



2022

# Annual Report

Whatcom County  
Auditor's Office



**The 2022 Annual Report  
is published by the  
Whatcom County  
Auditor's Office**

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## Message from the Auditor



Welcome to the 2022 Whatcom County Auditor's Office annual report. My office embraces change as a way to keep our services relevant and efficient. Change is also imposed on us, and we frequently pivot in order to meet the challenges. This report will highlight many of the changes that occurred in 2022, and what impact they had on our customers.

Like many other agencies and private businesses, staffing shortages that started in 2020 have continued. The Auditor's office has had continuous multiple vacancies – when we get one position filled another vacancy pops up. Retirements, promotions, relocations and lifestyle changes have all had an impact on our staffing levels. Despite the challenges, however, we continued to meet our statutory responsibilities and our core services of recording, licensing and elections were all performed to our usual high standard.

Along with staffing, the economy has had an impact on our office. Transactions significantly decreased in recording and were slightly reduced in licensing and marriage licensing. Revenue also took a hit with the reduction in transaction counts. On the plus side, with a reduction in daily workload, we were able to accomplish a significant amount of historical records indexing that makes those older records more readily accessible by the public.

Not all workload was reduced in 2022. Elections held four elections and experienced a higher turnout during both the primary and general elections than in 2021. We also experienced record high numbers of voters in the office on election day. The student HUB at Western Washington University also experienced its highest volume of customers since it started in 2020.

Reprecincting was another major project that was completed in 2022 . Redistricting occurs every ten years following the census data collection. As a result of districts adjusting their boundaries, the election division makes precinct revisions. This was a major effort on the part of the elections staff and was completed for Council approval in March of 2022.

Another initiative during 2022 was the first election center open-house. In an effort to promote voter education and increase transparency into the elections process we invited members of the public and elected officials into the election center to see the process “up close and personal”. Well attended and well received, this activity will become an annual event.

You can read more details about all of these activities and more in the following pages. I hope you find this report informative.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Diana Bradrick". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Diana Bradrick  
Whatcom County Auditor

## 2022 By the Numbers

1	Auditor
4	Elections Conducted
6	Subagents
16	Deputy Auditors
21	Ballot Drop Boxes
40	Election Center Open House Tours
54	Public Records Requests
77	Percentage of Documents e-Recorded
167	Combined Years Auditor's Office Experience
173	County Precincts
245	Voter Registrations at the Student HUB
1,385	Marriage Applications
40,831	Documents Recorded
81, 858	Web page views (Oct - Dec)
157,683	Active Registered Voters
227,631	Total Ballots Accepted 4 elections
296,562	County-wide Licensing Transactions
433,300	Total Ballots Issued
3,473,562	Total Office Revenue Collected
5,779,833	Affordable and Homeless Housing Revenue
14,849,191	Total Revenue Collected - All Sources and Fees

