



Lodging Tax Advisory Committee
2026 Funding Allocation Meeting
October 15th, 2025
Draft Minutes

COMMITTEE MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Executive Satpal Sidhu, County Executive (Chair)
Rebecca Boonstra, Mt. Baker Chamber of Commerce (TR¹)
Meganne Offrendi – Holiday Inn & Suites (TC²)
Guy Occhiogrosso, Whatcom Chamber (TR)
Dylan Deane-Boyle, BWCT – Visit Bellingham Whatcom County (TR)

STAFF PRESENT:

Jake Logan, Whatcom County Executive's Office - Administration

October 15, 2025, 9:07 a.m. – 10:30 p.m.

311 Grand Ave, Suite 107 Bellingham, WA (Hybrid Meeting)

OTHER ATTENDEES - IN PERSON:³

Name	Organization
Danielle Gaughen	Birch Bay Chamber of Commerce
Jake Locker	Ferndale Youth Sports
Bennett Knox	Whatcom County Parks and Recreation

OTHER ATTENDEES - VIRTUAL:

Name	Organization
Lindsay Gerhard	Bellingham Whatcom County Tourism
Racquel Muncy	Lynden Tribune
Doralee Booth	Birch Bay

1. CALL TO ORDER AND INTRODUCTIONS

Deputy Executive Kayla Schott-Bresler called the meeting to order at approximately 9:00 a.m., standing in for Executive Sidhu who was unable to attend. Chair Schott-Bresler confirmed a quorum was present. Introductions were made by all committee members, staff, and meeting attendees both in person and virtually.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

Chair Schott-Bresler opened the floor for public comment. No public comments were offered.

¹ TR – Tax Recipient

² TC – Tax Collector

³ Attendee list complete/correct to best of clerk's ability

3. ORIENTATION TO CAPITAL PROJECTS AND BUDGET

Jake Logan (WC Executive's Office) provided a brief orientation to the capital project review process. He explained that the committee would be reviewing three capital project applications totaling \$2,334,890 in requests, as opposed to the events and tourism promotion projects reviewed at the October 13, 2025 meeting. This is the first year the LTAC has categorized capital projects separately using this fund.

Budget Discussion

Chair Schott-Bresler and Jake Logan reviewed the Lodging Tax Fund balance and revenue projections. The fund has built up reserves over recent years, with fund balance standing at just under \$6 million as of 2025. Blue line revenue into the fund has grown from approximately \$600,000 in 2020 to a projected \$1.6 million in 2025. Dylan Deane-Boyle provided context on current lodging trends, noting that hotel revenue is not performing at the same level as 2024. Both occupancy rates and average daily rates (ADR) have been declining in recent months countywide. While collections had remained steady in previous years despite flat occupancy due to strong ADR, the current trend shows both metrics declining simultaneously. The committee acknowledged that revenue projections for 2026 may be lower than 2025.

Chair Schott-Bresler explained that the county believes the fund can tolerate some one-time spend-down of fund balance on capital projects given the current reserve levels. For 2026, the county projects approximately a \$400,000 difference between expenditures and revenue, providing some cushion in addition to the fund balance.

4. ADMINISTRATIVE COST ALLOCATION

Jake Logan explained that the administrative costs of operating the LTAC program are eligible expenditures from the fund, similar to the City of Bellingham's LTAC program. The City of Bellingham charges \$60,000 annually for administrative costs including tax collection, finance accounting, and administrative processes for organizing the committee. The county proposed allocating \$60,000 as a not-to-exceed amount for administrative costs. Jake Logan clarified that actual charges would be based on direct time tracking, and the county would likely charge less than the full amount. The rationale for direct allocation is to prevent inadvertently overcharging other county funds (such as the general fund, behavioral health fund, or veterans fund) for work specifically related to LTAC administration. Dylan Deane-Boyle confirmed this administrative cost allocation is standard practice and appears in the Bellingham LTAC proposed budget every year.

