

CLEARANCES	Initial	Date	Date Received in Council Office	Agenda Date	Assigned to:
Originator: Executive Office	DW	7/21/99	<b>RECEIVED</b>  <b>AUG 03 1999</b>  <b>WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL</b>	8/10	Committee of the Whole
Division Head:					
Dept. Head: ADS Dept					
Prosecutor	RON	7/21/99			
Purchasing/Budget:					
Executive: Pete Kremen	PK	8/2/99			

**SUBJECT: Adopting Strategic Plan 2000**

**ATTACHMENTS: Resolution**

SEPA review required? ( ) Yes ( ) NO  
 SEPA review completed? ( ) Yes ( ) NO

Should Clerk schedule a hearing? ( ) Yes (  ) NO  
 Requested Date:

**SUMMARY STATEMENT:**

**Resolution adopting Strategic Plan 2000**

**Distribution Request**

Indicate those who should receive a copy after Council action.  
 List specific names to the right.

ADS Facilities Management	
ADS Finance	
ADS Human Resources	
ADS Info Services	
Assessor	
Auditor	
Cooperative Extension	
District Court	
Executive	Francine Kincaid Dave Wareing
Health	
Hearing Examiner	
Jail	
Juvenile	
Parks	
Planning	
Prosecutor	
Public Works	
Sheriff	
Superior Court	
Treasurer	
Other	

**COUNCIL ACTION TAKEN:**

1999 - 310 8/10/99: Approved 6-0, Brown absent, Res. #99-040

**Ordinance or Resolution Number**  
**(this item):**

**RES # 99-040**

SPONSORED BY: Consent

PROPOSED BY: Executive Kremen

INTRODUCTION DATE: 8/10/99

RESOLUTION NO. 99-040  
ADOPTING STRATEGIC PLAN 2000

WHEREAS, the Whatcom County Home Rule Charter provides in Section 1.51 for the executive and legislative branches to engage in long-term strategic planning, and

WHEREAS, on March 30, 1999 and June 8, 1999, the executive and legislative branches met to consider and set forth proposed policies, goals and objectives to improve service delivery to the citizens of Whatcom County, and


WHEREAS, as a result of these deliberations, a "Strategic Plan 2000" has been developed.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Whatcom County Council adopts the "Strategic Plan 2000" as a policy statement setting forth the goals and objectives contained in the Action Plan for the coming year, 2000.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the executive and legislative branches will work toward implementation and accomplishment of the goals and objectives set forth.

APPROVED this 10 day of August, 1999.

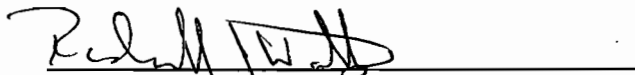
ATTEST:

  
Dana Brown-Davis, Clerk of the Council

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL  
WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON

  
MARLENE DAWSON, Council Chair

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

  
Civil Deputy Prosecutor

I:\dwcit\council\spresolution



# WHATCOM COUNTY

STRATEGIC PLAN  
2000



# WHATCOM COUNTY STRATEGIC PLAN

## CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

### *SUMMARY*

Chapter 1 describes the purpose of the Strategic Plan, the process used to develop the Plan, and how it will be used in the future. This chapter also provides background information on Whatcom County, including an overview of the services currently provided by county government.

In today's fast-paced environment, county government needs to be positioned to keep up with the changes our community demands. This Plan is designed to provide a solid foundation to assist the County in charting its future as it strives to provide the best possible service to the citizens and businesses in Whatcom County. While the Plan is a guide to the future, it also includes near-term Action Plans to address current needs.

The strategic planning process instituted over the past three years has provided the analysis, communication and deliberations that led to the development of this Plan. While the Administration and County Council took the lead role, employees were also involved in the process.

The Plan is designed to be useful to many different entities. Council members, elected officials, department heads, managers and employees will all use the document, although different chapters may be more relevant to some than others. Likewise, the county's citizens, businesses and other local governments will find the document a useful way to understand their county government and to track its activities.

### *INTRODUCTION*

#### A. Purpose of Whatcom County Strategic Plan

The world in which citizens, businesses and their governmental institutions operate is changing rapidly. While it is not possible to know with certainty all of the challenges that the future will bring, one assumption is certain: today's practices will not adequately meet tomorrow's needs. The purpose of the Whatcom County Strategic Plan is to chart a course for a viable future for county residents and to ensure that all of the various actions and other plans of county government work together to achieve that future.

