



2021

Annual Report

Whatcom County
Auditor's Office



The 2021 Annual Report is published by the Whatcom County Auditor's Office

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Message from the Auditor



I am pleased to release the Auditor's 2021 Annual Report. 2021 was a year of transition. Moving into the second year of the COVID Pandemic the office followed state and local mandates for masks, public access, and safety measures. By mid-year, however, we were able to open the office to walk-in customers while maintaining mask mandates and social distancing. We continued to encourage customers to access services remotely via online and drop-off services and held department and county meetings via ZOOM. State-wide conferences were conducted remotely. By the Fall we were able to hold Canvassing Board meetings in person and had increased the limit for election observers.

The office continued to deal with some challenges directly related to COVID. Supply chain issues delayed procurement of some items such as computers and laptops. Licensing, in particular, struggled all year with low inventory issues related to lack of supply of aluminum to manufacture the plates, and prison workers who contracted COVID and needed to quarantine. Our historical records projects were delayed due to staff quarantine requirements at the vendor site. Some customers were frustrated at the need to make an appointment the first half of the year, and the inability to get their transaction completed "on demand". Through it all, we made adjustments as necessary to get the job done. Department of Licensing put procedures in place to issue extended temporary plates. We carried the budget forward for the historical records projects. And we provided customers as many options as possible to get their transactions completed. The investment in technology over the past several years positioned us to be able to respond to these needs including allowing staff to work from home when necessary.

This report gives us an opportunity to review our accomplishments over the past year, evaluate what worked well, and make adjustments to enhance customer service and efficiencies. As you will see in the following pages, some transactions increased in 2021 and some decreased. We have taken on some new projects, and continued working on others.

It also provides an opportunity for the public to see and compare various aspects of the Auditor's Office. We're here to serve the citizens of Whatcom County and we remain committed to continuous improvement. I hope you find this report informative.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Diana Bradrick". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Diana Bradrick

Whatcom County Auditor

2021 By the Numbers

1	Auditor
3	Elections Conducted
6	Subagents
15	Public Records Requests
16	Deputy Auditors
19	Drop Boxes
78	Percentage of Documents e-Recorded
167	Combined Years Auditor's Office Experience
183	County Precincts
1,397	Marriage Applications
34,798	Petition Signatures Verified
68,771	Documents Recorded
131,118	Total Ballots Returned
157,062	Active Registered Voters
303,912	County-wide Licensing Transactions
326,294	Total Ballots Issued
4,386,708	Total Office Revenue Collected



Administrative Overview

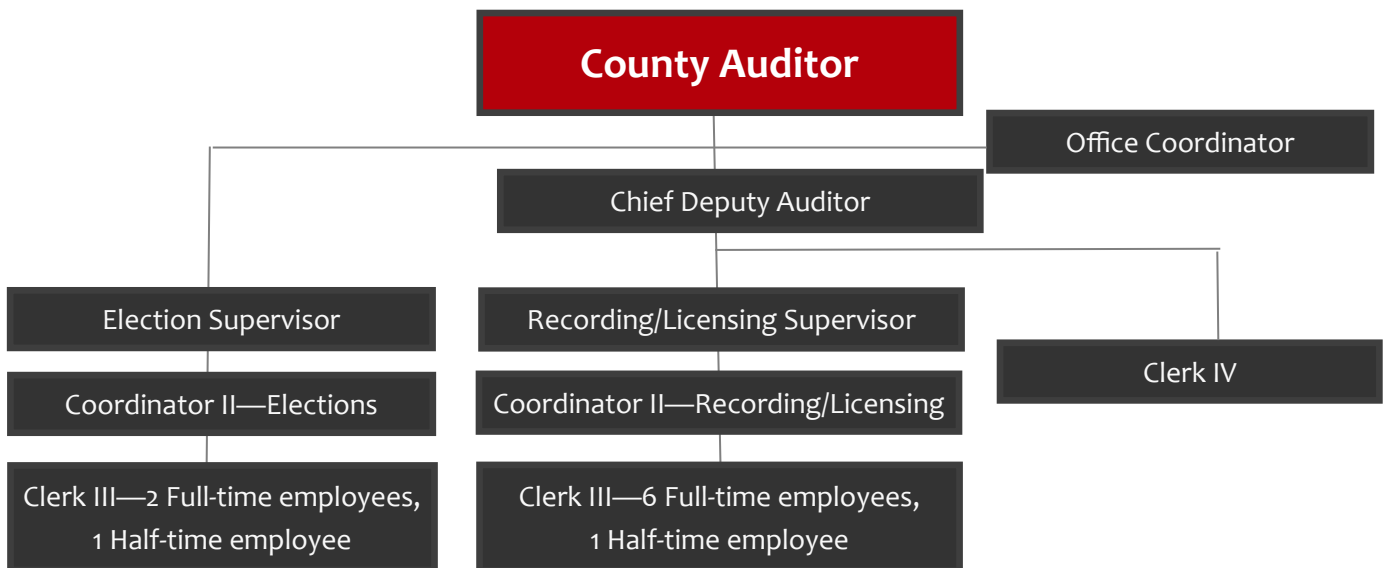
Auditor's Office administration, namely the Auditor, Chief Deputy, Office Coordinator, and Clerk IV, provide support for office-wide operations.

Highlights in 2021

- ◆ Processed 20 resolutions for ballot measures
- ◆ Calculated and mailed out 76 bills for election and registration costs
- ◆ Managed 50 contracts
- ◆ Developed and issued 1 request for proposals
- ◆ Managed 2 grants
- ◆ Responded to 15 Public Records Requests
- ◆ Updated the Canvassing Board Guidelines, Administrative Rules for Jurisdictions, and Administrative Rules for Candidates
- ◆ Processed 87 oaths of office and created certificates of election/ appointment
- ◆ Managed budgets totaling \$3,104,695
- ◆ Maintained 69 web pages
- ◆ Collected \$4,386,708 in revenue.

Core Services

- ◆ Administration
- ◆ Oversight of three divisions: Recording, Elections & Licensing
- ◆ Budget
- ◆ Payroll
- ◆ Purchasing/accounts payable
- ◆ Initiatives, referenda, district creation
- ◆ Requests for proposals
- ◆ Contract management
- ◆ Legal notices and press releases



Statewide Involvement

In addition to the oversight of three divisions under the Auditor's purview, the Auditor and the Chief Deputy participate in the Washington State Association of County Auditors (WSACA) and the Washington Association of County Officials (WACO). These statewide advocacy groups provide opportunities to interact with other counties and statewide officials, and to learn and share best practices.

Washington State Association of County Auditors (WSACA)

Auditor Diana Bradrick co-chaired the Elections Committee and served on the Legislative and Recording Committees as well. Diana and Chief Deputy, Stacy Henthorn, participated in the Recording Committee. In addition, Stacy and Licensing Supervisor, Morgan Kalkwarf, served on the Licensing Committee.

Secretary of State's Office Committees

Auditor Bradrick continued to serve on the Executive Steering Committee for the statewide VoteWA voter registration system. Amy Grasher, Elections Supervisor, served on the Advisory Committee for VoteWA helping to prioritize and test enhancements to functionality.

National Involvement

Auditor Bradrick has been a long-time member of the International Association of Government Officials (IGO) and the Property Records Industry Association (PRIA). Chief Deputy Henthorn has been a member of IGO and PRIA since 2020. Their participation in these associations keep the office current on emerging technology as well as keeping the office up-to-date on national trends in the recording, elections, records management and marriage licensing areas.

Highlights:

- ◆ Legislative Committee
- ◆ Recording Committee
- ◆ Licensing Committee
- ◆ Executive Steering Committee for statewide voter registration system
- ◆ State VoteWA Advisory Committee
- ◆ Property Records Industry Association (PRIA)
- ◆ International Association of Government Officials (IGO)



Elections in 2021

There were three elections conducted this year, however the special election in February only effected 37 voters. The primary and general elections were countywide.