## Administrative Overview

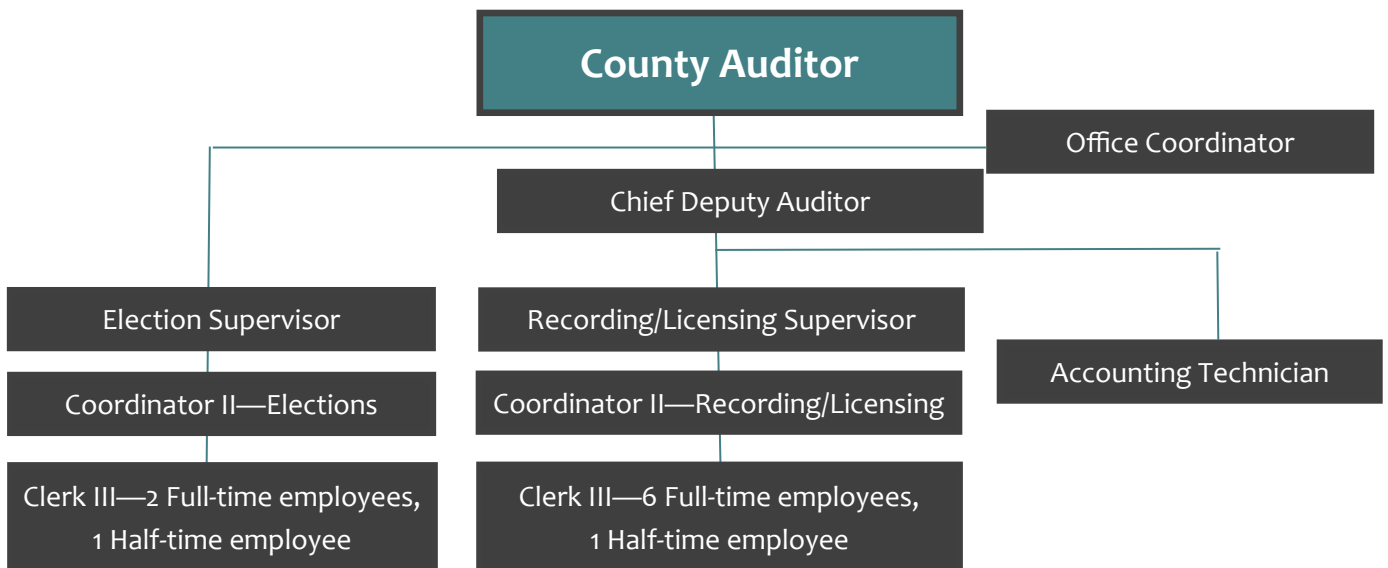
Auditor's Office administration, comprised of the Auditor, Chief Deputy, Office Coordinator, and Accounting Technician, provide support for office-wide operations.

## Highlights in 2022

- ◆ Processed 7 resolutions for ballot measures
- ◆ Calculated and mailed out 32 bills for election and registration costs
- ◆ Managed 55 contracts and 1 grant
- ◆ Responded to 54 Public Records Requests
- ◆ Updated the Canvassing Board Guidelines, Administrative Rules for Jurisdictions, and Administrative Rules for Candidates
- ◆ Processed 141 oaths of office and created certificates of election/ appointment
- ◆ Managed budgets totaling \$3,217,795
- ◆ Maintained 68 web pages
- ◆ Collected \$14,849,191 in revenue, all sources, all funds
- ◆ Held 1 Citizens Elections Advisory Committee (CEAC) meeting
- ◆ Conducted 2 public outreach presentations

## Core Services

- ◆ Administration
- ◆ Oversight of the Recording, Elections & Licensing divisions
- ◆ 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 coordinated a group of Auditors and staff who were tracking public records requests involving multiple counties. Chief Deputy, Stacy Henthorn, participated in the Legislative, Elections, and Recording Committees. Stacy has also been a member of three Recording Standards Commission workgroups. 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 as co-chair of the Learning and User Engagement Group for the Northwest Region.

## 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 recording, elections, records management and marriage licensing.

### Highlights:

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

## Elections in 2022

We conducted four elections including a contested position in the Macaulay Creek Flood Control District, which is a rare occurrence among the Diking & Drainage districts. See page 11 for more information.

The special election in February comprised 107,790 voters including voters in Bellingham & Ferndale School Districts and the Whatcom County Rural Library District (WCRLD) running the Birch Bay Library proposition.

Both the primary and general elections were countywide (over 157,000 voters). The primary election included 10 contests (not including Precinct Committee Officers) with over 50 candidates. The general election included 15 contests. There were two advisory votes, and four local ballot measures.

Voter turnout in 2022 was above average, as noted in the chart below.