This Plan identifies a long-term vision and mission for the County and near-term policy priorities to achieve that vision and mission. The document also includes goals and objectives for each policy.

## B. Process for Developing the Plan

This is the third year of strategic planning for Whatcom County. Section 1.51 of the County Charter mandates the executive and legislative branches “engage in long-term strategic planning to establish organizational structure, priorities and performance measurement.” For each of the last three years, administration staff has met with the Council to develop the vision and mission statement as well as set goals. This Strategic Plan then forms the basis of our budget development for the year. This year, employees were also given the opportunity for input on the development of the goals and strategies.

## C. How to Use the Plan

The Plan is organized into five Chapters:

- Chapter 1 - Introduction
- Chapter 2 - Plan Foundations
- Chapter 3 - Action Plan
- Chapter 4 - Monitoring Action
- Chapter 5 - Future Services Analysis & Implementation

The Plan is designed to be used by many audiences. While the entire document will have some interest and relevance to most people, different chapters will be more important than others will. For example, within the County:

- The County Council and Administration will utilize the Policy Priorities to determine how best to allocate their own efforts;
- Departments will use the Action Plan, Goals and Objectives (Chapter 3) to establish program priorities and monitor performance;
- New employees will find the Vision, Mission and Policy Priorities important elements of their orientation to Whatcom County;
- All employees will be encouraged to use the Action Plan to help establish goal and objective timelines and prioritize their work;
- The Plan will be an integral part of the budgeting process and provide a basis for performance accountability at all levels of the County.
- The citizens of the county can examine the vision, mission and policy priorities to make sure they are consistent with their own values; and
- Other governments and special purpose districts can use this Plan as the basis for understanding the future direction of the County and helping to make their own decisions about how best to meet citizen needs in the future.

#### D. Vital Statistics

Whatcom County is the northernmost county in Washington situated in the northwest corner, containing 2,151 square miles. The 1998 estimated population was 157,500; 46% live in unincorporated areas, 54% live in incorporated areas. The county's assessed valuation as of 1998 was \$10.44 billion.

#### E. Local Governments

The county contains one major city of 65,000 and six smaller cities. It also provides assistance to numerous special districts, serving water, fire, sewer, flood, and diking districts.

#### F. County Services

By virtue of its "Home Rule Charter" adopted in 1978, Whatcom County is one of only five counties in the state that have a "county constitution." This constitution or "charter" gives control of county affairs to the people of the county rather than the state legislature. As a charter county, there are two primary factors that make Whatcom County different from other counties. The first is a separation between legislative and administrative functions. This is accomplished through an elected nonpartisan seven-member, part-time county council (legislative) and a full-time elected county executive (administrative). The second difference is the right of initiative and referendum provided to county citizens by the charter. The County Charter defines duties and responsibilities of the branches, elected officials and departments. The county residents also elect five other officials who supervise offices in county government:

- Prosecuting Attorney
- Auditor
- Sheriff
- Treasurer
- Assessor
- Superior Court & District Court Judges

In addition, the County provides a wide range of services through the following other departments or organizational units:

- Administrative Services
- Parks & Recreation
- Cooperative Extension
- Planning & Development Services
- District Court
- Public Defender's Office
- District Court Probation
- Public Works
- Health & Human Services
- Superior Court/County Clerk
- Juvenile Services

The Boundary Review Board, Hearing Examiner's Office, Law Library and Medical Examiner also provide additional services.

## CHAPTER 2 – WHATCOM COUNTY VISION, MISSION AND POLICY PRIORITIES

### *SUMMARY*

Chapter 2 of the Strategic Plan includes a Vision Statement, Mission Statement and six Policy Priorities. The Vision Statement is the county government's hopes for its citizens and businesses as a whole. The Mission Statement relates specifically to county government, setting forth proposed guidelines for operation. The Policy Priorities provide a foundation to guide all of the County's employees as they conduct their various activities. The priorities also speak to what kinds of services the County should provide, and how the County should conduct itself as it provides those services.