The primary election included 11 races and 5 local fire district ballot measures.

The general election included 113 offices with 144 candidates. There were three advisory votes, and 15 local ballot measures.

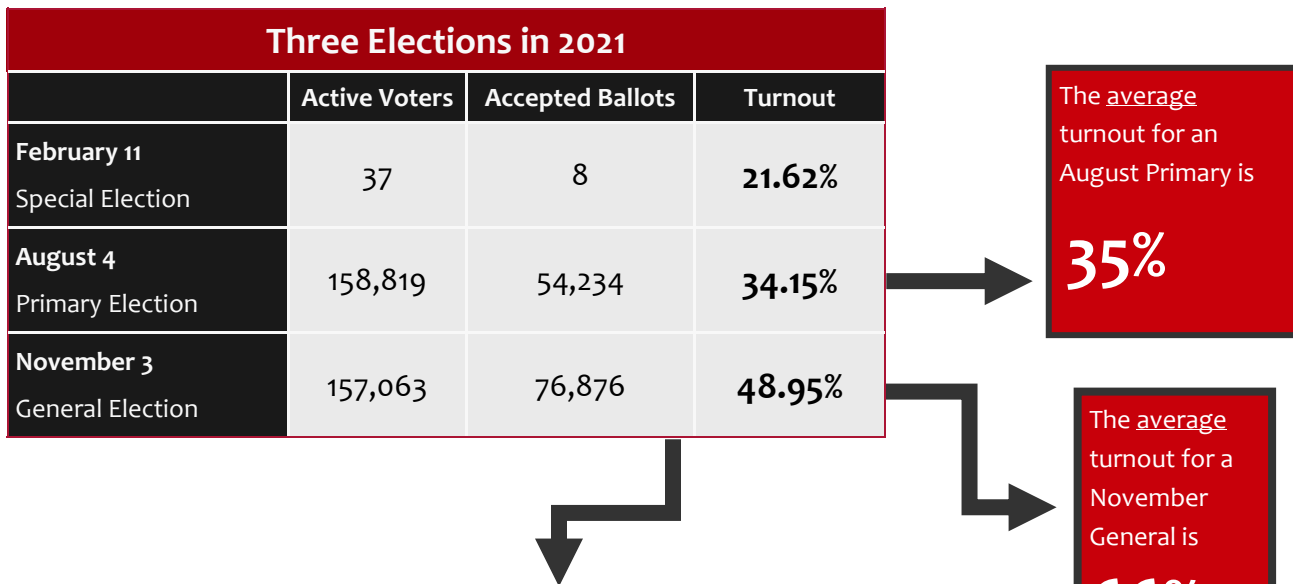
Voter turnout in the primary and general elections was lower than average, as noted in the chart below.

For more information on ballots returned, see page 6.

For a detailed review of rejected ballots, see page 7.

Administering Elections

- ◆ File candidates for local elected offices
- ◆ File and process all local ballot measures
- ◆ Design and print a local voters' pamphlet for each election
- ◆ Layout, proof, and print ballots and various election materials
- ◆ Ensure that all eligible voters are mailed a ballot 20 days prior to an election
- ◆ Hire, train, and supervise opening board workers, ballot collection teams, and ballot drop box closers
- ◆ Ensure ballot secrecy and security is maintained
- ◆ Receive, process, and count returned ballots
- ◆ Certify and publish election results
- ◆ Conduct observer training



Comparison of Ballots Accepted Each Year	
	2021: 131,118 ballots accepted, three elections conducted
	2020: 370,198 ballots accepted, four elections conducted
	2019: 153,109 ballots accepted, three elections conducted
	2018: 204,800 ballots accepted, four elections conducted
	2017: 98,430 ballots accepted, three elections conducted
	2016: 268,252 ballots accepted, five elections conducted
	2015: 104,842 ballots accepted, four elections conducted

Ballot Return

In 2020, during the general election, voters returned their ballots early. In 2021, voters waited longer to return their ballots. Late ballots accounted for only 66 out of 140,352 in 2020 as compared to 365 out of 77,594 in 2021. The graph below compares the ballot return data.

The early return not only enabled us to process ballots throughout the election, it meant more ballots were in the first results released election night. It also meant far fewer ballots were rejected for being late. Early returns also allow voters more time to cure a challenged ballot before the election is certified.

Returned to an official ballot drop box:

70.2%

Returned in the mail, postage paid:

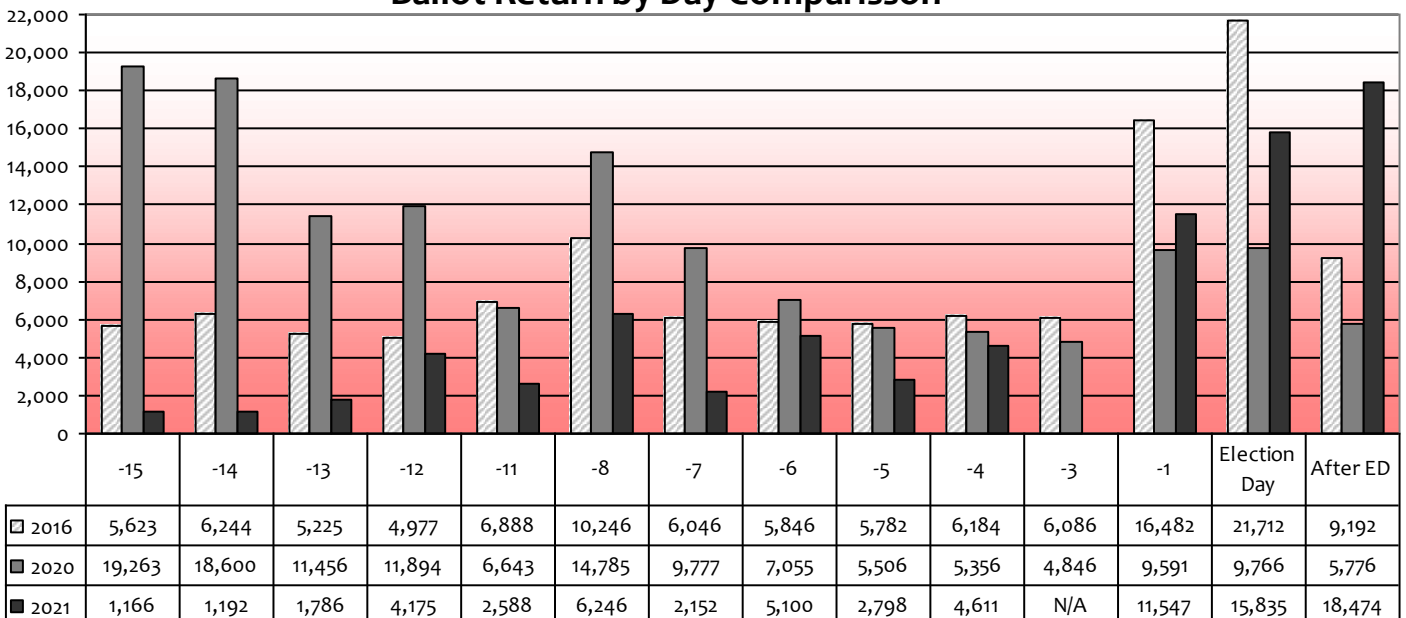
29.6%



Total Ballots Collected at Each Return Location

Mail	22,997
Courthouse	14,274
Lynden	7,638
Ferndale	6,506
Sehome	6,290
Barkley	4,363
Blaine	2,668
Everson	2,259
Birch Bay	2,048
WCC	1,322
Sudden Valley	1,194
Deming	1,071
Laurel	1,014
Kendall	749
Custer	598
WWU-Wade King	588
Sumas	570
WWU-Red square	545
Lummi	219
Point Roberts	207
WWU-HUB	177
Acme	176
Email/Fax	121

Ballot Return by Day Comparison



Rejected Ballot Overview

Upon receiving a ballot/return envelope, Auditor’s Office staff determine whether to accept or reject it by verifying the timeliness and signature. Accepted return envelopes that are on time and have a valid signature move along in the process to be counted/tabulated. Rejected return envelopes are removed and held for further review.

