the standards are to be reviewed annually. The bill was referred to the Senate Health and Long Term Care Committee and will be heard on March 16.

23-hour crisis relief centers: [Second Substitute Senate Bill 5120](#) sponsored by Senator Manka Dhingra (D- 45th LD) requires the Department of Health to license 23-hour crisis relief centers, facilities that are open 24 hours per day, seven days a week, offering behavioral health to adults for no more than 23 hours and 59 minutes at a time. The centers will accept all walk-ins and drop-offs from first responders, mobile rapid response teams, fire department CARES teams, and individuals referred through the 988 system. They must adhere to a no-refusal policy for individuals dropped off by law enforcement. On March 1, the Senate passed the bill unanimously. It was referred to the House Health Care and Wellness Committee, which will hold a hearing on March 15.

Housing

Flexibility on affordable housing and mental health funding: [Substitute Senate Bill 5604](#) sponsored by Senator June Robinson (D- 38th LD) allows all jurisdictions to use revenue from the affordable and supportive housing sales tax for rental assistance, and allows counties to use chemical dependency and mental health services tax revenue for modifications to existing facilities to address health and safety needs. On March 1, the Senate passed the bill unanimously. The bill was referred to the House Local Government Committee and will be heard on March 15. The Committee is scheduled to vote on the bill on March 17.

Real estate excise tax for affordable housing: [Substitute House Bill 1628](#) sponsored by Representative Frank Chopp (D- 43rd LD) increases the state real estate excise tax (REET) on properties over \$5 million to 4% and dedicates the new revenue to the Housing Trust Fund and related accounts. The bill also authorizes cities to impose a 0.25 percent REET to fund affordable housing, with councilmanic approval. As amended by the policy committee, the bill allows cities and counties to use revenue from the tax on infrastructure costs associated with housing projects. It allows revenue from the second 0.25 percent REET to be used for any capital project for which the first 0.25 percent local REET can be used. The bill was heard in the House Finance

Committee but has not yet been approved by the committee. It is “necessary to implement the budget” and still under consideration.

SEPA exemption for housing: [Second Substitute Senate Bill 5412](#) sponsored by Senator Jesse Salomon (D- 32nd LD) provides a State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) exemption for projects that propose to develop residential housing units in an urban growth area or middle housing types within an unincorporated urban growth area that meet specific criteria. Counties and cities planning under the Growth Management Act may only apply objective development regulations governing the exterior design of new development, and they must consult with the Department of Transportation to determine if there are any operational deficiencies in the transportation system in connection with the proposed project. The Senate passed the bill unanimously on March 6.

Authorizing standards for temporary emergency shelters for local adoption: [Senate Bill 5553](#) sponsored by Senator Liz Lovelett (D- 40th LD) requires the State Building Code Council to adopt standards for temporary emergency shelters to be made available for local adoption. The bill advanced out of the policy committee with no amendments. On February 27, the Senate passed the bill unanimously. The bill is now in the House Local Government Committee and will be heard on March 14. The Committee is scheduled to vote on the bill on March 17.

Accessory Dwelling Units: [Substitute Senate Bill 5235](#) sponsored by Senator Sharon Shewmake (D-42nd LD) requires cities to allow multiple accessory dwelling units per lot, depending on the size of the lot and the number of units otherwise allowed on the lot. The bill was amended in committee to state that the requirements to allow ADUs only apply within designated urban growth areas under the Growth Management Act. The Senate passed the bill by a vote of 42-6. Republicans voting in opposition noted concern about interference with local control. The bill was referred to the House Housing Committee, which will hold a hearing on the bill on March 13 and is scheduled to advance it out of committee on March 16.

[Engrossed House Bill 1337](#) sponsored by Representative Mia Gregerson (D- 33rd LD) requires cities and counties to comply with at least three of the policies in the bill pertaining to accessory dwelling units. These include restrictions on requiring off-street parking for ADUs, assessing impact fees on ADU construction that are greater than 50 percent of the impact fees that would be imposed on the principal unit, and requiring owner-occupancy on the lot. Additionally, cities must allow at least two ADUs on lots in all single-family zones. On March 2, the House of Representatives passed the bill with amendments setting the deadline for jurisdictions to adopt the provisions to six months after the next required comprehensive plan update and specifying that the requirements apply only to lots within an urban growth area. The vote was 81-15, with a bipartisan mix of votes on both sides of the vote tally. The bill was referred to the Senate Local Government, Land Use, and Tribal Affairs Committee.

