

**WHATCOM COUNTY COMMISSION ON SALARIES
FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS**

AGENDA - **REVISED**

Wednesday, March 26, 2025

4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.

[Virtual Meeting](#)

- 1. Call to Order**
- 2. Roll Call**
- 3. Approval of Minutes from March 12, 2025 Meeting**
- 4. Public Comment – cap of 18 minutes total**
 - 4.1. Any interested attendee will be given 3 minutes for public comment
- 5. Presentation by Elected Officials**
 - 5.1. Donnell “Tank” Tanksley, Sherriff
- 6. Old Business**
- 7. New Business**
- 8. Information Review**
 - 8.1. Review data needs by position
 - 8.2. Discussion
 - 8.3. Commissioner Data Requests Status
 - No new data requests from last meeting
- 9. Next Steps**
 - 9.1. Next Meeting: Wednesday, April 9th 4 – 6 p.m. PDT (substitute Facilitator)
- 10. Adjourn**

Attachments

- 5.1 Written Statement from Sherrif Tanksley
- 4.1 Written Statement from Dewey Desler, former Commissioner and Chair of 2021 & 2023 Salary Commission

Whatcom County Executive's Office is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: 2025 WC Salary Commission

Time: Jan 29, 2025 16:00 Pacific Time (US and Canada)

Every 2 weeks on Wed, until Apr 23, 2025, 7 occurrence(s)

Please download and import the following iCalendar (.ics) files to your calendar system.

Weekly:

https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/tZlude6grDgjG9Z3FoYDz_63x1cKbFNWiRRA/ics?icsToken=DNTB4qxTs7THNlaUUgAALAAAAMoU6WjacQz54jQSgqGmclJzTIgIeQWYgvBodBpGNG4w2iRBf3_hC5cv2VI7cQLb4wLaOfci2sEuVLeLRDAwMDAwMQ&meetingMasterEventId=BwaWVz-fSwK9Ue7908Qneg

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- 64.211.144.160 (Brazil)
- 159.124.132.243 (Mexico)
- 159.124.168.213 (Canada Toronto)
- 159.124.196.25 (Canada Vancouver)
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Meeting ID: 863 2782 3912

**WHATCOM COUNTY
SHERIFF'S OFFICE**
DONNELL "TANK" TANKSLEY
Sheriff



PUBLIC SAFETY BUILDING

311 Grand Avenue
Bellingham, WA 98225
(360) 778-6600

March 26, 2025

Salary Commission
Whatcom County

Greetings:

I would like to thank the Salary Commission for giving me the opportunity to describe the work of the Whatcom County Sheriff. I also appreciate the work of the Salary Commission and give my wholehearted thanks to you all.

The principal job duties for the Office of Sheriff in Whatcom County are defined and prescribed by the Whatcom County Charter, Whatcom County Ordinances, the Revised Code of Washington and the Washington State Constitution.

The Sheriff is the chief law enforcement officer of the County. Established by Article XI, Section 5 of the Washington State Constitution, the duties of the Office of Sheriff were reaffirmed by Section 3.52 of the Whatcom County Charter and the "powers and duties" of Sheriff "are as provided by general law." The specific duties are prescribed in numerous sections of the statutes and are very diverse. They include not only law enforcement and investigative responsibilities, but additional duties that range from Civil and Support Services, Department of Emergency Management, Search and Rescue Operations, and Sex Offender/Kidnapper registration.

Most law enforcement responsibilities of the Sheriff are prescribed by Section 36.28.010 of the Revised Code of Washington. While most law enforcement duties are performed in unincorporated Whatcom County, the duties of Sheriff are countywide and exist irrespective of the existence of a municipal police department. The Whatcom County Sheriff's Office regularly assists municipal police departments, enforces the law within the city limits. We also coordinated with municipal police department and other law enforcement agencies to co-manage services such as the Whatcom Regional Drug Task Force, the Northwest Regional Transport Shuttle—and are the sole local law enforcement agency that provides Marine Patrol.

While all Sheriffs in Washington have county wide law enforcement responsibilities, not all are responsible for the operation of correctional facilities or are in charge of their county's emergency management functions. The Office of Sheriff in Whatcom County is responsible for

the operation of the Whatcom County Correctional system that often holds over 320 inmates at two locations. We also coordinate and supervises others on various jail alternative and release programs. The operation of the jail not only includes housing inmates that the county is legally required to detain, but operating a facility that contractually provides jail services to cities and tribes.

In addition, we are in the beginning stages of preparing to build a new Correctional facility in Ferndale. This is the largest project in the history of Whatcom County government. The Sheriff's Office are one of the primary stakeholders in the project.

Pursuant to County Ordinance, the Sheriff serves as the County's Director of Emergency Management which provides services to all municipalities except the city of Bellingham, the Port of Bellingham, and a water district. As director, the Whatcom County Sheriff is responsible for preparation, response and mitigation to natural and manmade disasters and emergencies. This includes overseeing the disbursement and accounting for state and federal relief funds authorized by Council. Not all counties vest this responsibility with the Sheriff.

Whatcom County is also unique in that it is home to an approximately 100-mile land border with Canada, hydroelectric facilities, refineries and an international airport resulting in complex challenges. It is important that the Sheriff have the sophistication, credibility and respect to deal with a myriad of federal, state and local partners in on-going efforts to keep Whatcom County safe.

The total budget for all Sheriff's Office functions is approximately \$48,000,000. In addition, I oversee (85) grants, general contracts, revenue contracts, and waivers totaling over \$14,300,888.