Staff are trained by the Washington State Patrol and have years of experience verifying signatures. Rejected signatures are reviewed by multiple staff members. If the signature on the return envelope has been rejected, a letter is sent to the voter providing the opportunity to cure their challenged signature. The two most common challenge reasons are the signature does not match and the envelope is unsigned. All rejected envelopes are presented to the Canvassing Board for final review prior to election certification.

As seen below, fewer than 1% of ballots returned get rejected. In 2021, there was an increase in the number of ballots rejected for being returned late. This was due in large part to voters mailing their ballots too close to election day.

General Election Rejected Ballot Totals, 2014-2021

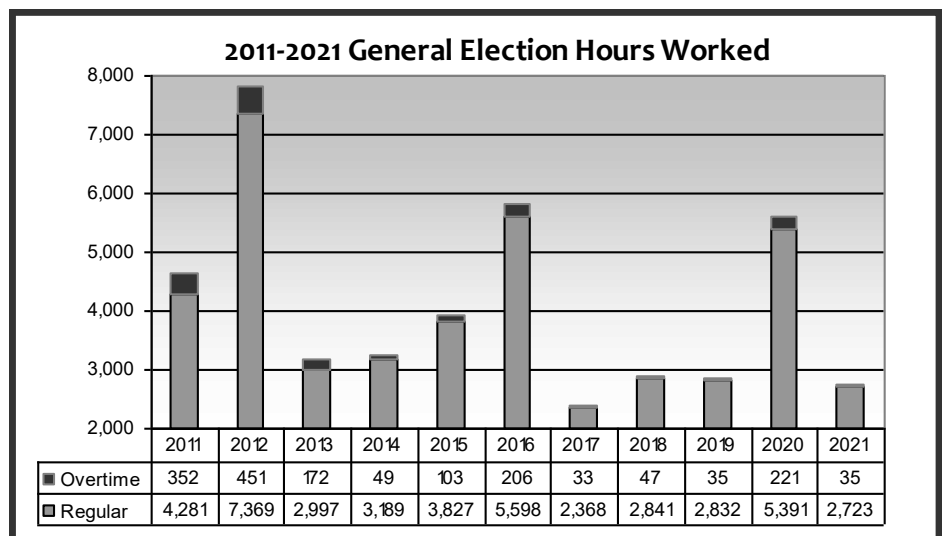
	Signature		Returned		Total Rejected	Total Returned	Rejected %
	Unsigned	No Match	LATE	Other			
2021	65	277	365	11	718	77,594	0.93%
2020	173	463	66	22	724	140,352	0.52%
2019	61	229	387	12	689	83,226	0.83%
2018	27	252	192	107	578	111,082	0.52%
2017	56	188	271	40	555	64,181	0.86%
2016	85	521	90	155	851	115,771	0.74%
2015	26	176	234	68	504	61,640	0.82%
2014	55	263	293	108	719	76,842	0.94%

Hours Worked

The chart to the right shows total hours worked during the general election over the past 10 years.

In 2021, hours worked were low in comparison to other years due to low ballot return. Only 2017 required fewer hours worked.

The chart also shows the dramatic increase in hours during presidential election years (2012, 2016, 2020).



Election Security

Election security continued to be a high priority in 2021. Here are a few measures that were taken for election security in Whatcom County:

- Five cameras monitoring the election center 24 hours a day, available to view online.
- Ballots batched, tracked, and audited.
- Security prox locks on all doors with access restrictions and monitoring reports.
- Use of seals and seal logs, formal chain of custody supports all movements of ballots.
- Logic & accuracy test to ensure accuracy of tabulation system.
- Tabulation system on a closed network (no internet access).
- Two designated election workers required around ballots at all times.
- Access to voter registration system requires two factor authentication.

General Election - A Historical Perspective

As you can see in the chart below, the turnout in 2021 was low, but not the lowest seen in the last 30 years.

The chart to the right compares the turnout percentage of Whatcom County and Washington State as a whole.

Whatcom County Votes!

Voter turnout in Whatcom County is typically higher than the average for the entire state, as noted in the chart below.

	Whatcom County	Washington State
2021	48.95%	39.38%
2020	87.94%	84.14%
2019	56.20%	44.82%
2018	77.13%	71.83%
2017	45.88%	37.10%
2016	82.70%	78.76%
2015	47.24%	38.45%
2014	59.81%	54.16%
2013	54.89%	45.27%
2012	83.46%	81.25%
2011	59.02%	52.95%
Avg	63.93%	57.10%

General Election Turnout in Whatcom County (* indicates Presidential Election year)

1990-1999	1990	1991	1992*	1993	1994	1995	1996*	1997	1998	1999	
Ballots Accepted	39,660	44,697	64,463	44,911	45,192	45,511	65,565	50,593	57,090	53,038	
Turnout %	64%	70%	81%	56%	53%	51%	69%	59%	63%	58%	
2000-2010	2000*	2001	2002	2003	2004*	2005	2006	2007	2008*	2009	2010
Ballots Accepted	74,671	44,163	55,066	45,786	91,497	63,716	69,782	55,059	101,399	61,288	86,993
Turnout %	76%	45%	60%	48%	86.24%	62%	68%	53%	87.93%	53%	74%
2011-2021	2011	2012*	2013	2014	2015	2016*	2017	2018	2019	2020*	2021
Ballots Accepted	69,147	104,727	69,709	76,123	61,136	114,920	63,626	110,504	82,537	139,628	77,594
Turnout %	59%	83.46%	54%	59%	47%	82.7%	45%	77%	56%	87.94%	48.95%

Student Engagement HUB

The Washington State Legislature passed Engrossed Substitute Bill 6313 related to establishing Student Engagement Hubs. It requires counties with a university (defined in RCW 28B.10.016) to provide voter registration and ballot access services to all voters in Washington State at the university.

In preparation, student workers at Western Washington University (WWU) were trained by staff from the Auditor's Office. The HUB was open on November 1st & 2nd in the Viking Union Center at WWU to assist voters with registering, updating registrations and ballot replacement.

Statistics:

- 270 ballots returned at drop box inside HUB
- 96 registration forms completed
- 20 new voters registered, 76 voters updated

Student Engagement Hubs



College students are on the move. Public universities offer Student Engagement Hubs to ensure that students never miss an election just because they're away from home.

For dates, hours, and locations, contact student leadership at:

CWU Ellensburg	EWU Cheney	TESC Olympia
UW Bothell	UW Seattle	UW Tacoma
WSU Pullman	WSU Tri-Cities	WSU Vancouver
WWU Bellingham		

Voting Center

The Auditor's Office was open for in-person registration and ballot replacement starting October 13th. The election day voting center numbers were significantly lower in 2021 compared with 2020. The statistics below highlight the difference in voters added, updated, and ballots issued.

Election Day Statistics in the Voting Center:

- Voters added (newly registered): 7 in 2021 (133 in 2020)
- Voters updated: 50 in 2021 (194 in 2020)
- Ballots issued: 55 in 2021 (658 in 2020)

Assisting by Phone & Email

In 2021 the Election Division experienced an increase in correspondence by phone and email. From October 4th through November 2nd, the Election Division:

- ◆ Answered 700 phone calls, averaging 25 calls per day. 62 calls were handled on election day
- ◆ Sent more than 320 emails.