### 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 before 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

Four Elections in 2022			
	Active Voters	Accepted	Turnout
February 8 Diking & Drainage	532	171	32.14%
February 8 Special Election	107,790	40,755	37.81%
August 2 Primary Election	155,466	74,914	48.19%
November 8 General Election	157,683	111,791	70.90%

The average turnout for an August Primary since 2000

36.94%

The average turnout for a November General since 2000

64.53%

Total Accepted Ballots per Year								
Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Accepted Ballots	104,842	268,252	98,430	204,800	153,109	370,198	131,118	227,631
Number of Elections Held	4	5	3	4	3	4	3	4

## Ballot Return

Ballot packets are put in the mail 20 days before election day. A voter may return their ballot any time between when they receive it and election day. The graph below compares when ballots were returned in four different general elections. In 2022, voters returned their ballots at a steady pace but fewer and later than in 2020.

Voters in Whatcom County now have 21 official ballot drop box locations where they can return their ballot before 8:00 pm on election day. Voters can return their ballot in the mail, as long as it is *postmarked* by election day. Military and US Citizens living outside the US may return their ballot by email or fax. See chart to the right for the number of ballots returned at each location for the general election.

### What ballots returned after election day are accepted?

- Ballots deposited in an official ballot drop box by 8:00 pm election day are collected on Wednesday following the election
- Ballots returned in the mail postmarked on or before election day
- On-time ballots deposited on or before election day at another Washington county official ballot drop box. These are forwarded to our office in the mail

Returned to an official ballot drop box:

**69.6%**

Returned in the mail:

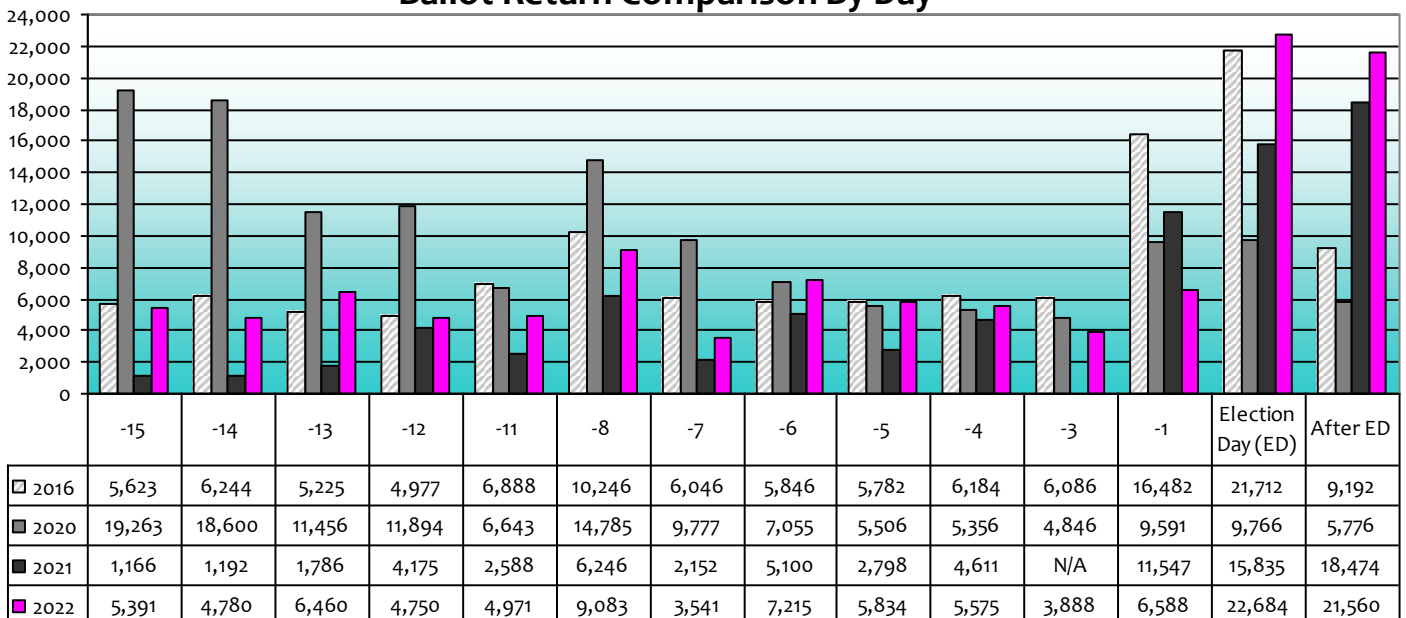
**29.6%**



### How did voters return their ballot?

Mail	33,382
Courthouse	19,547
Ferndale	10,458
Lynden	10,170
Barkley	6,728
Sehome	6,605
Blaine	4,146
Everson	3,052
WCC	2,895
Birch Bay	2,882
Sudden Valley	2,208
Deming	1,468
Laurel	1,363
Kendall	1,267
WWU-Wade King	1,138
WWU-Red square	1,079
Custer	899
Sumas	792
Lummi	650
Email	646
Point Roberts	371
WWU-HUB	339
Acme	255
Fax	19

### Ballot Return Comparison By Day



## Rejected Ballot Overview

Upon receiving a return envelope, Auditor’s Office staff verifies the timeliness and signature. Return envelopes that are on time and have a matching signature are accepted. Return envelopes that are unsigned, late, or the signature doesn’t match are challenged and held for further review.

Voters with a return envelope that has been rejected (unsigned, signature doesn't match) are sent a letter providing them the opportunity to fix their challenged signature. Voters are also called and emailed as a reminder. All rejected envelopes are presented to the Canvassing Board for final review prior to election certification.

As seen in the chart below, fewer than 1% of ballots returned are rejected. In 2022, there was a slight decrease from 2021 in the number of ballots rejected for being unsigned, signature not matching, and returned late.

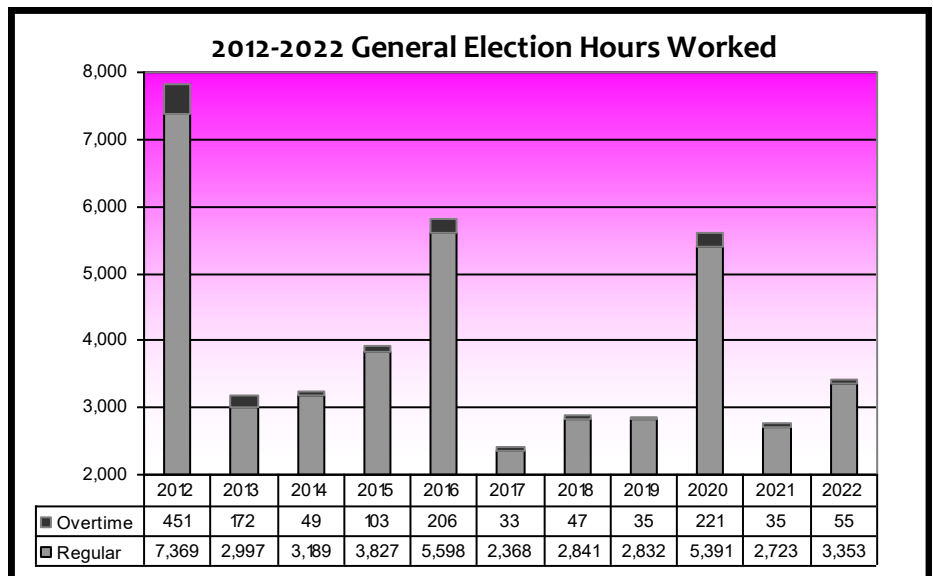
General Election Rejected Ballot Totals, 2014-2022

	Unsigned	Signature No Match	Returned LATE	Other	Total Rejected	Total Returned	Rejected %
2022	57	247	246	19	569	112,359	0.50%
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.

As in other years, the entire staff in the Auditor’s Office helped during the general election. There were an additional 33 temporary employees hired to help register voters, provide replacement ballots, and process returned ballots in the Election Center.



