



Skagit County Public Health

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TO: Board of County Commissioners
Cc: Trisha Logue, Jennifer Johnson
FROM: Monica Negrila
DATE: January 29, 2026
SUBJECT: Senior Centers Funding

Purpose

The purpose of this memo is to:

1. Describe current senior center funding and operational models across Skagit County cities.
2. Provide comparative information from other Washington counties.
3. Present alternative funding models for consideration; and
4. Offer a staff recommendation for an equitable funding framework for County-supported senior centers.

This review is timely due to the upcoming transition of senior nutrition services away from County administration, which necessitates a clearer distinction between senior center operations and nutrition services. The memo concludes with a recommended funding model for Board consideration.

Background

The senior centers in the cities of Burlington, Mount Vernon and Sedro Woolley are operated by the County. The senior center in the city of Anacortes is operated by the city. The community center in Concrete is operated by Community Action of Skagit County. The County provides funding to La Conner to provide senior services.

The senior center facilities in the cities of Anacortes, Burlington and Sedro Woolley are owned by the cities. The senior center facility in the city of Mount Vernon is owned by the County. The Community Center facility in Concrete is owned by the County.

The 2026 Public Health budget for senior center staffing and operations totals \$670,536, of which \$618,456 is funded by the County General Fund. This does not include facility, maintenance, janitorial and repair expenses. The County currently provides \$128,000 annually per senior center operated by the County in the cities of Burlington, Mount Vernon and Sedro Woolley to support staffing, programming, and day-to-day operations.

- The County provides \$105,000 annually to Anacortes for their staff costs. The County provides \$7,000 to the Town of La Conner for their Senior Program.
- The County provides \$167,400 annually to Community Action of Skagit County for the staffing, operations and meal service at the Concrete Community Center.
- The County also receives a CDBG Block Grant in the amount of \$66,064 for the Concrete Community Center (not included in the total above.)

2025 City Contributions (Centers and Nutrition Combined)

Each city has historically provided funding to the County to support both senior center activities and senior nutrition programs. The city contributions to the County were combined rather than differentiated by service type.

Amounts reflect combined support for senior center operations and senior nutrition programs.

Anacortes	Concrete	Burlington	Mount Vernon	Sedro-Woolley
\$44,600	\$9,229	\$15,402	\$65,080	\$22,791

Beginning July 1, the senior nutrition program will no longer be administered by the County. In response to the upcoming change the cities and county entered into 6-month contracts, January 1-June 30, 2026, instead of a year-long contract for 2026. As a result, the city contribution structures beyond June 30, 2026, need to be discussed and re-negotiated.

This transition presents an opportunity to revisit and clarify the County–city partnership specifically related to senior center operations, separate from nutrition services. While all cities benefit from senior center services, the current financial model does not consistently reflect operating costs or the varying levels of city support.

Current Models of Senior Center Operations in Skagit County

Senior Center services are delivered through multiple operational models:

Mount Vernon Model (Population: 35,000)

- The City of Mount Vernon contributes \$65,000 annually to the County for the operations of the Senior Center and the Nutrition Program.
- The County provides the facility, utilities, janitorial, maintenance, staffing and operations.

Burlington (Population: 11,000) and Sedro-Woolley Model (Population: 13,000)

- The City of Burlington contributes \$15,000 annually to the County for the operations of the Senior Center and the Nutrition Program.
- The City of Sedro-Woolley contributes \$23,000 annually to the County for the operations of the Senior Center and the Nutrition Program.
- Cities provide the facilities, janitorial, maintenance, and a cash contribution to the County.
- The County provides staffing and operations of the senior center and the nutrition program.
- Burlington's Senior Center also serves as the central kitchen for congregate meals and Meals on Wheels for all cities.

Anacortes Model (Population: 18,000)

- The County provides \$105,000 annually to the city in lieu of providing County staff.
- The City of Anacortes provides \$44,600 annually to the County for the operations of the Nutrition Program.
- The City of Anacortes provides the facility, janitorial, maintenance, staffing and operation of the Center.

Concrete Community Center (Population: 800)

- The Town of Concrete contributes \$9,229 annually to the County for the operations of the Community Center.
- The County provides the facility, utilities, janitorial, and maintenance.
- The County contributes \$167,400 annually to Community Action of Skagit County for staffing and operations of the Community Center in Concrete, which does include preparation and service of lunch on site five (5) days per week. This is separate from the nutrition/meal program offered in the Senior centers.
- The facility operates as a community center serving all ages, reflecting population size and local needs.

This model reflects geographic and demographic realities and differs from traditional senior-center-only operations. The meal program is not funded by NWRC as it does not meet age restriction eligibility.

Peer County Comparisons

A review of other Washington counties demonstrates a wide range of funding and operational approaches:

Kitsap County (Population: 277,658)

- Kitsap County does NOT provide funding to support senior centers, nor do they operate any senior centers.
- Three cities host Centers in city owned buildings
- Senior Centers are membership clubs. The members decide how much they pay to support their club. City governments assist with public space or general funding (typically through Parks & Rec) to support local Centers. Area Agencies on Aging can provide funding for older adult programs/ services to be in the Senior Centers, but the Senior Centers must have the infrastructure to execute a contract (for funding). This includes liability insurance and other formal processes for accepting public funds.

Whatcom County (Population: 231,919)

- Whatcom County provides \$540,000 annually to support 8 senior centers
 - 4 large centers
 - 4 smaller centers with limited hours

Cowlitz County (Population: 112,864)

- Cowlitz County does NOT provide funding to support senior centers, nor do they operate any senior centers.

Lewis County (Population: 86,154)

- Lewis County leases five senior center buildings to a non-profit for \$1 annually and covers major maintenance (e.g., roofing)
- Ownership transfer to nonprofits has been discussed but not implemented

Key takeaway: Counties across Washington use markedly different models. Skagit County's level of staffing and operational responsibility is comparatively high.