Future Voters

In July 2019, legislation passed permitting 16-year-olds to pre-register, 17-year-olds were already allowed pre-registration. As of December 2020, almost 1,000 future voters have registered in Whatcom County. These voter registrations have a pending status in VoteWA until they turn 18.

If the future voter will be 18 years old by Election Day, their registration is activated. They are also issued and mailed a ballot for that election.

In 2020 at the end of the year, there were a total of 980 citizens pre-registered to vote:

- 312 16-year-olds and 668 17-year-olds pre-registered to vote in Whatcom County.

In 2021 at the end of the year, there were a total of 1,171:

- 748 16-year-olds and 423 17-year-olds pre-registered to vote.

November General Election Cost Analysis, 2011-2021

	Election Cost	Registered Voters	Number of Ballots Cast	Cost per Registered Voter	Cost per Ballot Cast
2021	\$618,858	157,063	76,876	\$3.94	\$8.05
2020	\$527,704	158,780	139,628	\$3.32	\$3.78
2019	\$430,451	146,851	82,537	\$2.93	\$5.22
2018	\$407,002	143,265	110,504	\$2.84	\$3.68
2017	\$503,000	138,688	63,626	\$3.63	\$7.91
2016	\$505,413	138,962	114,920	\$3.64	\$4.40
2015	\$424,543	129,345	61,136	\$3.28	\$6.94
2014	\$399,789	127,280	76,123	\$3.14	\$5.25
2013	\$421,691	127,002	69,709	\$3.32	\$6.05
2012	\$468,529	125,485	104,727	\$3.73	\$4.47
2011	\$398,255	117,162	69,147	\$3.40	\$5.76

Cost Per Ballot & Voter

The cost per ballot cast was higher this year due to the low turnout. The cost per registered voter is slightly higher than average due to the increased cost of the election as seen in the comparison chart to the left. Rising costs in 2021 can be attributed to increases in envelope costs, salaries, the new requirement for the Auditor to pay return postage, and incremental increases in supplies and services. Charts for presidential primary and special elections are on the following pages.

General Election—10 Year Average:

- Cost per Registered Voter \$3.02
- Cost per Ballot Cast \$4.86
- Election Cost \$407,852

August Primary Election Cost Analysis, 2011-2021

	Election Cost	Registered Voters	Number of Ballots Cast	Cost per Registered Voter	Cost per Ballot Cast
2021*	\$401,202	158,819*	54,234	\$2.52	\$7.40
2020*	\$372,793	150,440*	92,780	\$2.48	\$4.02
2019*	\$359,044	147,256*	58,184	\$2.44	\$6.17
2018*	\$349,565	139,813*	62,717	\$2.50	\$5.57
2017	\$323,155	105,045	32,681	\$3.08	\$9.89
2016*	\$303,463	132,362*	49,088	\$2.29	\$6.18
2015	\$279,259	102,161	25,861	\$2.73	\$10.80
2014*	\$320,465	126,961*	42,736	\$2.52	\$7.50
2013	\$184,976	65,994	14,325	\$2.80	\$12.91
2012*	\$317,225	118,654*	47,234	\$2.67	\$6.72
2011*	\$284,726	118,678*	44,270	\$2.40	\$6.43

Primary Election—10 Year Average:

- Cost per Registered Voter \$2.58
- Cost per Ballot Cast \$7.60
- Election Cost \$317,806

*indicates county-wide election (not all August Primaries are county-wide)

Special Election Data	Entire Election Cost	Number of Registered Voters	Number of Ballots Cast	Cost per Registered Voter	Cost per Ballot Cast
2021 February Special	\$4,882	37	8	\$131.95	\$610.25
2020 Presidential Primary*	\$292,904	149,176*	82,851	\$1.96	\$3.54
2020 February Special*	\$240,397	146,342*	54,939	\$1.64	\$4.38
2019 February Special	\$80,326	28,392	12,388	\$2.83	\$6.48
2018 April Special	\$44,259	11,800	4,375	\$3.75	\$10.12
2018 February Special	\$184,251	78,787	25,665	\$2.33	\$7.18
2017 April Special	\$31,246	3,399	1,298	\$9.19	\$24.07
2016 Presidential Primary*	\$296,882	132,640*	54,233	\$2.24	\$5.47
2016 April Special	\$42,244	9,247	3,328	\$4.57	\$12.69
2016 February Special*	\$275,905	129,126*	46,683	\$2.14	\$5.91
2015 April Special	\$45,594	12,312	7,137	\$3.70	\$6.39
2015 February Special	\$103,157	31,550	10,708	\$3.27	\$9.63
2014 February Special	\$102,377	31,063	13,571	\$3.30	\$7.54
2013 April Special	\$45,552	6,592	2,784	\$6.91	\$16.36
2013 February Special	\$53,336	8,062	3,794	\$6.62	\$14.06
2012 February Special*	\$239,002	117,137*	50,454	\$2.04	\$4.74
2011 May Special	\$51,239	11,385	5,449	\$4.50	\$9.40
2011 April Special	\$50,903	9,721	4,554	\$5.24	\$11.18
2011 February Special	\$53,168	11,356	5,679	\$4.68	\$9.36

Districts have the choice to run a ballot measure during the February or April special elections or to put the measure on the August or November ballots. All districts on a ballot are billed proportionately based on registered voters in the district. If only one district runs an election, that district pays the entire election cost.

*indicates county-wide election (not all special elections are county-wide)

SALARIES, WAGES (incl benefits)		
Regular Wages		\$86,964.05
Auditor Admin		\$61,401.51
Extra Help - Opening Board		\$14,004.27
Extra Help - Drop Boxes		\$530.00
Overtime		\$1,268.09
TOTAL SALARIES, WAGES (incl benefits)	\$164,167.92	
SUPPLIES		
General Operating Supplies		\$2,332.07
Envelopes		\$37,515.78
Ballot Page Printing & Stock		\$55,952.78
TOTAL SUPPLIES	\$95,800.63	
OTHER SERVICES		
Mailing Services for Ballots		\$46,835.22
Postage & Freight		\$37,748.41
Postal Permits		\$290.40
Legal Notices		\$208.44
Equipment Repairs and Maintenance		\$21,683.75
Software Maintenance		\$16,115.00
Building Charges		\$22,862.40
Travel & Education		\$0.00
Software Subscriptions (InDesign)		\$376.57
Phone Extensions		\$715.00
Cell Phone		\$254.99
Other (Security, Fuel, & Other)		\$633.66
TOTAL OTHER SERVICES	\$147,723.84	
TOTAL ELECTION EXPENSES	\$407,692.39	
Less: Minimum Fees \$50/jurisdiction (13X\$50)		\$2,750.00
Total to be Allocated		\$404,942.39

Itemization of the 2021 General Election Bill

Salaries, supplies, and other services are a major component in running an election. The chart to the left and below show what is included in the cost breakdown. Salaries were 26.5% of the total cost, and supplies and services were almost 40%. An increase in cost of printing and paper were noticed this year. The price of purchasing envelopes, in particular, has risen significantly due to a decrease in demand.

DIRECT COSTS		
Petition Signature Verification (City of Bellingham)		\$33,974.08
TOTAL DIRECT COSTS	\$33,974.08	
LOCAL VOTER'S PAMPHLET		
Local Voter's Pamphlet (print & postage)		\$96,471.66
TOTAL LVP COST	\$96,471.66	
PLUS 15% OVERHEAD		\$80,720.72
GRAND TOTAL	\$616,108.85	
Plus Minimum Fees \$50/Jurisdiction		\$2,750.00
GRAND TOTAL	\$618,858.85	

Four Initiative Petitions Received in 2021

In June, there were 4 petitions submitted by citizens in the city of Bellingham regarding initiative measures. Each petition had over 500 pages with 20 signatures possible on each page. In order to validate, each petition needed at least 6,187 valid signatures. The work of researching voters and verifying over 35,000 signatures was completed in two weeks. All four petitions validated, which put each measure on the ballot for registered voters in the City of Bellingham to vote on in the November 2 General Election.