## Election Security

Election security continued to be a high priority in 2022. Here are a few measures that Whatcom County has taken to ensure the security of every election:

- Five live stream cameras monitoring the election center 24 hours a day, available to view online.
- Ballots batched, tracked, and audited including post-election hand count and risk limiting audits.
- Security prox locks on all doors with access restrictions and monitoring reports.
- Use of seals and seal logs; formal chain of custody documents 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.
- Two factor authentication required to access the voter registration system.
- Physical facilities audit by Homeland Security.
- Security cameras installed in addition to live stream webcams.

## General Election - A Historical Perspective

The chart below shows voter turnout in general elections back to 1990. The average turnout for midterm elections since 1990 is **65%** (midterms occurred in 1990, 1994, 1998, 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014, 2018 & 2022).

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
<b>2022</b>	<b>70.90%</b>	<b>63.82%</b>
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%
10-year Average	<b>65.01%</b>	<b>58.09%</b>

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

1990-2000	1990	1991	1992*	1993	1994	1995	1996*	1997	1998	1999	2000*
Ballots Accepted	39,660	44,697	64,463	44,911	45,192	45,511	65,565	50,593	57,090	53,038	74,671
Turnout %	64%	70%	81%	56%	53%	51%	69%	59%	63%	58%	76%
2001-2011	2001	2002	2003	2004*	2005	2006	2007	2008*	2009	2010	2011
Ballots Accepted	44,163	55,066	45,786	91,497	63,716	69,782	55,059	101,399	61,288	86,993	69,147
Turnout %	45%	60%	48%	86.24%	62%	68%	53%	87.93%	53%	74%	59%
2012-2022	2012*	2013	2014	2015	2016*	2017	2018	2019	2020*	2021	2022
Ballots Accepted	104,727	69,709	76,123	61,136	114,920	63,626	110,504	82,537	139,628	77,594	111,791
Turnout %	83.46%	54%	59%	47%	82.7%	45%	77%	56%	87.94%	48.95%	70.90%

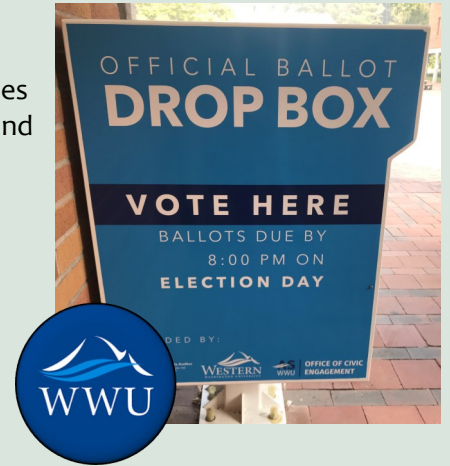
## Student Engagement HUB

The Washington State Legislature passed Engrossed Substitute Bill 6313 related to establishing Student Engagement Hubs in 2020. 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 8th in the Viking Union Center at WWU to assist voters with registering, updating registrations and ballot replacement.

### Statistics:

- 339 ballots returned at the drop box inside the HUB.
- 245 paper registration forms processed. Of those, 50 were for voters registered in another county. For comparison, in 2021 96 registration forms were processed over two days, and only 34 forms in 2020.



## Voting Center

The Auditor’s Office was open for in-person registration and ballot replacement starting October 19. The statistics below highlight the difference in voters added, updated, and ballots issued in the last three general elections.

### Election Day Statistics in the Voting Center:

	Voters Added (new)	Voters Updated	Ballots Issued
2022	94	247	750
2021	7	50	55
2020	133	194	658

## Assisting by Phone & Email

In 2022 the Election Division experienced an increase in correspondence by phone and email. From October 10th through November 8th, the Election Division:

- ◆ Received over 1,400 calls, averaging 67 calls per day, with over 200 calls on election day!
- ◆ Sent more than 550 emails.

## Primary Only Voters (POV)

The 2022 August 2 Primary Election marked the first time 17-year-olds were allowed to vote, as long as they were turning 18 years of age on or before the date of the general election and were registered to vote.