Total Cost to Operate a Senior Center

For purposes of evaluating funding models, staff recommend recognizing the full cost of operating a senior center in Burlington, Mount Vernon and Sedro Woolley. *This does not reflect the full cost for Anacortes or Concrete.*

- County staffing for Burlington, Mount Vernon, and Sedro Woolley: **\$128,000**
- Facility, utilities, and janitorial services: **\$243,000**
 - Based on 9,000 sq. ft. at \$27 per sq. ft. (this is an average, and can be calculated more exactly for each facility)
 - Approximate figure for county and city owned facilities for Burlington, Mount Vernon and Sedro Woolley

Total operating cost per senior center: \$371,000 (plus the cost of any necessary building repairs.)

Funding Models for Board Consideration

Option 1: Equal Cost-Share Model

- County and city each fund 50% of total operating costs
- In-kind credit provided for facilities, utilities, and janitorial services

- When in-kind support exceeds a party's 50% share, the cash contribution is reduced to \$0 and the remaining in-kind value offsets the other party's share of total operating cost

Cost Breakdown

- Total cost: **\$371,000**
- County share (50%): **\$185,500**
- City share (50%): **\$185,500**

In-Kind Credit

- Cities providing facilities, utilities, and janitorial services receive a \$243,000 in-kind credit.
- County receives \$243,000 in-kind credit in Mount Vernon.

Example A: Cities Providing Facilities

- City share: **\$185,500**
- Less in-kind credit: **\$243,000**
- City cash contribution: **\$0**
- County cash contribution: **\$128,000**

(Total cost \$371,000 - \$243,000 in-kind = \$128,000 remaining cash cost)

Example B: City Not Providing Facilities

- City cash contribution: **\$185,500**
- County in-kind contribution: **\$243,000**

(When a city does not provide facilities, it pays its full 50% share in cash, while the County provides facilities and related services as an in-kind contribution.)

Rationale

- Reflects the approximate full cost of operating a senior center.
- Shared County/City funding responsibility with clear credit for in-kind support.
- Reduces variability created by historical arrangements.
- Avoids complex formulas or annual recalculations.
- Provides a stable framework adaptable to future cost changes.

Option 2: County-Funded FTE Model

- The County funds and provides one full-time equivalent (FTE) position per city. The FTE is a county employee.
- Cities and/or non-profits would be responsible for facilities and additional operational costs.

Rationale

- Simple to explain
- Directly ties County funding to staffing

Option 3: Per Capita Funding Model

Under this model, total County funding for senior centers would be allocated to cities based on their proportion of the total population. Each city's share would be calculated as a percentage of the combined population and applied to the total funding amount available.

City populations:

- Anacortes: 18,000
- Burlington: 11,000
- Mount Vernon: 35,000
- Sedro-Woolley: 13,000

Total population used in calculation: 77,000

Scenario A: Current Total Funding – \$670,000

City	Population	% of Total Population	Estimated Allocation
Anacortes	18,000	23.4%	~\$156,800
Burlington	11,000	14.3%	~\$95,800
Mount Vernon	35,000	45.5%	~\$304,900
Sedro-Woolley	13,000	16.9%	~\$112,500
Total	77,000	100%	\$670,000

Scenario B: Reduced Funding Example – \$500,000 (*Example number only*)

City	Population	% of Total Population	Estimated Allocation
Anacortes	18,000	23.4%	~\$116,900
Burlington	11,000	14.3%	~\$71,400
Mount Vernon	35,000	45.5%	~\$227,300
Sedro-Woolley	13,000	16.9%	~\$84,400
Total	77,000	100%	\$500,000

Rationale

- Appears equitable on a population basis
- Easy to calculate, explain, and adjust as funding levels change
- Commonly used approach in other intergovernmental funding models

This approach does not account for service use by residents outside city limits.

Option 4: County provides funding to cities and/or non-profits, and cities and/or non-profits employ and supervise the Senior Center Coordinator position

The Board may wish to consider an alternative staffing structure in which the County provides funding to participating cities and/or non-profits, subject to Board of County Commissioners' direction and the availability of General Fund resources. Under this approach, funding levels would be determined through the selected cost-share or allocation model as approved by the Board. Cities or non-profits would employ and supervise the Senior Center Coordinator position and would assume responsibility for hiring, supervision, and day-to-day management of senior center staff.

Option 5: County phases out funding of Senior Center Operations

Under this option, the County would gradually phase out its financial support for senior center operations in recognition of ongoing General Fund constraints and statutory priorities. Counties across Washington State commonly do not provide direct operational funding for senior centers, with such services more often funded and administered by cities, nonprofit organizations, or community-based partners. A phased approach would allow time for transition planning, partner coordination, and communication with affected stakeholders while aligning County expenditures with statutory responsibilities and long-term fiscal sustainability.

Staff Recommendation

Staff recommend adoption of **Option 4**, under which the County provides funding and cities and/or non-profits employ and supervise the Senior Center Coordinator position. This approach balances continued County support for senior services with fiscal responsibility and operational efficiency by aligning staffing, supervision, and day-to-day management at the city level. Cities and/or non-profits are often best positioned to oversee senior center operations given their proximity to the facilities and communities served, while County funding can be structured through contracts to ensure accountability and consistency. Option 4 also reduces administrative burden on the County, provides clearer lines of supervision, and offers a sustainable, collaborative model that reflects common practice across Washington State.

Recommended Next Steps

Staff recommend that the Board of County Commissioners:

1. Review and provide policy direction on the preferred funding model,
2. Clarify acceptable contribution parameters and implementation timing, and
3. Commissioners and staff engage with city partners for input.