Redistricting Postponed

The distribution of U.S. Census population data was delayed until September 30, 2021. SB 5013 was passed to amend the deadlines for local redistricting. Local redistricting for jurisdictions that elect members of their governing body in 2022 were due by December 31, 2021 (PUD No. 1). New precincts are due by May 2, 2022.

For jurisdictions that don't elect members in 2022, the due date for redistricting is November 15, 2022. Those districts include County Council, Port of Bellingham, Cities of Bellingham & Blaine, School Districts with internal boundaries, South Whatcom Fire Authority, and Lake Whatcom Water & Sewer District. Precinct lines will be revised again once the county gets these changes.

Candidate Filing Week

There were 150 citizens that filed for office during the third week of May. Over 115 offices were open for election this year. At the end of filing week, there were 16 offices with no filings. An additional special 3-day filing period was held the fourth week in May to accept filings for these 16 offices.

The primary election included 11 offices that had 3 or more candidates file, with the top 2 moving on to the general election.

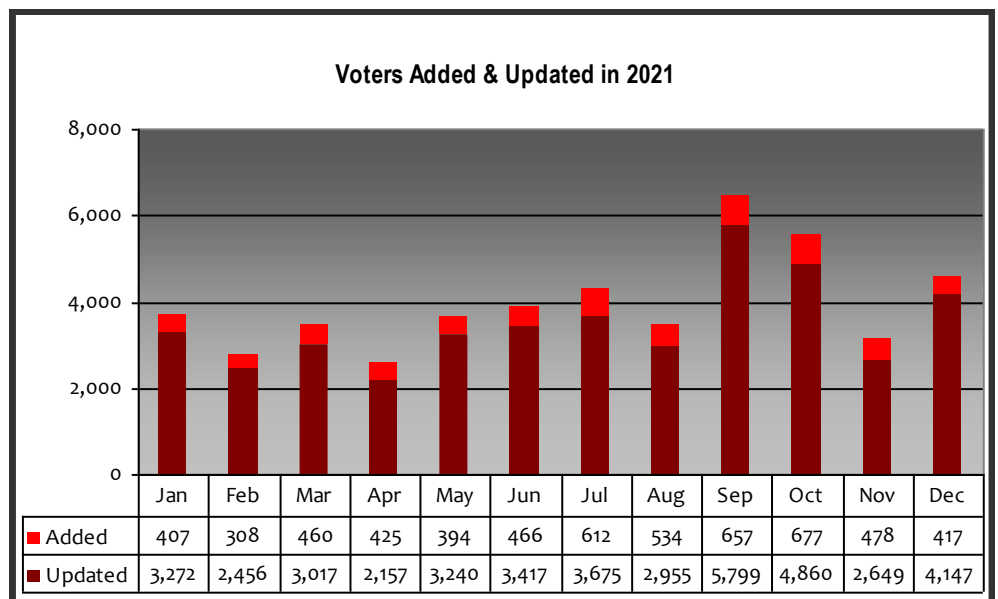
Core Services

- ◆ Register citizens residing in Washington State to vote, including those living overseas and in the military
- ◆ Update and maintain the voter registration database
- ◆ Promote voter education
- ◆ Verify signatures for initiatives, referenda, petitions and every returned ballot
- ◆ Maintain and update district and precinct boundaries

Added & Updated

Voters added to the system were first time voters in Washington State. Voters updated were already registered to vote in Washington.

A total of 5,835 voters were added, and over 41,000 voters were updated. The graph to the right details the total added and updated by month.



Risk Limiting Audit Test

Auditor Bradrick chose to conduct a Risk Limiting Audit (RLA) internal test during the General Election. With 82 ballots randomly selected, there were no discrepancies found when compared with the cast vote record.

Excerpt from the RLA Report from the Secretary of State (SOS):

Prior to the day of the audit, Whatcom County elections staff assembled a ballot manifest: a spreadsheet with four columns indicating for each batch of ballots: (1) the ballot container name/ID; (2) the name/ID of the tabulator used; (3) the name/ID number of the batch; and (4) the number of ballots in the batch. The audit software uses the ballot manifest to identify the specific ballots that need to be retrieved.

Elections staff also exported the cast vote record (CVR) from the voting system. The CVR is an electronic record of every vote scanned and tabulated in an election. As ballots exit the voting system they are imprinted with a number that corresponds to a specific row in the CVR; this allows each paper ballot to be compared individually to the cast vote record to ensure that the voting system is correctly interpreting voter markings.

Setting up the audit

For the RLA test, the team selected the contest that provided the most advantageous sample size for a learning exercise -Whatcom County Proposition 2021-13, appeared on every ballot in the county.

The OSOS Results Audit Specialist, served as audit software administrator and set up the audit in Arlo (the RLA audit software). The audit administrator enters the target contest details, risk limit and random seed, and designates the local jurisdiction manager.

Amy Grasher, Whatcom County Elections Supervisor, served as the local jurisdiction manager. The jurisdiction manager selects the number of audit board teams, uploads the pre-audit files (the ballot manifest and cast vote record), downloads and prints the audit materials—ballot retrieval list, placeholder sheets, ballot labels and audit board credentials.

The group held a random seed ceremony, taking turns rolling 10-sided dice to generate a random twenty-digit number string. The seed powers the pseudorandom

number generator that selects individual ballots for audit. The random seed enables audit transparency—anyone using the ballot manifest and random seed with the open-source audit software will see the same ballot retrieval list; the random seed also makes it impossible for anyone to know in advance which specific ballots will be audited.

For the pilot the team selected a risk limit of 5%, meaning that the audit will achieve a 95% or greater confidence level in the election outcome. The risk limit and the vote margin in the target contest determine the audit sample size; in this case the sample size was 82 ballots.

Ballot Retrieval

Whatcom County elections staff retrieved ballots from batches in the ballot storage room. It took approximately 90 minutes to retrieve 82 ballots.

Data entry into Arlo

Once all ballots were retrieved, the audit board logged into Arlo and entered the voter markings from the Whatcom County Proposition 2021-13 contest.

Finishing the audit

The audit administrator logged into Arlo to see the results. The audit found no discrepancies between the paper ballots and the cast vote record, so the audit was complete after one sampling round. A 96.5% confidence level was achieved. The audit was completed in approximately two hours, including setup.

— WASHINGTON  SECRETARY OF STATE —

Risk-limiting audit: Audit board report

County:	WHATCOM
Election name:	2021 GENERAL
Date of audit:	11/15/2021
RLA type:	Ballot Comparison
Voting System & Software Version:	Clear Ballot 2.1
Contests audited:	Whatcom County Proposition 2021-13
Random seed:	65338120138703664007
Initial sample size:	82 ballots
Risk limit:	5%
Audit start time:	9:00 am
Audit end time:	11:10 am
Number of observers:	0
Number of audit rounds:	1
Audit passed?	Yes
Were any discrepancies found? (list below)	None