The Whatcom County Sheriff is also a member of several important commissions and task forces that include among others, the Whatcom Incarceration Prevention and Reduction Task Force; the Whatcom-Bellingham Commission Against Domestic Violence; and the Behavioral Health Advisory Committee; the Medical Examiner Advisory Committee and the Washington State Courts, Alternatives to Incarceration Task Force.

In addition, I am a member of the National Sheriff's Association, Washington State Sheriff's Association, Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs, National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives and the International Association of Chiefs of Police.

I am currently a board member of the Whatcom Dispute Resolution Center and a past board member of the Mount Baker Foundation. I am also on the National Security Commission, American Legion, Law and Order & Homeland Security Committee. And, lastly, I am the Chair of the Law and Order Committee, American Legion Department of Washington.

The Sheriff's Office is a very complex organization that operates (24) hours a day—every day.

No one should seek the position of Sheriff for monetary reasons. The mission of the Sheriff's Office is to provide the highest quality of Law Enforcement, Corrections, Emergency Management and Support services to Whatcom County.

a). The 2025 salary for the Whatcom County Sheriff is \$221,208.

b). The 2025 salary for the Whatcom County Undersheriff -- who reports to the Sheriff -- is \$184,524. The top step for the Undersheriff is \$204,224. The undersheriff also earns benefits that are not accorded to the sheriff (after hours call out pay) and an ability to cash out accumulated sick and vacation time upon resignation or retirement. (Sheriff and other elected officials do not earn sick or vacation time.)

c). The 2025 salary for the City of Bellingham Chief of Police is \$225,660. Chief Mertzig is also entitled to vacation and sick leave benefits. The Chief is only responsible for law enforcement, not a Correctional system or emergency management.

d). As an elected official, I perform the duties required of the Office of Sheriff as well as maintain the same general duties that the county's "department heads" are responsible for.

I have worked very hard professionally and formally to hold the position as Sheriff.

I hold a Masters degree in Management, Bachelors degree in Management, Associate degree in Human Resource Management, Associate degree in Education & Training, and (2) Associate degrees in Criminal Justice.

I am a graduate of Northwestern University, Center for Public Safety, School of Police Staff and Command, FBI LEEDA Executive Development Course, High Performance Leadership Academy and hold an Executive Police Certification from the Washington State Criminal Justice Commission.

It is critical that the County be able to maintain the ability to interest those with sufficient experience, education and proven leadership abilities to seek election to the Office of Sheriff.

Thank you for your volunteerism, time and work on the Salary Commission.

Respectfully,

Donnell "Tank" Tanksley
Sheriff, Whatcom County



Stacey Carroll <stacey@hrexpertsoncall.com>

link to zoom meeting

Stacey Carroll <stacey@hrexpertsoncall.com>

Wed, Mar 26, 2025 at 9:20 AM

To: Ralph Foldenauer <ralphf@dewaardandbode.com>, Rebecca Sadwick Shaddix <rebeccasadwick@gmail.com>, Vanessa Bronsema <vanessaB@ridewta.com>, Brennen Brown <brennen_james@yahoo.com>, Tracie Gulit <tracieg@windermere.com>, Karen Funston <karen@burifunston.com>, Gary Wrightson <garywrightson1@gmail.com>, Sonya Luhm <SonyaL.Bellingham@gmail.com>, Guy Occhiogrosso <guy@bellingham.com>, Daniel Darwin <president@atu843.org>

Please see below for comments from former salary commissioner (and chair), Dewey Desler. I will add this to the minutes to ensure it becomes part of the public record.

Thank you - see most of you this evening. We have just enough for a quorum, so please let me know if you are unable to attend ASAP (and haven't already notified me).

Thanks -
Stacey

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Dewey Desler** <ddesler@comcast.net>
Date: Tue, Mar 25, 2025 at 11:16 PM
Subject: Re: link to zoom meeting
To: Stacey Carroll <stacey@hrexpertsoncall.com>

Hi Stacey,

Actually I have decided to pass on attending and watching the next meeting of the Commission via zoom, though thank you for your time to take my call and your email.

Regarding my original concerns, after reading the latest letter (March 5, 2025) from the Prosecutor to the commission, rather than publicly commenting I decided that people on the County Salary commission could just as easily see my written comments in response to the prosecutors' assertion that mistakes were made by the 2021 commission for a perceived salary shortfall in July of 2023 of the prosecutor's salary. My view is the past two commissions made the decisions they made clearly and with intent as stated in their reports to the Country. They did so even in the face of an active and vigorous set of recommendations by the Prosecutor.

The previous Commissions choose to match the prosecutor's salary to that of a Superior Court Judge in the methods stated according to their respective and written reports. Those past 2 commissions, which I chaired, in my view, did not make a "known salary inequity" as alleged by our Prosecutor. They consciously made the determination and decisions that set the amount and timing of salaries for the elected officials during the past 3 and a half years.

I want to make this point, especially since none of the current commission members or its staff were part of the 2021 commission deliberations and decisions.

Of course, what the current commission decides is theirs to make but it shouldn't be assuming they need to correct some alleged "inequities" or alleged errors on the part of previous commissions. The prosecutor's implication in this regards is unfounded and specious.

I wish you and the Commission much insight and wisdom in the coming weeks.

Please share my communication with the Salary Commission.

Sincerely

Dewey Desler

Sent from my iPhone

On Mar 25, 2025, at 9:09 PM, Stacey Carroll <stacey@hrexpertsoncall.com> wrote:

Dewey - Here is the link to the zoom meeting for the WC Salary Commission meeting.

Also, I gave Prosecutor Richey a heads up that you were going to possibly make a public comment. I wanted to make sure if he wanted to respond that he had a chance before the commission starts moving forward with decisions.

Thanks -
Stacey

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