Taken together, the Vision Statement, Mission Statement and Policy Priorities identify the basic values important to Whatcom County. They are intended to provide the focus for all county processes, from choosing which services to provide and establishing budget priorities, to how the County communicates and interacts with its citizens on a daily basis.

### *VISION STATEMENT*

Whatcom County is envisioned as a place where people are able to enjoy an abundant, safe and healthy life. It is a place rich in natural beauty and renewable resources that provide plentiful recreation, life style and economic opportunities. A vibrant economy and diverse community resources provide family wage jobs, affordable housing and exceptional social and educational opportunities. Public services are responsive, transportation is convenient, regulations are user-friendly and justice is prompt and fair. It is a community where citizens and their government work together to preserve the rights of the individual while protecting the essential natural environment in which they live.

### *MISSION STATEMENT*

Whatcom County government will strive to promote, enrich and enhance the freedoms, opportunities and safety of its citizens. It will provide essential and desirable public services in a cost effective and accountable manner. It will provide vision, leadership and responsiveness while addressing community issues and conducting the business of the people. It will encourage community involvement in public issues while protecting the rights of the individual and encouraging respect for diversity. It shall serve as an active catalyst for individuals and other entities to participate in achieving a positive vision for the future of Whatcom County.

## *POLICY PRIORITIES*

Core elements of the Mission and Vision demand that Whatcom County government be:

- responsive;
- user-friendly and helpful;
- effective;
- efficient and accountable; and
- a catalyst for positive change.

To fulfill these elements, the following policy priorities have been established for the Plan:

1. Whatcom County shall conduct the public's business in a customer-focused, user-friendly, helpful and effective manner.
2. Whatcom County shall be accountable and efficient in the services provided to its citizens.
3. Whatcom County shall improve public awareness and understanding of the roles and services of county government.
4. Whatcom County shall identify and fund essential and other appropriate county government services.
5. Whatcom County shall support a work environment that values productive employees and encourages progressive personnel practices and employee skill development.
6. Whatcom County shall, when appropriate, work in partnership with cities, tribes, special districts, other government entities, agencies, citizens, businesses and other stake holders to jointly facilitate the most effective and efficient governance and means of delivering services.

## **CHAPTER 3 – ACTION PLAN**

Chapter 3 is a near-term Action Plan. It identifies general goals for each of the six Policy Priorities. The goals provide the categories for specific objectives. The goals and objectives are listed separately as they are expected to have different life spans. Goals will tend to remain more constant over time than objectives as the Plan is updated. For example, one of the goals for Policy Priority #1 is: "The County shall measure and report the effectiveness of countywide and departmental services." The objectives, or strategies, to accomplish the goal will change regularly, although it is likely that working measures of service effectiveness will remain continually important.

**Policy #1: Whatcom County shall conduct the public's business in a customer-focused, user-friendly, helpful and effective manner.**

**Goal 1-A: Assure that county government is providing responsive and fair customer service.**

- Objectives:
1. Establish standards for customer service.
  2. Review staff training needs.
  3. Provide customer service training to all departments.
  4. Provide sufficient resources/staff to all departments to enable appropriate customer service.
  5. Optimize use of telephone service.
    - a. More responsive voicemail system;
    - b. Translation services;
    - c. Use of 1-800-number for county business; and
    - d. 24-hour dialup access to information.
  5. Identify all employees with name badges.
  6. Provide public notary services in key departments.
  7. Evaluate the need for other public services.

**Goal 1-B: Assure that all Whatcom County facilities are safe and easily accessible by all citizens.**

- Objectives:
1. Review current facility plans to evaluate existing employee and customer service requirements, including parking.
  2. Consolidate, where appropriate, compatible functions and services.
  2. Improve signage at Courthouse and other facilities.
  3. Provide maps and services handouts at public entries with directions to other County facilities.
  4. Develop future facility plans that incorporate enhanced customer service capabilities.
    - a. Assess the feasibility of drive-thru operations.
    - b. Assess the feasibility of satellite or remote operations.
    - c. Assess the need for expanded hours of operation.
  5. Assess and establish minimum security standards for County facilities.