Streamlining development regulations: [Engrossed Substitute House Bill 1293](#) sponsored by Representative Mark Klicker (R- 16th LD) requires cities and counties to apply only clear and objective design review standards to the exterior of new

development. It establishes a categorical exemption from the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) for residential housing units within an urban growth area, as long as proposed projects do not have an existing or anticipated transportation system safety or operational deficiency. It limits the ability of a city to require a preapplication conference or public meeting. The House of Representatives amended the bill on the floor to state that the SEPA exemption and design review provisions apply beginning six months after the jurisdiction's next required update of its comprehensive plan and limits the applicability of the clear and objective design review requirements to projects that do not contain residential units. The House passed the bill 94-3, with the three "nay" votes coming from Democrats.

Transit-oriented development: [Substitute Senate Bill 5466](#) sponsored by Senator Marko Lias (D- 21st LD) upon the request of the Governor's Office, requires cities to allow certain housing densities within proximity to major transit stops. It prohibits counties and cities planning under the Growth Management Act from requiring off-street parking within a transit station area and prohibits cities from enacting new regulations within a station area that restricts the siting of multi-family housing. The Senate had robust floor debate, with senators raising concern about the developments resulting from the legislation not bringing more affordable housing stock to market and interference with local decision making. The bill was amended to define "frequent bus stop" and modifying "station area" to include all parcels within the urban growth area. It was further amended to state that the prohibition on off-street parking does not apply if the local government consults with the Department of Transportation and determines that the lack of off-street parking would make on-street parking infeasible or unsafe. The bill passed with bipartisan support by a vote of 40-8, and the votes in opposition were cast by both Democrats and Republicans. The bill was referred to the House Housing Committee, which will hold a hearing on March 16.

Residential multi-plex housing regulations: [Engrossed Second Substitute House Bill 1167](#) sponsored by Representative Davina Duerr (D- 1st LD) prohibits local governments from imposing any development, siting, parking, design review, or other standards for middle housing that are more restrictive than those required for detached single-family residences. It directs the Department of Commerce to develop and administer a grant program to assist counties and cities with adopting pre-approved architectural plans for accessory dwelling units, instead of all middle housing types. It directs the State Building Code Council to convene work groups on multi-plex housing provisions in the International Residential Code and allowing multi-family structures up to six stories to be served by a single-exit stairway. On March 4, the bill was amended on the House floor to remove the categorical exemption under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) for infill development within a quarter mile of a community core location and removed the term "community core location." It specifies that local governments may adopt low-cost, expedited permitting processes for development of single-family, duplex, triplex, and accessory dwelling units in urban growth areas. The House of Representatives passed the bill unanimously. The bill was referred to the Senate Local Government, Land Use, and Tribal Affairs Committee, which will hold a hearing on the bill on March 14 and is scheduled to advance it out of committee on March 16.

Consolidating local permit review processes: [Second Substitute Senate Bill 5290](#) sponsored by Senator Mark Mullet (D- 5th LD), requested by the Office of the Governor, requires a local government to exempt project permits for interior alterations from site plan review under certain conditions. It establishes a consolidated permit review grant program for local governments to issue final decisions for residential permit applications within specified time frames. It establishes project permit review time periods for certain permit applications by which local governments must comply beginning in 2025. The Senate passed the bill unanimously on March 6.

Increasing supply and affordability of condominiums: [Substitute Senate Bill 5258](#) sponsored by Senator Sharon Shewmake (D- 42nd LD) addresses condominium builder liability to boost construction of condominiums and townhomes. The proposal requires that construction defect lawsuits brought by condo owners against builders include a report by construct defect professional describing the nature and extent of the defect and recommendations for repair. The Senate Ways and Means Committee held a hearing on March 9. The bill received supportive testimony from the City of Tacoma, Downtown Spokane Partnership, groups representing real estate interests who noted that Washington's current laws regarding condominium liability are a barrier to construction of these housing units, which often serve as a viable option for first-time homebuyers and others looking to downsize into smaller homes. One testifier was opposed to the bill, citing a specific example of defects that she experienced in her townhome.