There were 272 eligible Primary Only Voters in Whatcom County. Of those mailed, there were 70 ballots returned resulting in a 26% turnout for POV’s.

## Felony Convictions & Voting

As of January 1, 2022, those convicted of a felony in Washington State, another state, or in federal court had their right to vote automatically restored as long as they are not currently serving a DOC sentence of total confinement in prison. After the right to vote is restored, these citizens can re-register to vote.

Citizens do not lose the right to vote for a misdemeanor conviction. Only people in total confinement for a felony conviction are not eligible to vote.

See RCW 29A.08.520 for more information.

### November General Election Cost Analysis, 2012-2022

	Election Cost	Registered Voters	Number of Ballots Cast	Cost per Registered Voter	Cost per Ballot Cast
2022	\$532,094	157,580	111,791	\$3.38	\$4.76
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

### Cost Per Ballot & Voter

The cost per ballot cast was lower this year than in 2021 due to the higher voter turnout, for both the primary and general elections, as displayed in the tables to the left.

#### General Election—10 Year Average:

- Cost per Registered Voter \$3.02
- Cost per Ballot Cast \$4.86
- Election Cost \$407,852.00

#### Primary Election—10 Year Average:

- Cost per Registered Voter \$2.63
- Cost per Ballot Cast \$7.55
- Election Cost \$332,278.00



### August Primary Election Cost Analysis, 2012-2022

	Election Cost	Registered Voters	Number of Ballots Cast	Cost per Registered Voter	Cost per Ballot Cast
2022*	\$443,917	155,458*	74,914	\$2.85	\$5.92
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

### Risk Limiting Audits Continue

Auditor Bradrick chose to continue conducting Risk Limiting Audits (RLA) for the primary and general elections in 2022. Selections were randomly made from all accepted ballots, and when compared with the cast vote record, no discrepancies were found.

The RLAs are open to observers, and the date and time is posted on our website and in the news release before each election.

See RCW 29A.60.185 & WAC 434-261 for more information (sections 114-119).

\*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
2022 February Special	262,979	107,790	40,755	\$2.44	\$6.45
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

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

Local taxing districts have the choice to run a ballot measure during a special election. These elections could be in February, April, August, and November.

All districts included in an election are billed proportionately based on registered voters in the district. If only one district runs an election, that district pays the entire election cost.

The Bellingham & Ferndale School Districts, along with the Whatcom County Rural Library District had a measure on the February Special in 2022.

## Macaulay Creek Flood Control District (FCD)

For the first time in 10 years, there was a contested race in a Diking & Drainage district. The Macaulay Creek FCD had two candidates for their Director Position 1, a 6 year term within that district.

Elections for Diking & Drainage Districts are conducted differently; property owners who are registered to vote in Washington State are the voting members. Each parcel is allotted a certain number of votes, based on the size of the parcel.

The Macaulay Creek FCD had a total of 532 ballots sent to 229 parcels. The 171 ballots returned represented 75 parcels. There were 7 ballots returned that were rejected for unsigned voter declarations. There was a 32.14% turnout for this special election.



## Redistricting & Reprecincting

With the U.S. Census population data delayed until September 30, 2021, SB 5013 was passed to amend the deadlines for local redistricting. Redistricting for local jurisdictions occurred in 2022 for County Council, Port of Bellingham, and Public Utility District No. 1. Those districts submitted their changes, and precinct boundaries were adjusted.

All other local jurisdictions had until November 15, 2022 to provide the changes to their internal districts. Those districts include the 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 to include any changes in boundaries. New precinct maps will be reviewed and approved by April of 2023.