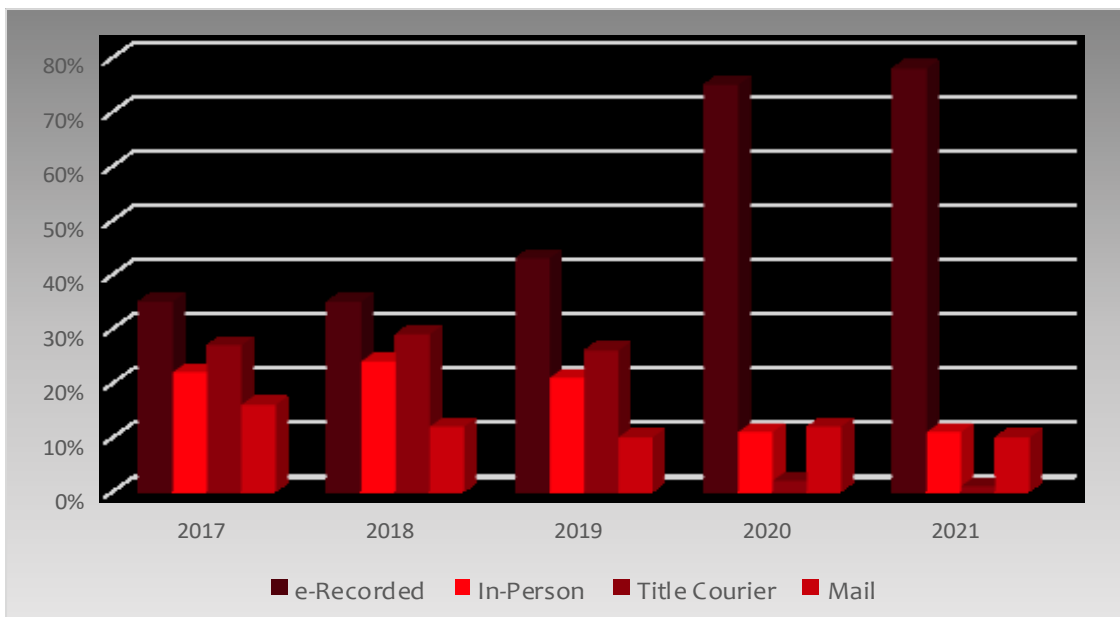
Core Services

- ◆ Record paper and electronically submitted documents
- ◆ Index recorded documents to make them searchable by grantor/grantee names, Assessor's parcel number, legal description, and reference number for ease of access by staff and public
- ◆ Make recorded documents publicly available through an in-person customer service center and online access
- ◆ Help customers search recorded documents
- ◆ Provide certified copies of recorded documents
- ◆ Register and reserve plat and condominium names
- ◆ Register process servers
- ◆ Preserve and protect historically significant permanent archival documents

Recording Process

The recording division has been processing and preserving property records prior to County inception. Whatcom County was established on March 9, 1854. The first document was recorded in 1853. The recording process continues to change with technology. Always looking to improve and keep costs down, we implemented electronic recording (e-Recording) in 2006. e-Recording gave the customer the ability to work with an established vendor to scan & upload their original document from anywhere with the use a computer, scanner, and internet. The chart below shows that more and more customers are taking advantage of this service. The ability to e-record during a pandemic has been invaluable. Many of our business partners appreciated the ability to work remotely with limited personal contact while meeting their business needs, and the volume of electronically recorded documents shows it!

Business Partners —



Recording Fees

Recording fees increased by \$100 on July 25 for most document types. Recording a one-page single title document is now \$203.50. The increase funds go to affordable and homeless housing projects. The funds to the right make up the \$203.50 as passed by state legislature.

2021 Dollars Collected for Homeless Housing

Total
\$5,180,852

Goes to County: \$2,512,870

Goes to State: \$2,667,982

2021 Dollars Collected for Affordable Housing

Total
\$1,673,581

Goes to County: \$1,061,435

Goes to State: \$612,146

Where does the money collected for recording fees go?

Administration

General Fund \$5.65

Used by the county for administration and operations.

Recording Operations and Maintenance \$3.24

Used by the Recording Division for modernizing and improving the recording and indexing systems and preserving recorded documents.

Archives and Preservation

Commissioner's Preservation Fund \$1.00

Used at the discretion of the county council for historical programs and preserving historical documents.

State Archives Fund \$2.00

Used by the state for archives and records management training, funding grant programs, and constructing a new regional archives facility.

Preservation Fund \$2.00

Collected by the state and redistributed to county governments for preservation of historical documents.

State Library-Archives Fund \$6.00

Used by the state to operate and maintain the state archives, state library, and capital museum.

Affordable Housing

Homeless Housing Assistance Fund \$47.58

Used by the county and municipalities to fund local homeless housing services, programs, and grants.

State Home Security Fund \$97.18

Used by the state to maintain the statewide homeless housing strategic plan and provide grants for partial rental assistance, homeless shelters, youth shelters, and transitional housing.

State Affordable Housing Fund \$28.94

Used by the state to fund low-income housing subsidy programs

Low-Income Housing Assistance Fund \$7.41

Used by the county to provide affordable housing for very low-income households and emergency shelters.

Growth Management Planning Fund \$2.50

Used by the state to manage high density residential growth and environmental impacts.

Document Recordings

Document recordings increased from the previous year by 9.40%. Document recordings steadily increased month after month through July.

Lower interest rates continued to influence consumers to refinance an existing home loan or consider buying a home during the first half of the year. As interest rates started inching up mid-year the number of refinance documents decreased resulting in a drop in monthly recorded documents compared to the prior year.

What's New

WAC Changes:

Mylar requirement removed from Auditor Checklist — Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) updated the Auditor's Checklist in WAC 332-130-050 removing mylar as a media requirement used when recording any survey maps. Even though the Auditor's Office does not require a map to be on mylar, other city or county departments might still require mylar. Submitters need to check with the approving agency's requirements.

New Legislation:

SB 5019—Created a recording standards commission in the Secretary of State's office to set statewide standards for recording.

HB1335—Related to discriminatory covenants and conditions in recorded documents. Created research process and notification process and clarifies amendment, removal and replacement of records in the chain of title.

HB5355— Procedures established for recording wage liens on real and personal property.

Documents Recorded by Month

	2020	2021	% Change from Prior Year
January	3,932	4,829	23%
February	3,319	5,149	55%
March	3,826	6,294	65%
April	3,761	5,780	54%
May	3,587	4,967	38%
June	5,119	5,613	10%
July	5,088	5,439	7%
August	5,309	4,953	-7%
September	5,773	5,020	-13%
October	5,896	4,881	-17%
November	5,308	4,371	-18%
December	5,801	4,754	-18%

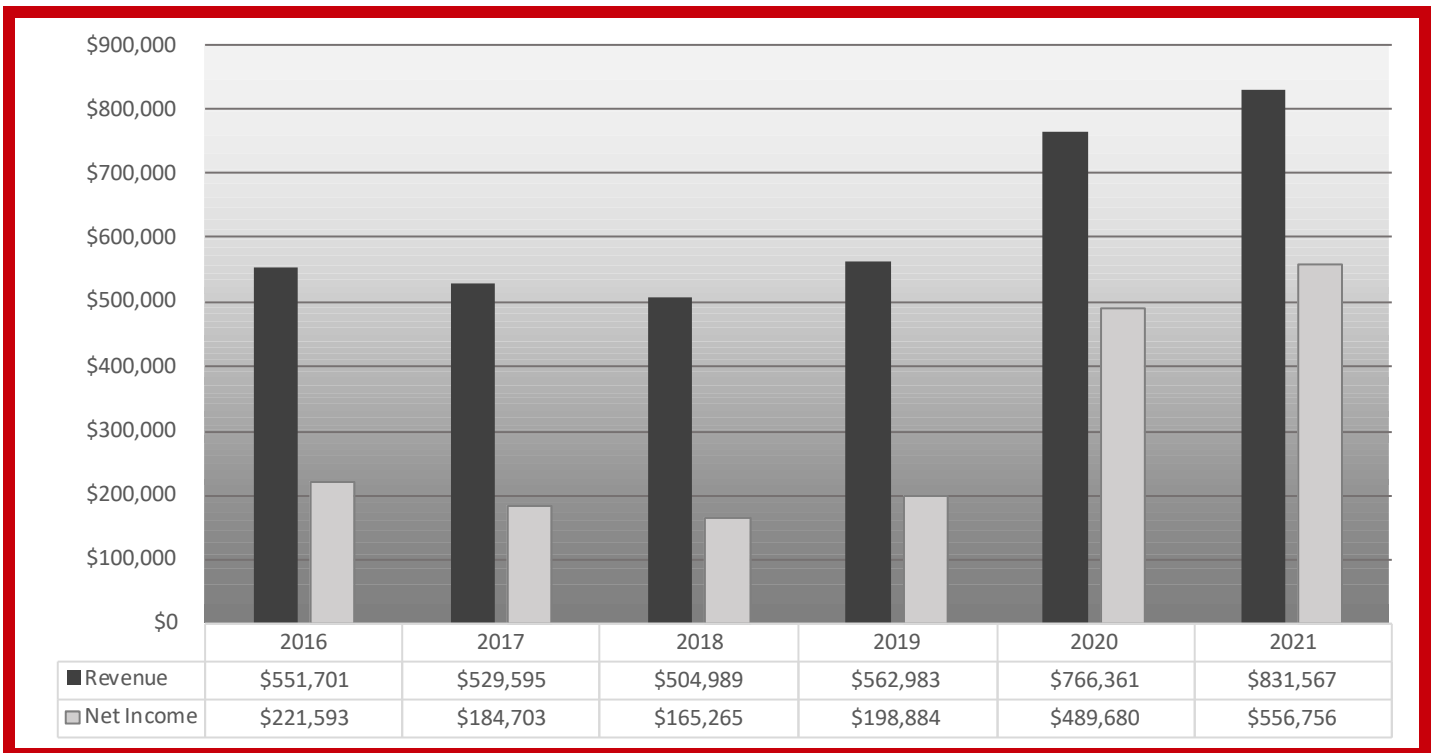
68,771 documents were recorded in 2021.