**Goal 1-C: Develop and maintain technology solutions that improve delivery of County services and assure full utilization of the County's technology system.**

- Objectives:
1. Provide for coordination, integration, and planning of technology systems through the Computer & Technology Advisory Committee.
  2. Provide adequate funding to maintain technology staff availability and expertise.
  3. Expand Website, E-commerce, field communication, and internet capabilities.
  4. Facilitate expansion of remote public access.
  5. Develop interaction protocols with outside entities.

**Goal 1-D: Use technology systems to improve internal communications.**

- Objectives:
1. Develop internal communications policies that require the use of technology delivery systems whenever feasible.
  2. Provide applicable technology training to all employees.
  3. Institute help line for technology questions.
  4. Establish technology users groups and resource pools.
  5. Adopt an electronic signature policy.
  6. Develop an intranet plan.

**Goal 1-E: Measure and report the effectiveness of countywide and departmental services.**

- Objectives:
1. Define performance standards and measures for services.
  2. Monitor performance measures of service delivery.
  3. Report performance at regular time intervals using both internal and industry comparisons.
  4. Evaluate and maintain performance benchmarks and standards.
  5. Develop problem and complaint resolution process.
    - a. Education of staff about handling of complaints.
    - b. Reporting back process.

***Policy #2: Whatcom County shall be accountable and efficient in the services provided to its citizens.***

**Goal 2-A: Develop coordinated departmental mission statements to enhance service delivery and responsiveness.**

- Objectives:
1. Provide mission focus that is consistent among all departments.
  2. Define departmental duties and relationships.
  3. Provide detailed overview and description of departmental operations.
    - a. Provide clear direction to staff regarding rules, duties, procedures and expectations as to the delivery of services.
    - b. Develop policy manuals that are consistent and user-friendly.
    - c. Ensure general ongoing availability of up-to-date policies and procedures for the public and to staff.
  4. Refine organizational ethics standards.

**Goal 2-B: Review current organization and operations to enhance efficiency.**

- Objectives:
1. Facilitate multi-department coordination of common objectives.
    - a. Complete comprehensive Criminal Justice Strategic Plan and adopt appropriate recommendations to enhance public safety and crime prevention.
    - b. Optimize use of Geographical Information System (GIS), coordinating multiple departmental integration and use.
    - c. Continue implementation of comprehensive water resource planning.
  2. Encourage participation by management and employees at professional conferences to network and identify alternative operational procedures.
  3. Continue a comprehensive and vital strategic planning process that involves periodic review and implementation, revision and updating of goals, strategies, action plans, best practice standards and performance measures.
  4. Develop conflict resolution process to resolve internal and external conflicts.
  5. Encourage staff suggestions for improvement of service delivery.

***Policy #3: Whatcom County shall improve public awareness and understanding of the roles and services of county government.***

**Goal 3-A: Develop improved interfaces between county government and its citizens.**

- Objectives:
1. Expand information content on the County's Website.
  2. Update and develop new written materials about county services.
  3. Improve placement and distribution of written information.
  4. Facilitate opportunities with unincorporated communities and other established groups to address issues with county government.
  5. Improve access to public meetings.
    - a. Record or project "live" County Council meetings for prime time TV or electronic broadcast.
    - b. Hold County Council meetings at locations throughout the county.
    - c. Approach newspapers for Council agenda publication as public service.

**Goal 3-B: Enhance public perception of county government.**

- Objectives:
1. Assess viability of a Public Information Office.
  2. Establish internal Public Services Committee to review current and future practices.
  3. Provide a public information speakers bureau, public information videos, newsletter and notices.
  4. Promote media coverage of newsworthy information.
  5. Improve visibility and image of county employees.
    - a. Identification badges
    - b. Expand booth at Fair & Home Show
    - c. Employee recognition in Business Pulse

6. Conduct periodic open house activities.
7. Invite/encourage school classes to visit county government.
8. Post Vision and Mission Statements in courthouse.

**Goal 3-C: Improve mechanisms for public feedback regarding citizen interface with county government.**

- Objectives:
1. Develop strategy for obtaining public input.
    - a. Utilize Customer Survey cards in more areas of public service.
    - b. Develop surveys to gain public input regarding projects and planning processes.
    - c. Institute Website surveys.
    - d. Involve public in Strategic Planning Process.