### 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

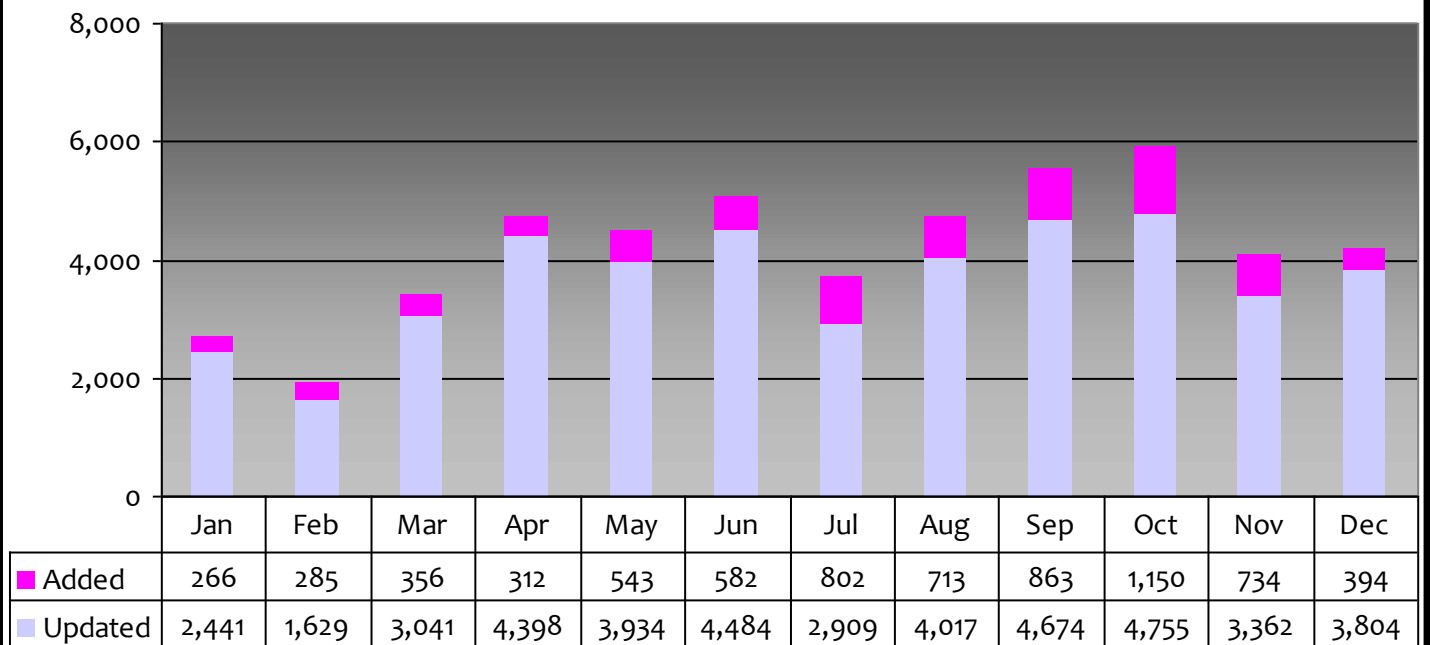
### Voter Registrations Added & Updated

Over 7,000 citizens registered to vote in Whatcom County this year. That is an increase of over 1,100 from last year. The graph below details the total added and updated by month.

Voters added indicates the number of newly registered voters. October continues to be the month with the most new registrants, as the graph below shows.

Voters updated indicates the number of existing voters that had information updated in their voter record. Over 43,000 records were updated this year. *Not all updates to a voter record are changes of name and/or address.*

Voters Added & Updated in 2022



## Tours of the Election Center

In July and August during the 2022 Primary Election, the Auditor hosted the first ever open house. Over a period of four days, members of the public, candidates and elected officials were given tours of the election center. Participants were able to see “up close and personal” the flow and processing of ballots including the ballot intake and sorting room, the operation of the Runbeck envelope sorter, signature verification, ballot separation and opening, ballot scanners, ballot duplication and ballot adjudication. Visitors had the opportunity to ask questions and see specific examples in response to their questions. This activity to promote voter outreach and education and to provide transparency in the election process will be conducted again for the 2023 election cycle.



