



Lodging Tax Advisory Committee  
2025 Funding Allocation Meeting  
June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
**Draft Minutes**

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**COMMITTEE MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:**

Executive Satpal Sidhu, County Executive (Chair)  
Rebecca Boonstra, Mt. Baker Chamber of Commerce (TR<sup>1</sup>)  
Tera Lorimer, Luxury Getaways via Zoom (TC<sup>2</sup>)  
Meganne Offedi – Holiday Inn & Suites (TC)  
Guy Occhiogrosso, Whatcom Chamber (TR)  
Dylan Deane-Boyle, BWC Tourism (TR)

**STAFF PRESENT:**

Tawni Helms, *WC Administration*  
Jake Logan, *WC Administration*

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**Welcome and Call to Order:**

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 AM by Chair Executive Sidhu Sidhu. Everyone introduced themselves to begin the meeting.

**Confirmation of March 17, 2025 Minutes:**

The Chair asked for comments and changes on the minutes. There was a question about how the minutes were provided to committee members. A motion was made to approve the minutes. When asked for all in favor, the committee responded with "aye." With no opposition, the minutes passed unanimously.

**2026 Funding Priorities Review:**

Tawni Helms (Whatcom County Staff) began the review of 2026 tourism funding priorities, discussing the various fund sources. The discussion continued with conversation around the Events and Festivals application specifically. Discussion of infrastructure projects among the committee. The aim is for applicants to be able to express themselves effectively through the application. Lindsey (Bellingham Whatcom County Tourism – Staff) asked why the applications were being split up. (into three categories, Events/Festivals, Tourism Promotion, and Infrastructure/Capital Project) Tawni responded that at the last meeting, it was her sense that Guy and the committee had commented on the fund applications being significantly different for applicants who are marketing DMOs versus those who are visitor centers. Tawni noted that they also don't have quite the resources that the city does. The committee had agreed that applications might need to be differentiated from each other. Meganne suggested the committee might adopt the city's hotel form. Dylan emphasized the importance of hotel room blocks but acknowledged there needs to be an alternative since there is only one hotel in unincorporated Whatcom county.

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<sup>1</sup> TR – Tax Recipient

<sup>2</sup> TC – Tax Collector

The discussion turned to whether they would be able to verify STR data that applicants may submit – and how the measurable goals of the committee could be facilitated in the context of Whatcom County’s lodging.

Lindsey noted that it is challenging to get data across the board regardless, and asking applicants to think outside the box wouldn't be new. Tera and Meganne discussed data collection, with Tera explaining they have the ability to report when they give out discount codes. Meganne noted that even that limited scope of data is useful, citing Ski to Sea as being good at this type of tracking.

### **Discussion of Application Timeline:**

The committee discussed the open and close dates for the call for applications, working to balance how much time is needed while perhaps trying to align with other processes. A September closing date was suggested, with opening planned for next week (Early July).

### **Capital Projects Discussion:**

Executive Sidhu introduced the discussion of capital projects, explaining what tends to happen when the budget (fund balance of LTAC) grows. The balance comes to the attention of the council and various stakeholders. He referenced a wayfinding project (as an example of a capital project) that was derailed by time and COVID. Executive Sidhu suggested the committee think about tourism capital investments, noting it doesn't have to be brick and mortar. He asked where they could invest this money to grow events, business, and individual businesses. Guy Occhiogrosso commented on the digital infrastructure as a potentially good idea, but expressed that it would need specific determination on what would be eligible. Lindsey and Dylan (Bellingham Whatcom County Tourism – which operates Bellingham.org) confirmed that digital wayfinding falls in their wheelhouse. General sentiment was that if there potential to make large impacts on projects in visitor-centric areas, those are interesting, but the committee needs time to take a thoughtful approach. The committee would need time and information to be able thoughtfully participate in a capital project initiative through LTAC – as in that scenario LTAC would most likely be supporting only a portion of the cost of any project, rather than the sole funder. Continuing on this thread of conversation, Executive Sidhu commented that the division between Bellingham and Whatcom County (both municipalities have lodging tax programs which fundamentally operate much the same) is emphasized internally but not as perceptible externally. He suggested they can work together with Bellingham and other municipalities, as the benefits can grow to the whole region with these funds. *(Note City of Bellingham funds can only be spent on projects within city limits, Whatcom County funds can be spend in both Bellingham and the rest of Whatcom County.)*, speaking on behalf of the Mt. Baker area, said she would be remiss not to mention that signage and physical classic wayfinding has value to those communities. Rebecca stated she will never stop trying to get public bathrooms built in Birch Bay, though there may be a longer path to success. She also knows their tourism and chamber infrastructure is struggling. More people are using digital solutions, of course, and even the Forest Service is switching to an app. However, some elements of needs-based wayfinding are important in rural areas and places without internet, such as East County.

Executive Sidhu encouraged the committee to undertake these conversations around larger projects and ideas, saying the opportunity is there. He urged them to give more thought to this without rushing, but to look for opportunities. Meganne suggested that BWCT could potentially create a staff position to address these needs.

**Public Comment:**

Doralee Booth “decided to pop in” to see if they were talking about bathrooms at Birch Bay. She remembered coming to meetings years ago when Jack Louws said there was a million dollars for bathrooms at Birch Bay. Executive Sidhu acknowledged this topic comes up every time. He noted the county budget has been tight right now but committed to talking with the parks department about potentially coming as an applicant to this board. Doralee has been speaking with Bennett Knox (WC Parks and Recreation Director) and mentioned they are coming up to July 4th and have ordered port-o-potties, but there will be long lines.

Danielle Gaughen from the Birch Bay Chamber emphasized that inviting people to come and recreate here without proper facilities is challenging.

**Meeting Adjournment:**

The meeting was adjourned at 9:48 AM.

Respectfully Submitted,

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