



Office of the Washington State Auditor  
Pat McCarthy

## Accountability Audit Report

# Whatcom Council of Governments

For the period January 1, 2022 through December 31, 2023

*Published June 13, 2024*

Report No. 1035034



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**Office of the Washington State Auditor  
Pat McCarthy**

June 13, 2024

Board of Directors  
Whatcom Council of Governments  
Bellingham, Washington

**Report on Accountability**

Thank you for the opportunity to work with you to promote accountability, integrity and openness in government. The Office of the Washington State Auditor takes seriously our role of providing state and local governments with assurance and accountability as the independent auditor of public accounts. In this way, we strive to help government work better, cost less, deliver higher value and earn greater public trust.

Independent audits provide essential accountability and transparency for Council operations. This information is valuable to management, the governing body and public stakeholders when assessing the government's stewardship of public resources.

Attached is our independent audit report on the Council's compliance with applicable requirements and safeguarding of public resources for the areas we examined. We appreciate the opportunity to work with your staff and value your cooperation during the audit.

Sincerely,

Pat McCarthy, State Auditor  
Olympia, WA

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# AUDIT RESULTS

## Results in brief

This report describes the overall results and conclusions for the areas we examined. In those selected areas, Council operations complied, in all material respects, with applicable state laws, regulations, and its own policies, and provided adequate controls over the safeguarding of public resources.

In keeping with general auditing practices, we do not examine every transaction, activity, policy, internal control, or area. As a result, no information is provided on the areas that were not examined.

## About the audit

This report contains the results of our independent accountability audit of the Whatcom Council of Governments from January 1, 2022 through December 31, 2023.

Management is responsible for ensuring compliance and adequate safeguarding of public resources from fraud, loss or abuse. This includes the design, implementation and maintenance of internal controls relevant to these objectives.

This audit was conducted under the authority of RCW 43.09.260, which requires the Office of the Washington State Auditor to examine the financial affairs of all local governments. Our audit involved obtaining evidence about the Council's use of public resources, compliance with state laws and regulations and its own policies and procedures, and internal controls over such matters. The procedures performed were based on our assessment of risks in the areas we examined.

Based on our risk assessment for the years ended December 31, 2023 and 2022, the areas examined were those representing the highest risk of fraud, loss, abuse, or noncompliance. We examined the following areas during this audit period:

- Payroll – gross wages, leave balances and accruals, and electronic funds transfers
- Accounts payable – general disbursements, credit cards, travel expenditures, and electronic funds transfers
- Open public meetings – compliance with minutes, meetings and executive session requirements
- Financial condition – reviewing for indications of financial distress

## RELATED REPORTS

### **Financial**

Our opinion on the Council's financial statements and compliance with federal grant program requirements is provided in a separate report, which includes the Council's financial statements. That report is available on our website, <http://portal.sao.wa.gov/ReportSearch>.

### **Federal grant programs**

We evaluated internal controls and tested compliance with the federal program requirements, as applicable, for the Council's major federal program, which is listed in the Schedule of Findings and Questioned Costs section of the separate financial statement and single audit report. That report is available on our website, <http://portal.sao.wa.gov/ReportSearch>.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE COUNCIL

The Whatcom Council of Governments is an inter-governmental organization that coordinates projects primarily relating to transportation issues to mutually benefit the member entities. The governing officials of the Council consist of a Council Board and an Executive Committee. The Council Board is a 15-member board comprised of elected representatives of local general purpose and special district governments throughout Whatcom County. The Executive Committee carries out the responsibilities of day-to-day Council activities. Mayors, Executives, Commissioners and Council Members of participating local governments serve as Board Members. As of December 31, 2023, the Council Board included representatives from the following local governments: City of Bellingham, City of Blaine, City of Everson, City of Ferndale, City of Lynden, City of Nooksack, City of Sumas, Whatcom County, Lummi Nation, Port of Bellingham, and Lake Whatcom Water and Sewer District.

Established in 1966 as a multi-jurisdictional body, the Council represents local governments in Whatcom County, which serve an estimated 236,000 citizens. The Council has a staff of eight employees.

In fiscal year 2023, the Council operated on budget of approximately \$1.5 million. The majority of the Council's funding comes from federal, state, and local grants along with local dues.

### Contact information related to this report

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*Information current as of report publish date.*

### Audit history

You can find current and past audit reports for the Whatcom Council of Governments at <http://portal.sao.wa.gov/ReportSearch>.

## ABOUT THE STATE AUDITOR'S OFFICE

The State Auditor's Office is established in the Washington State Constitution and is part of the executive branch of state government. The State Auditor is elected by the people of Washington and serves four-year terms.

We work with state agencies, local governments and the public to achieve our vision of increasing trust in government by helping governments work better and deliver higher value.

In fulfilling our mission to provide citizens with independent and transparent examinations of how state and local governments use public funds, we hold ourselves to those same standards by continually improving our audit quality and operational efficiency, and by developing highly engaged and committed employees.

As an agency, the State Auditor's Office has the independence necessary to objectively perform audits, attestation engagements and investigations. Our work is designed to comply with professional standards as well as to satisfy the requirements of federal, state and local laws. The Office also has an extensive quality control program and undergoes regular external peer review to ensure our work meets the highest possible standards of accuracy, objectivity and clarity.

Our audits look at financial information and compliance with federal, state and local laws for all local governments, including schools, and all state agencies, including institutions of higher education. In addition, we conduct performance audits and cybersecurity audits of state agencies and local governments, as well as state whistleblower, fraud and citizen hotline investigations.

The results of our work are available to everyone through the more than 2,000 reports we publish each year on our website, [www.sao.wa.gov](http://www.sao.wa.gov). Additionally, we share regular news and other information via an email subscription service and social media channels.

We take our role as partners in accountability seriously. The Office provides training and technical assistance to governments both directly and through partnerships with other governmental support organizations.

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