MOTION: It was moved and seconded to approve the administrative cost allocation of \$60,000 (not-to-exceed).

VOTE: The motion passed unanimously.

5. REVIEW OF CAPITAL PROJECT APPLICATIONS

Ferndale Youth Sports - Northwest Field Renovations

Request: \$59,140

Jake Locker presented the application on behalf of Ferndale Youth Sports. He explained that Ferndale Youth Sports assumed the lease for the Northwest Fields facility from the Boys and Girls Club as of June 2025. The organization has invested approximately \$40,000 of their own funds to date in field improvements, including stripping fields, redoing outfields, and reseeding. The \$59,140 request would fund a specific infield dirt mix for all four baseball fields that helps with drainage and prevents erosion, improving both safety and quality of play. Locker explained this improvement would allow the organization to meet standards necessary to host Cal Ripken state tournaments, where teams from across the region would compete. With four fields available, tournaments would typically include at least 12 teams of 12 players each, resulting in families needing lodging for Friday and Saturday nights.

Locker provided estimates in the application assuming 10 teams per tournament, \$100/day for food per family, and \$150/night for lodging, with a 25-year lease period supporting long-term tournament hosting.

Locker also described additional infrastructure needs that would enhance the facility's attractiveness for tournaments:

- Outfield fencing – (\$16,000 total for all four fields) Would separate baseball fields from adjacent soccer fields for safety and create a more professional appearance
- Backstop netting – (\$6,000 total for all four fields) Current netting is worn out; replacement would extend 40 feet high and 60 feet side-to-side to protect spectators
- Bleachers – (24,000 total) Each field has two places for bleachers. Four fields. 8 Bleachers, at \$3,000 per.

Total additional requests: \$46,000

Committee Discussion:

Bennett Knox spoke in support of the application from the Whatcom County Parks Department perspective. He noted that Parks was pleased when Ferndale Youth Sports stepped up to assume the lease after the Boys and Girls Club ended. Parks has been in discussions with the Tourism Bureau, Public Works, and the soccer league about improving the entire Phillips 66 complex, and Ferndale Youth Sports' investment in the baseball fields positions the county well to think holistically about the site.

MegAnne Offrendi expressed strong support, noting the project clearly generates "heads and beds" overnight stays. She encouraged the organization to be cognizant of event-heavy weekends when bringing tournaments to town, as lodging availability would be challenging and rates would be higher. Locker confirmed their peak season would be March through July, with potential for subletting to fall baseball programs.

Guy Occhiogrosso raised questions about how the project aligns with broader site planning for the P-66 complex, particularly given discussions about potential redevelopment related to the Planning & Development Services (PDS) location. He expressed support for the project but wanted to ensure the investment wouldn't be compromised if the site were redeveloped in 5-6 years.

Bennett Knox responded that Parks is in early discussions with stakeholders including the soccer league, Public Works, and the Tourism Bureau about comprehensive planning for the complex. There may be planning funding opportunities to bring all parties together to develop a broader concept. Dylan Deane-Boyle added context from the 2020 sports feasibility study that identified the P-66 complex as the highest priority for renovation and updates. He noted that Bellingham Whatcom County Tourism has set aside sports development funding annually to support feasibility studies for sports complexes, and expressed hope that the committee would see a comprehensive plan for P-66 improvements in the future.

Chair Schott-Bresler provided an update on county infrastructure planning. The county had originally planned to build Planning & Development Services and Public Works office space at the Northwest Annex with shovel-ready designs, but put the project on hold several months ago to explore acquisition opportunities for existing buildings. Given the need to build a new jail, the county is nervous about taking on a \$160 million new construction project simultaneously. The project remains in flux, so it is not certain the county will redevelop the P-66 site for office space.

Bennett Knox described potential improvements to the overall complex that would not conflict with the baseball field investments, including improved parking layout, upgraded restroom facilities serving both baseball and soccer users, enhanced perimeter areas, and expanded basic park amenities. He confirmed that the soccer league has been very helpful and cooperative in working with Ferndale Youth Sports, including allowing storage of equipment and agreeing to remove the fifth baseball field structure for soccer use. Fencing on the two east-facing baseball fields was specifically discussed with the soccer league as providing a clear boundary between activities.