The top document titles recorded were:

1. Reconveyance of Deed of Trust— 16,782 (24.4%)
2. Deed of Trust—15,921 (23.1%)
3. Appointment of Trustee—14,830 (21.5%)
4. Deed—9,962(14.4%)

Recording Revenue

An increase in recorded documents corresponds with an increase in overall revenue. Total general fund revenue collected in the recording division was \$831,566.95. Of that, \$673,103.00 was collected for recording documents. The remainder of \$158,463.95 was collected from marriage license fees, subscription fees, copy and certified copy fees, administrative fees, search fees and other minor fees.



In 2021

Recording revenue increased by 8.51%

Net income increased by 13.70%

Dollars collected for
General Fund

\$831,566.95

Historical Projects

Documents and marriages are processed daily by our staff. After getting caught up on daily work, staff index and verify historical records. Information from each document is indexed so records can be queried by date, type of document, party names (grantor and grantee), legal description including plat name if available, and reference number to previously recorded documents.

Documents are sometimes added during the research process. During indexing or verifying, we occasionally come across records needing further research. This research helps ensure the best image is displayed and/or allows us to add records missing from the digital document repository ensuring the accuracy of the records. This past year, in addition to the 1974 images, we added 1,978 historical records from 1964, 1967, 1970, 1971, and 1973.

Full-time Recording, Licensing, and Election staff continue to devote available hours indexing and verifying these historical records. In addition, a temporary indexing staff person assisted us through August.

Not only did staff index or verify 125,944 documents recorded in 2021, 89,266 historical records were indexed and verified from 1890—1992.

Previous Imaging project continued

In 2019, a two-year imaging project began in an effort to digitize the rest of the Auditor's Office historical records dating back to 1853. The project vendor scanned 357,883 pages from original historical records in bound books at the Northwest Regional Branch Archives in Bellingham. These images, once scanned, are then enhanced and named before they are imported into the county recording system.

Due to the Pandemic, this project continued into 2021. We imported 20,950 images from 1974 and are working with our recording software vendor to import the remainder of the images. Once imported, the staff will redact social security numbers and then index the documents before they are made available to the public. This project not only provides improved customer access but also an electronic back-up of the original documents. Additionally an improved archival copy of microfilm will be created and stored.

New Historical Project

A Request For Proposal and subsequent contract was issued to digitize our Auditor Fee Books and Commissioners Proceedings volumes back to the late 1800's. Scanning of these historical books will begin spring of 2022. Many of the books are deteriorating and require special handling. Retaining digital images preserves these records permanently and provides faster and more efficient customer service.

The Fee Books offer research information. When an auditor file number is unable to be found due to illegibility or poor image quality, the information in the fee book is used to locate and confirm details such as the date of recording, submitter, auditor file number, grantor/ grantee names, volume and page, amount paid, and any notes.

The information in County Commissioner Proceedings includes meeting minutes, resolutions, ordinances, agreements, leases, notices, road vacations and more. Digitizing these records will provide easy access via computer, tablet, or smart phone.

Marriage Licensing

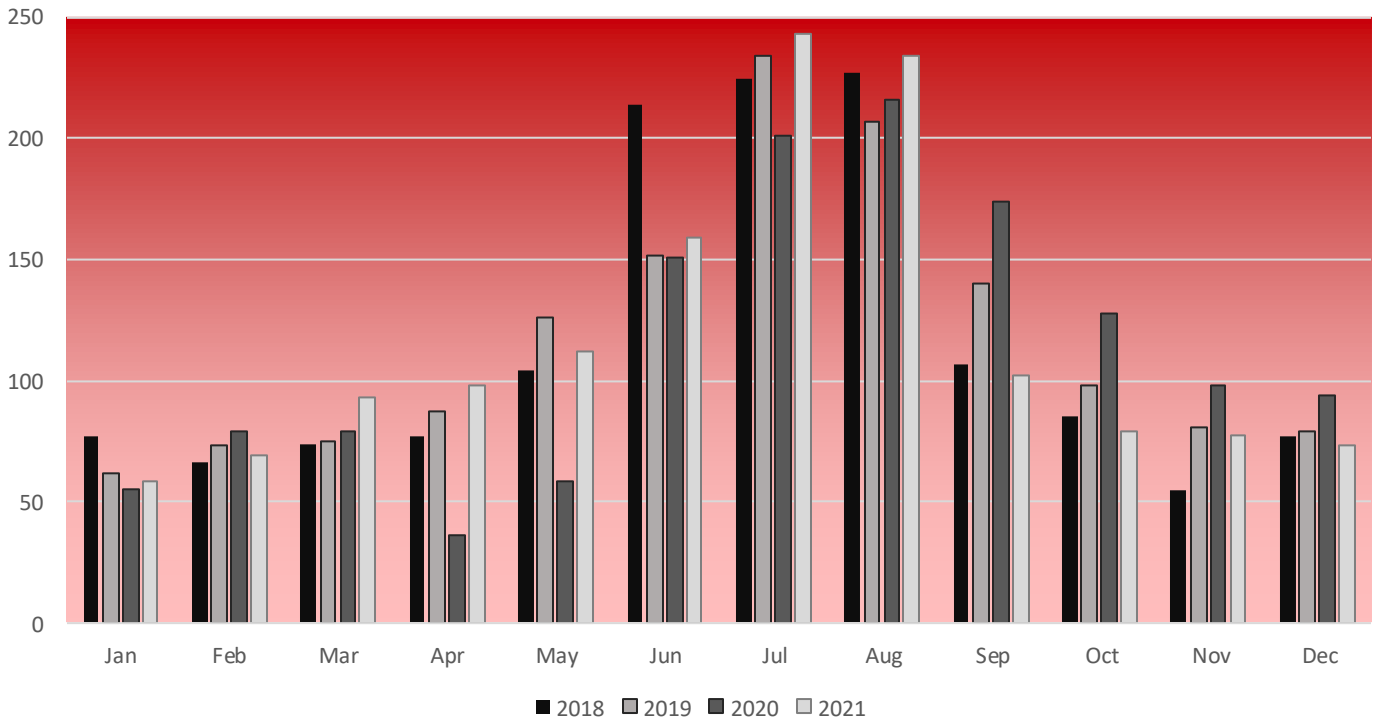
Core Services

- ◆ Issue marriage certificates
- ◆ Record and index marriage licenses
- ◆ Provide certified copies of marriage records
- ◆ Preserve and provide access to marriage records in Whatcom County dating back to 1854

The number of marriage licenses issued in 2021 increased by 2.29% from 2020. Once the license is issued, the couple is required to wait three days before the marriage ceremony can be performed. Couples are urged to complete their application online at home but they may also fill out the application using kiosks in our office (as shown below). COVID restrictions remained in place for the first half of 2021. Customers either made an appointment to complete the application process in person or applied remotely.