***Policy #4: Whatcom County shall identify and fund essential and other appropriate county government services.***

**Goal 4-A: Determine essential and other appropriate county government services for which adequate and sustainable funding shall be provided.**

- Objectives:
1. Continue to refine departmental Inventory of Services definitions.
  2. Identify mandated services and establish appropriate service levels.
  3. Identify non-mandatory desirable services and service levels.
  4. Define relationship and service levels with special purpose districts.
  5. Evaluate the relative cost basis and cost effectiveness of all services.
  6. Prioritize all services in order of importance.
  7. Update services and service levels periodically as required.
  8. Set minimum service levels and response times for emergencies.

**Goal 4-B: Establish a strong internal control system for financial operations.**

- Objectives:
1. Establish financial cost basis for county government operations.
  2. Promote sound financial management and control practices.
  3. Develop and update countywide financial, personnel and general business policies, procedures and forms.
  4. Explore methods to conserve funds and increase revenues.

**Goal 4-C: Develop a 6-year financial strategic plan that is consistent with the County's mission and that provides adequate funding for essential and other appropriate services.**

- Objectives:
1. Develop multi-year financial trend models to establish assumptions.
  2. Review historical models and future direction.

3. Anticipate service demand changes due to growth.
4. Research, evaluate and track relevant revenue trends.
5. Develop 6-year financial planning document.
6. Establish formal policy for approval of 6-year plan.

**Goal 4-D: Actively pursue adequate funding of services.**

- Objectives:
1. Review and consider changes in taxes and fees.
  2. Pursue lobbying efforts at State Legislature.
  3. Develop a policy regarding the use of grant funding.

***Policy #5: Whatcom County shall support a work environment that values productive employees and encourages progressive personnel practices and employee skill development.***

**Goal 5-A: Regularly assess and evaluate employees' work and workload.**

- Objectives:
1. Use the performance evaluation system to clearly define performance expectations.
  2. Address areas where workloads are affecting quality of service.
  3. Assess impact of workload and changing regulations on employee performance.
    - a. Assess sick leave usage and other stress indicators.
    - b. Compare actual and projected workloads to standard maximum workload levels to ensure efficiency and effectiveness.
    - c. Assess impact prior to implementing new requirements.
  4. Provide for training and operational adjustments prior to implementing new regulations or programs.

**Goal 5-B: Retain a highly skilled workforce through employee skill development programs.**

- Objectives:
1. Support employee skill enhancement benefiting service operations.
  2. Provide well-defined skill paths for employee advancement.
  3. Establish consistent performance-oriented promotion requirements.

**Goal 5-C: Improve employee/employer relationships.**

- Objectives:
1. Provide mechanisms for resolving conflict and enhancing trust.
  2. Improve employee morale and job satisfaction.
  3. Celebrate individual and organizational successes and accomplishments.
  4. Enhance employee/supervisor communication.
  5. Provide better training to build positive supervisory skills.

- a. Team Building
- b. Morale Building
  - 1) Encouragement and praise
  - 2) Positive reinforcement
  - 3) Personnel enrichment
  - 4) Good self-image of government

**Goal 5-D: Examine the county's mechanisms for paying and rewarding employees.**

- Objectives:
- 1. Find ways to address fairness in pay.
    - a. Conduct wage survey – market analysis.
    - b. Compare internal equity of positions.
  - 2. Evaluate alternative methods to differentiate and reward performance.
  - 3. Consider alternatives to sick leave plan.
  - 4. Consider salary enhancements resulting in an organizational benefit for licenses/certificates/degrees.

**Goal 5-E: Enhance training opportunities for county employees.**

- Objectives:
- 1. Assess and expand training opportunities.
  - 2. Assure regular safety training.
  - 3. Track new employees' training through HR.
  - 4. Provide supervisory training.
  - 5. Review existing training/travel policies.

***Policy #6: Whatcom County shall, when appropriate, work in partnership with cities, tribes, special districts, other governmental entities, agencies, citizens, businesses and other stake holders to jointly facilitate the most effective and efficient governance and means of delivering services.***

**Goal 6-A: Serve in a leadership/facilitation role to address community issues.**

- Objectives:
- 1. Continue cooperative intergovernmental efforts to provide for community needs.
    - a. Continue to address water-related issues and planning.
    - b. Participate in addressing countywide criminal justice resource needs.
    - c. Enhance availability of GIS database to the broader community.
    - d. Seek development of a community support resource directory.
    - e. Continue efforts to develop access to Parking in the Civic Center area.
    - f. Regularly assess need for interlocal agreements; review and update current interlocal agreements.