Locker was asked about potential for private sponsorship funding for additional improvements. He acknowledged there is always that opportunity, but noted the organization is entirely privately funded and has already invested \$40,000 of their own resources to bring the fields to their current condition. Clarification was provided that the county owns the property and Ferndale Youth Sports has a 25-year lease, so all improvements would remain county property.

MOTION: MegAnne Offrendi moved to approve the Ferndale Youth Sports grant application in the amount of \$59,140. Dylan Deane-Boyle seconded.

VOTE: The motion passed unanimously.

SECOND MOTION: Guy Occhiogrosso moved to approve a budget hold of \$50,000 (increased from \$46,000 to provide cushion in case cost estimates are not exact) for additional improvements including fencing, netting, and bleachers, contingent upon Ferndale Youth Sports submitting a complete grant application to Jake Logan and county staff for administrative review. This motion structure provides authority for staff to approve the additional funding without requiring the committee to reconvene, following precedent established in previous LTAC meetings. Dylan Deane-Boyle seconded.

VOTE: The motion passed unanimously.

Total Ferndale Youth Sports Funding: \$109,140 (\$59,140 approved + \$50,000 budget hold pending application)

Whatcom County Parks & Recreation - Glacier Restroom Improvements Project

Request: \$475,750

Bennett Knox presented the Glacier Restroom Improvements Project. He explained this is a renovation of the existing restroom facility along Mt. Baker Highway (SR-542) in Glacier that has deteriorated over time and no longer adequately represents the needs of the community.

Bennett emphasized the project should be understood in the context of other Parks Department work in the corridor. Parks has received two grants from WSDOT for planning the Bellingham to Baker Trail along SR-542 from Kendall to Glacier. Parks has engaged stakeholders including the Mt. Baker Chamber, the ski lodge, DNR, and Maple Falls community members, and is in the process of hiring a planner to implement that project. The restroom renovation and trail planning support each other as part of a holistic approach to serving tourists traveling to Mt. Baker.

The project includes renovation and improvements around the existing structurally sound building to make it more inviting to tourists. A major expense is road improvements including chip seal paving (rather than asphalt to reduce permitting requirements). The \$475,750 request covers staff time, design work, permitting, and construction.

The project timeline calls for requesting budget authority from County Council in January 2026, with completion by summer 2027 (approximately 16 months).

Committee Discussion:

The committee first addressed the ongoing annual maintenance funding for the Glacier restrooms. This maintenance funding has been provided by LTAC historically but was not included in a separate line item on the October 13, 2025 agenda. Committee members recalled the 2025 funding amount was \$34,500. Given cost escalation trends, the committee discussed increasing the amount to approximately \$36,000 for 2026.

MOTION (Annual Maintenance): Guy Occhiogrosso moved to earmark \$36,000 for ongoing Glacier restroom maintenance as historically funded. Dylan Deane-Boyle seconded.

VOTE: The motion passed unanimously.

Rebecca Boonstra, representing the Mt. Baker Chamber of Commerce, spoke in support of upgrading the bathrooms and surrounding area. She noted the access road is pothole-filled, and the recent closure of the ranger station over the weekend meant public restroom access was critical. Her only question regarding ongoing maintenance and cleaning was addressed by confirming that Parks staff working out of Silver Lake handle regular maintenance.

Dylan Deane-Boyle asked about the chip seal/paving component shown in project renderings. Bennett Knox confirmed all road improvements are included in the comprehensive ask, including staff time, permitting, and design work.

Rebecca Boonstra asked about the implementation timeline and whether the project would be completed by end of 2026. Bennett confirmed completion would be summer 2027, approximately 16 months after January 2026 budget authority approval. Chair Schott-Bresler clarified that for capital projects, the county could either create a capital project budget or rebudget any unspent 2026 money into 2027 to accommodate the timeline, which differs from typical one-year LTAC grants.