Marriage Licenses Issued



Licensing Core Services

- Title and license vehicles and vessels in partnership with the Washington State Department of Licensing
- Train, oversee, and audit six subagents
- Collect tax on behalf of the Department of Revenue for private party and out of state sales
- Issue Disabled Parking placards

Licensing Revenue

In 2021, Whatcom County licensing transactions totaled over \$33 million in state and local vehicle/vessel licensing fees. Of the fees collected, \$29,052,943 were allocated to the Department of Licensing to support the state’s transportation system. The remaining funds were divided between the Whatcom County general fund and the county’s licensing subagents.

The table below shows the breakdown of total revenue retained by the Whatcom County Auditor’s Office between 2019 to 2021.

	Revenue from Auditor's Office	Revenue from Subagents	Total Revenue
2019	\$279,434	\$1,073,802	\$1,355,255
2020	\$225,000	\$1,336,683	\$1,563,702
2021	\$175,267	\$1,387,205	\$1,564,492

Website Updates

New Icons and Web Pages

We created several new webpages outlining requirements for common transactions and fees. We worked with the Treasurer’s Office and Assessor’s Office to create pages with smooth workflow so customers can set up or transfer their mobile homes or park models. We also added a new page to help customers locate the VIN on their mobile home.

Mobile Homes and Park Models



Mobile Homes



Mobile Homes & Park Models

New Audit Pilot Program

Department of Licensing launched a new statewide audit program in 2021. DOL conducted the audits virtually due to Covid-19 restrictions.

Whatcom County Auditor’s Office successfully passed the audit with no findings. DOL reviewed transactions, inventory, and financials as part of the audit.

As part of the new program, the Auditor’s Office will audit the subagent offices yearly. The licensing supervisor completed a five-part training course for conducting audits.

Subagents in Whatcom County:

- ◆ Auto Licensing of Bellingham
1738 Iowa Street
Bellingham
- ◆ Valley Drug Licensing
208 East Main Street
Everson
- ◆ Auto Licensing of Ferndale
1740 La Bounty Drive
Ferndale
- ◆ Lynden Food Pavilion Licensing
8130 Guide Meridian
Lynden
- ◆ Blaine Cost Cutter Licensing
1733 H Street
Blaine
- ◆ Northwest Licensing
2502 Cedarwood Avenue
Bellingham

Transactions in 2021

In 2021, Auditor’s Office licensing staff processed 40,969 vehicle and vessel tab renewals and title transfers. The six subagent offices in Whatcom County processed 262,943 combined transactions. The subagent offices continued to process much of the in-person transactions until the courthouse re-opened to walk in customers in July 2021.

Version 12 Upgrade

The newest version of the licensing system DRIVES rolled out on July 5, 2021. Before going live, all vehicle licensing operators completed six hours of training—including videos, live demonstrations, and practice transactions.

A subagent is a private business that enters into a contract with a County Auditor and is appointed by the Department of Licensing Director to perform vehicle and vessel title and licensing services.

As part of the oversight of the six subagents, the Licensing staff:

- Held one virtual training for subagent managers
- Administered five 100-question licensing qualification tests
- Verified that three clerks completed the required 1800 hours to become Certified Licensing Operators

Yearly Licensing Transactions by Office, 2016-2021

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Auditor’s Office	85,604	81,732	80,748	73,239	53,718	40,969
Bellingham Auto	62,037	66,219	64,576	54,531	Closed Oct 2019	
Valley Drug	13,978	14,788	14,398	15,584	20,743	20,170
Lynden Food Pavilion	24,577	26,193	27,018	28,474	34,085	32,700
Blaine Cost Cutter	12,799	13,112	13,304	13,766	18,056	16,881
NW Licensing	45,719	53,434	53,249	56,713	64,156	60,014
Auto Licensing Ferndale	27,180	32,991	36,356	41,488	47,170	49,225
Auto Licensing Bellingham			Opened Oct 2019	7,391	73,371	83,953
County Wide	271,894	288,469	289,649	291,186	311,299	303,912

License Plate Shortage

COVID interruptions continued in 2021. License plate production at Department of Corrections was hit by both production delays due to COVID outbreaks and supply limitations due to aluminum shortages.

Licensing offices pivoted to issuing “virtual plate” permits while customers waited for their physical plates to be made.

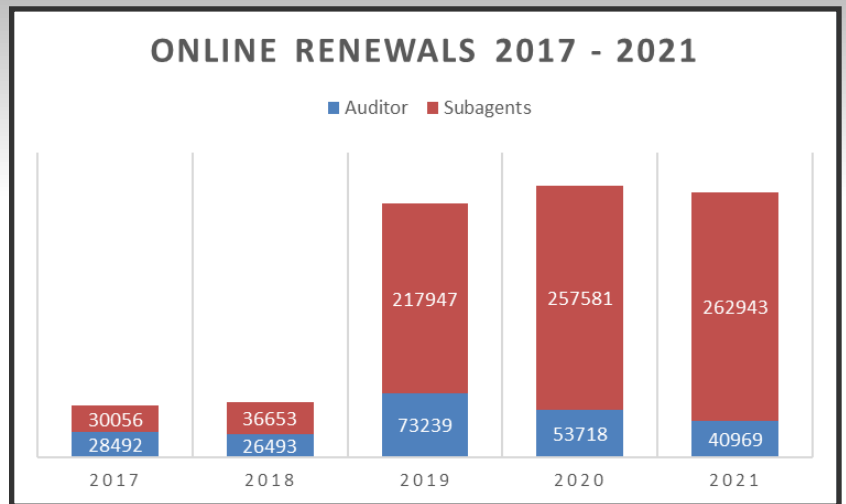
Once the plates were made, customers could pick them up at an office or have them mailed. In 2021, Whatcom County licensing offices mailed 186 sets of plates due to the shortage.



Online Renewals

The Auditor’s Office paused processing online renewals on May 13, 2020 when the office went to remote services due to COVID precautions. We resumed processing online renewals for pickup on July 1, 2021 when we reopened the office to walk-in customer service.

The chart to the right shows that online tab renewals have increased 419% over the last five years! Customers have the option to pick up their tabs at an office or have them mailed.



New Plate Design Debut

Kraken license plates debuted May 1, 2021 in support of the new National Hockey League team in Seattle. Special plate fees generated by Kraken license plate sales benefit Boundless Washington (an outdoor leadership program) and One Roof Foundation (philanthropic arm of the team for community improvement).

New in 2021

- Completed Department of Licensing audit with zero findings
- New ballot imprinters
- New web pages and icons
- New staff person filling previously frozen position
- New document folding equipment
- New ballot drop box in Barkley
- New legislation in Recording for discriminatory language
- New legislation in Elections for 17 year old voters
- Test of Risk Limiting Audit
- New Election Observer Training Videos



Auditor's Office



Pictured from left to right: Laura Bauthues, Morgan Kalkwarf, Krystal Ross, Amy Grasher, Diana Bradrick, Nic Covell, Tais Stockard, Kehli Whitmer, Kathleen Zatine, Kim Faubion-Boulanger

Not Pictured: Stacy Henthorn, Agy Pitalo, Nicolle Armstrong, Susan Stafford, Kellye Conner