Land Use, Environment & Forest Management

Carbon sequestration and ecosystem services in the management of public lands: [House Bill 1789](#), sponsored by Representative Kristine Reeves (D- 30th LD), is request legislation from the Department of Natural Resources that would allow DNR to enter into ecosystem services contracts (which includes the sale of carbon credits). The bill went through an intense, bi-partisan stakeholder process through the course of legislative floor action. The bill passed out of the House with a striking amendment directly negotiated by the Washington Forest Protection Association, the bill sponsors, key natural resource committee members, counties, and representatives of other timber products industries. The amended version of the bill is significantly changed from the underlying legislation, providing substantive sideboards on the types of ecosystems services projects the Department of Natural Resources may enter: DNR may only undertake afforestation, reforestation, and aquatic projects on public lands. These projects may only generate additional revenue for trust beneficiaries and may not supplant any existing revenue. Ecosystem service contracts may not last longer than 125 years. The Department can only enter into ecosystem services contracts if the project is consistent with the Department's management of underlying public land for agriculture or commercial timber harvest. No single project, nor combination of multiple projects, may prevent the Department from managing state lands and forestlands for sustained yield as required under existing statute. Ecosystem service projects must be approved by the Board of Natural Resources. DNR must submit a report by December 1, 2024, to OFM and the Legislature outlining payment for ecosystem services projects,

the number of acres involved, type of projects, and projected revenues. The report must also include an assessment of challenges or barriers when trying to implement carbon offset projects, including the operability of carbon offset rules adopted by Ecology. The amended bill may be [found here](#). The bill has been referred to the Senate Environment, Energy, and Technology Committee. It is suspected there will be minor changes to the legislation requested by the Commissioner of Public Lands to which timber organizations are likely to be amenable.

Department of Natural Resources land transactions, revenue distributions, and land transfer program: [Substitute House Bill 1460](#) sponsored by Representative David Hackney (D- 11th LD), by request of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), authorizes DNR to create and manage a trust land transfer program to transfer economically under-performing state lands to other purposes, and to acquire replacement property to generate sustainable revenue to trust beneficiaries. It modifies the DNR's authority to exchange state forestlands on behalf of counties through proximate county agreements. The bill was amended in the committee process to specify that underperforming parcels are those that generate no revenue or less revenue than desired or adequate to cover costs and that income from property sales must be deposited in the land bank account created by the amendment. The land bank account will include funds deposited as directed or appropriated by the Legislature and expenditures may only be made to acquire property for the land bank. The House of Representatives passed the bill 82-13. The bill was referred to the Senate Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources, and Parks Committee, which held a hearing on March 9. The Washington State Association of Counties testified "other" on the bill, expressing general support but pointing out that the current draft does not stipulate that replacement lands be acquired to match the pace at which lands are being transferred. WSAC is working with DNR on technical amendments. DNR staff also testified that they are working with WSAC and senators from the policy and fiscal committees on amendments, which will be prepared in time for the Committee's vote on March 16.

Climate change in comprehensive planning: [Engrossed Second Substitute House Bill 1181](#) sponsored by Representative Davina Duerr (D-1st LD), requested by the Office of the Governor, amends the Growth Management Act to incorporate goals and provisions related to climate change. The transportation goal would include multi-modal transportation systems that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and per capita vehicle miles traveled. The land use element must consider environmental justice and health disparities and mitigate wildfire risk to lives and property. The proposal also adds a climate change and resiliency element designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. On March 3, the House of Representatives passed the bill with amendments stating that the transportation element forecast must prioritize multi-modal safety and clarifying some definitions in the bill. The vote was 57-41 on mostly party lines. The bill was referred to the Senate Local Government, Land Use, and Tribal Affairs Committee, which will hear the bill on March 14 and is scheduled to advance the bill out of committee on March 16.

Updating the state’s integrated climate response strategy: [Engrossed Second Substitute House Bill 1170](#) sponsored by Representative Chipalo Street (D- 37th LD) directs the Department of Ecology to update and modernize the 2012 Integrated Climate Response Plan in collaboration with state agencies, local governments, tribes, non-governmental organizations, businesses, and overburdened communities. The Department is further directed to develop an inter-agency workgroup structure to coordinate funding for climate resilience, and to provide estimated agency costs for implementing the updated strategy to the Governor and Legislature by September 30, 2024. The House legislation was passed by the chamber on February 27 by a vote of 82-14. It was amended to include geographic risks and prioritizing actions related to drought resilience, flood risk mitigation, forest health, urban heat islands, and other considerations to the guiding principles for the strategy. The bill was referred to the Senate Environment, Energy, and Technology Committee, which held a hearing on March 10. The bill received supportive testimony from the Department of Ecology, Nature Conservancy, and Environment and Culture Partners, who highlighted the importance of modernizing the state’s climate response work, which can also help increase competitiveness for federal grants.

