

Skagit County Legislative Report September 30, 2019

While most legislative activities were quiet in August, the pace picked up significantly after Labor Day. Most local governments are in the budget development process and the march to legislative session has begun!

House Committee Assembly Days: September 12 – 13

Historically the House and Senate meet in the Fall for “committee days”. While the Legislature is not formally in session during this time, legislators convene in Olympia and legislative committees hold work sessions on emerging issues. GTH-GA attended multiple work sessions on the county’s behalf, on topics including: local government census efforts, state-promoted pre-apprenticeship programs, impacts of wildfires on the environment and communities, waterway health, interest arbitration in public sector collective bargaining, drought, the Medicaid 1115 Transformation waiver, community development programs and economic tools, public works contracts, and tax increment financing. If the county would like further detail on any of these topics, GTH-GA would be happy to share our notes.

The House Local Government Champions Caucus, chaired by Rep. Gerry Pollet and Rep. Keith Goehner, met during Committee Assembly. The conversation was largely informal; members shared issues that they are working on and discussed their desire to keep the Caucus going during session.

House Rural Development, Agriculture, and Natural Resources Work Session on Skagit Valley Environmental Issues

During committee assembly days, GTH-GA attended a work session on wildlife damage and water resources in Skagit County. Panelists for the portion on wildlife damage discussed negative impacts of the North Cascades native elk herd on Skagit Valley agriculture, communities, and infrastructure. Panelists from the Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Swinomish Tribal Community, the Stillaguamish Tribe of Indians, and the Lummi Nation provided comanager perspectives of the elk management program, while Commissioner Wesen offered the county perspective on the issue. Agricultural interests were represented by the Skagit Land Trust and the Washington Cattlemen’s Association. GTH-GA will continue to look for opportunities to engage with the county and other stakeholders on this issue.

WSAC Legislative Steering Committee

WSAC held a Legislative Steering Committee meeting on September 20th in Ellensburg. GTH-GA attended on behalf of the county. WSAC staff provided updates on indigent

defense, fish passage barrier removal, FPHS, behavioral health, HB 1406 implementation, PILT, and DNR's marbled murrelet study. While items on the draft legislative agenda (included in the meeting packet) were discussed, the steering committee did not formally adopt the association's legislative agenda. The committee also adopted changes to the association's Policy Statement, found in the meeting packet.

State Revenues Continue to Climb

The Economic and Revenue Forecast Council met on September 25th and received an update from the State's Economist on state revenue projections. Legislative budget writers will have an additional \$447 million in general fund resources available in the current ('19-'21) biennium. That's a total of \$51.4 billion. The state general fund is currently projected to grow to \$55 billion in the '21-'23 biennium.

Homeless Bill of Rights Stakeholders Meeting

GTH-GA staff joined a small group of advocates representing the Washington Low Housing Alliance, Washington Community Action Network, Columbia Legal Services, Seattle University and the Association of Washington Cities to discuss last year's proposed legislation establishing a homeless bill of rights (HB 1591). The goal was to try and identify less-divisive alternatives than last year's bill. We expect that these conversations will continue until and through the 2020 session.