## CHAPTER 5 – FUTURE SERVICE ANALYSIS & IMPLEMENTATION

### *SUMMARY*

In the future, to further develop the Action Plan, Goals and Objectives contained in this Plan, the County and each department shall perform an analysis of services based on the following model:

### COUNTY SERVICES ANALYSIS MODEL

#### *Introduction*

During the next 12-month period, an extensive analysis of the services the County does and/or should provide in the future should be conducted and reported. It should summarize a multi-step process to categorize all county services as:

- Essential;
- Preferred;
- Discretionary; or
- Transitional (out to another provider).

#### *County Services Analysis*

Each governmental service function currently provided by the County should be examined using the tests outlined below. Possible future functions not currently provided by the County should also be examined using the same tests. In evaluating service delivery options, it is assumed that all statutes and labor agreements related to employee rights will be honored.

#### Threshold Public Benefit Test

Any service provided by the County must serve a public need. Any service that maintains or advances community safety, health, welfare or quality of life meets this initial test.

#### Need for Priorities

Many services will meet the public benefit test. However, it is not possible for the County to be all things to all people. Given limited resources, the County must establish priorities in order to be sure that the services it provides to citizens create the greatest public benefit possible. This priority-setting process will help to ensure that the County remains a fiscally viable organization and does not become a government service provider of last resort.

Having set the priorities, it is important to evaluate each service - Is this a "basic" function (i.e., one that the County should prioritize for funding and delivery)?

If so, the following tests should be applied to answer that question:

1. Is the service duplicated by other public or private providers?

2. Is the service strongly supported by Whatcom County citizens and those who directly benefit from the service?
3. Does the service require county or area-wide coordination?
4. Is the service indeed controllable by the County?
5. If the County provides the service, is it feasible to transition the service to another entity in the future?

### Priority Evaluation Checklist

The evaluation checklist below will be used to guide decision-making on each function to help determine whether the current county role should be maintained, expanded or contracted. All issues on the checklist should be evaluated together. No single issue is intended to guide decision-making.

When examining whether current county functions should be maintained, expanded or contracted, the following tests should apply:

1. Do other viable service deliverers exist or could they reasonably be expected to be created?
2. Are there appropriate funding options available to other prospective service deliverers?
3. What would be the impact on the overall cost efficiency of delivering the service?
4. What would be the impact on existing County assets and investments?
5. What would be the impact on the quality of service provided to citizens, including the ability to attract and retain qualified staff?
6. What would be the impact on the ability to respond flexibly to changes in future trends and needs?
7. What would be the impact on accountability and accessibility between decision-makers, the general public and those who benefit from the service?
8. What would be the impact on other services provided by the County?
9. Does it reflect a commitment to pro-active leadership, vision and innovation?
10. What would be the impact on public opinion and acceptance?
11. What would be the impact on County employees?
12. What would be the impact on other service providers?

As a result of this analysis, every major County function should be assigned to one of five categories:

1. County is mandated to perform the function by state or federal law and there is no similar quality service provider.
2. County is mandated to perform the function by state or federal law.
3. County is best available service provider in all future planning scenarios.
4. County is best available service provider only with moderate budget cuts or continued unincorporated urban area.
5. Equal or better service providers exist under all future planning scenarios.

#### Assignment of Priorities

The final result of all of this analysis should be to assign each major current county function to one of four categories:

- **Essential** (Services mandated by law and/or valued by citizens as essential. Deliver under all circumstances; may have to vary level of service provided depending on financial circumstances.)
- **Preferred** (Strong preference (by whom?) for providing. High probability of allocating local discretionary dollars if necessary.)
- **Discretionary** (Delivered only when certain criteria are met. Unlikely significant local discretionary dollars would be allocated.)
- **Transitional** (out to another provider)

The categories should be assigned assuming a 6-year future plan. Funding of such services should be provided in descending order of importance as may be indicated by the ranking structure or as may be deemed appropriate by the County Council. Successive strategic planning processes should include such prioritization and make such adjustments as may be deemed to be appropriate.