Shoreline Master Program schedules: [House Bill 1544](#) sponsored by Representative Emily Alavardo (D- 34th LD) changes the master program review and revision cycle in the Shoreline Management Act from eight to 10 years. The bill was passed unanimously by the House of Representatives in early February, and was referred to the Senate Local Government, Land Use, and Tribal Affairs Committee. On March 9, the Committee voted to advance the bill.

General Government & Finance

Rural public facilities sales and use tax: [Substitute House Bill 1267](#) sponsored by Representative Steve Tharinger (D- 24th LD) renews the 0.09% rural county credit against the state sales and use tax for public facilities serving economic development purposes until the end of 2054. It requires the State Auditor to provide a publicly accessible report on its website containing rural county project and expenditure information and the total amount of revenue collected under the sales and use tax. The House of Representatives passed the bill unanimously on February 27. It was referred to the Senate Local Government, Land Use, and Tribal Affairs Committee, which is scheduled to vote on the bill on March 14.

Concerning stormwater control facilities and county jurisdiction: [Substitute House Bill 1705](#), sponsored by Representative Dan Griffey (R- 35th LD), addresses county and diking and drainage district jurisdiction over stormwater control facilities. Counties had concerns over unclear language and cost sharing required under the bill. Over the weekend, the bill moved out of the House 95-1 with an amendment sponsored by Local Government Chair Representative Davina Duerr (D- 1st LD). The amendment was negotiated by WSACE. As amended, the bill provides that counties should, rather than must, notify a diking and drainage control district when the county intends to extend/improve stormwater control facilities located within a district. The county does not need to consult with the district when doing so. Ordinary maintenance of stormwater facilities does not require notification to be provided to the diking or drainage district.

Finally, the bill provides that only diking and drainage districts operating a stormwater control facility that was transferred to the district via written agreement may receive a portion of stormwater control rates and charges assessed by the county. This amendment should address county concerns with the bill; we recommend going “neutral.”

Contracting with community service organizations: [Engrossed House Substitute Bill 1086](#) sponsored by Representative Clyde Shavers (D- 10th LD) increases local governments’ ability to contract with community service organizations by modifying the current annual limit for such agreements from \$25,000 to \$75,000. The House of Representatives passed the bill in early February, and the legislation is now in the Senate Local Government, Land Use, and Tribal Affairs Committee. The Committee held a hearing on March 9 on an amended version of the bill which states that the yearly total payments made to community service organizations cannot exceed the greater of \$75,000 or \$2 per resident in the jurisdiction. It also allows local governments to contract with community service organizations for improvements to other public spaces in addition to existing locations as well as maintenance for environmental justice projects. The bill received supportive testimony from park stewardship organizations and governmental entities. The Committee is scheduled to vote on the bill on March 16.

Washington Voting Rights Act: [House Bill 1048](#) sponsored by Representative Sharlett Mena (D- 29th LD) allows persons or organizations who file a notice of intent to challenge an election system under the Washington Voting Rights Act to recover costs incurred in conducting the necessary research, if the notice causes the political subdivision to adopt a remedy that is approved by the court. It grants standing to organization and tribes located at least in part of the political subdivision to challenge election systems under the Act on behalf of their members, as long as the organization’s membership or volunteers include a voter who resides in the political subdivision. On March 4, the House of Representatives passed the bill with an amendment clarifying that an organization or tribe filing a legal action under the Act must establish standing when commencing the lawsuit. The vote was 57-38, generally on party lines. The bill was referred to the Senate State Government and Elections Committee and will be heard on March 14. The Committee is scheduled to vote on the bill on March 17.

Veterans’ services and programs: [Substitute Senate Bill 5358](#) sponsored by Senator Chris Gildon (R- 25th LD) directs the Department of Veterans Affairs to submit reports to the Legislature to determine the effectiveness of the veterans service officer program, and the veteran peer-to-peer training and support program in meeting veterans’ needs. The stated intent is to increase appropriations for the programs, prioritizing smaller counties and counties with below-average rates of veterans receiving federal benefits. The Senate passed the bill unanimously on March 6.