MegAnne Offrendi asked about plans for restroom access during summer 2026 construction. Bennett indicated there would be times when the facility might need to be closed, but for much of the work the restroom should be able to remain open.

Dylan Deane-Boyle reinforced Guy Occhiogrosso's earlier point about finally implementing projects that have been identified in multiple planning studies over many years. He cited the 2022 destination development study with Western Washington University's Center for Economic and Business Research that involved local stakeholder input and identified wayside improvements as a priority. He emphasized that studies consistently recommend investing in infrastructure and amenities that serve both local residents and visitors, including restroom facilities, parking, and access improvements.

Guy Occhiogrosso noted this has been on the "wish list forever" and expressed strong support for finally moving forward.

MOTION: MegAnne Offrendi moved to approve the Glacier Restroom Improvements Project in the amount of \$475,750. Guy Occhiogrosso seconded.

VOTE: The motion passed unanimously.

Whatcom County Parks & Recreation - Birch Bay Beach Park Phase I Construction

Request: \$1,800,000

Bennett Knox presented the Birch Bay Beach Park project, acknowledging the large ask but emphasizing this represents an opportunity to finally complete a project that has been on the community's wish list for over a decade.

The project would implement Phase I construction including restrooms, parking, and infrastructure to support future improvements. Once completed, the park would serve as a space for community events.

The high costs relate to the difficulty of the site and required structural investments. Parks has successfully secured a \$500,000 grant from the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO), and the county has significant funding already set aside waiting to be leveraged. The LTAC funding would allow Parks to request budget authority from County Council to move forward with the project.

Committee Discussion:

Guy Occhiogrosso asked for clarification on what currently exists at the site. Danielle Gaughen from the Birch Bay Chamber explained the site currently functions primarily as a dog park and is occasionally used for overflow parking for events like the car show, but requires significant ground maintenance and management to be safe for regular parking due to structural issues. The project would add new parking, new restroom facilities, among other improvements

Guy Occhiogrosso reiterated his earlier theme about implementing projects that have been repeatedly studied and identified as priorities, rather than continuing to analyze opportunities indefinitely. He expressed support but wanted to be clear-eyed about future implications. He noted that approving this project would likely mean continued or increased operating costs for Parks maintenance, and would not eliminate the Birch Bay Chamber's need for porta-potty funding (included in their \$240,000 tourism promotion grant approved October 13). He emphasized that the committee's stated priorities are supporting chambers like Birch Bay and Mt. Baker that serve year-round visitors, and investing in tourism infrastructure. He wanted to ensure that saying yes to this capital project wouldn't negatively impact future operating grants to the chambers or other established funding priorities. Chair Schott-Bresler acknowledged the legitimate concern about ongoing operating costs and the importance of maintaining funding commitments to established tourism promotion partners. Dylan Deane-Boyle concurred with Guy's comments.

MOTION: Guy Occhiogrosso moved to approve the Birch Bay Beach Park Phase I Construction project in the amount of \$1,800,000. Dylan Deane-Boyle seconded.

VOTE: The motion passed unanimously.

Committee members expressed excitement at finally moving forward with this long-planned project. There was consensus that breaking out infrastructure and capital projects as a separate category has been a huge improvement to the LTAC program.

Guy Occhiogrosso reflected on the committee's work over the two meetings, noting that the committee had done the hard work of establishing clear funding priorities and made difficult/unpleasant decisions on October 13 to decline funding for eight applications. Those decisions freed up resources to fund these infrastructure investments that serve year-round visitors and have for many years and across many studies been identified as prudent and valuable investments.

6. OTHER BUSINESS

No other business was raised.

7. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at approximately 10:30 a.m.

* Budget hold contingent upon submission and administrative approval of complete grant application

DRAFT MINUTES - Subject to approval at the next LTAC meeting

Respectfully submitted,

Jake Logan
Clerk of the Board
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