## Maintenance of Official Ballot Drop Boxes

Ballot drop boxes are thoroughly checked prior to each election to ensure security locks are working and there is no damage.

Lots of coordination goes into maintaining these ballot drop boxes. Each box weighs anywhere from 325 to 650 pounds so most of the work is completed on site.

We coordinated with Whatcom Community College (WCC) to replace their small box with a bigger box and relocate it to the Auxiliary Services area. This new location offers voters a more accessible drive up option.

Earlier in 2022, we replaced the Sumas ballot drop box with a new box due to the extensive rust and corrosion that occurred during the flood. The damaged box was then able to be restored. These were the steps for repair:

- Transportation to and from repair shop—Our facilities department used a crane to uninstall the damaged box and install a new box
- A private company sandblasted the box and then applied powder coating
- New skins were applied identifying the box as a Whatcom County Official Ballot Drop Box
- New multiple locking mechanisms were installed

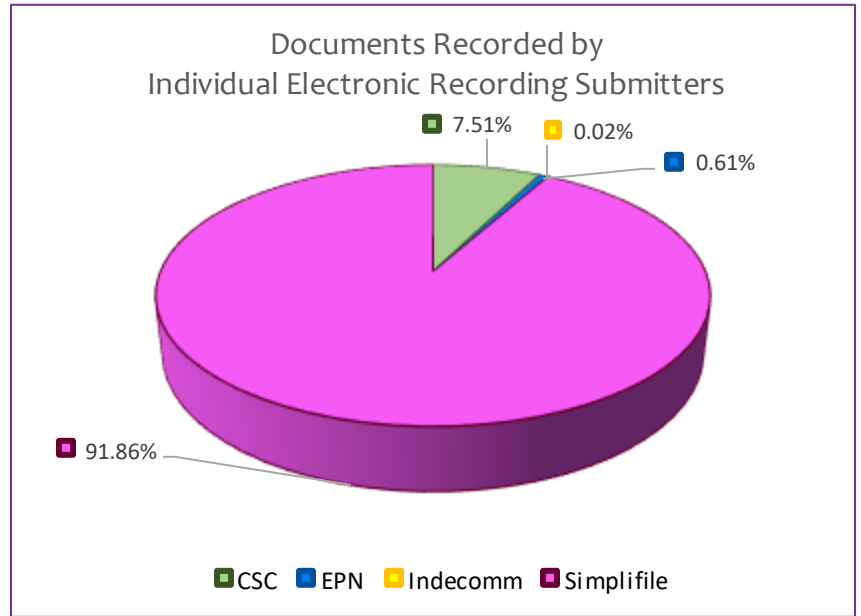
# Recording

## Core Services

- ◆ Record documents submitted in person, by mail and electronically
- ◆ 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 the public
- ◆ Make recorded documents publicly available online and through an in-person customer service center
- ◆ Help customers search recorded documents
- ◆ Provide certified copies of recorded documents
- ◆ Register and reserve new plat and condominium names
- ◆ Register process servers
- ◆ Preserve and protect historically significant permanent archival documents

The recording division has processed and preserved property records since County inception in 1854 with some documents pre-dating county creation. Once a document is recorded, it becomes a permanent part of the official records of Whatcom County.

Through the use of technology, recording looks different than it did in the past, even as late as 2020. Today, most of the documents we receive are through an electronic portal managed by our recording software vendor. Our business partners appreciate the ability to work remotely with limited personal contact while meeting their business needs. The chart below shows the percentage of documents received electronically.



### Business Partners



### Percentage of Documents Electronically Recorded

2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
22%	31%	36%	35%	35%	43%	75%	78%	77%

## Document Recordings

Rising mortgage rates have affected document recordings showing a steady monthly decrease beginning in August 2021.

Higher interest rates influence consumer decisions in whether or not to refinance an existing home loan or even to consider buying a home. A comparison of total recorded documents from 2021 to 2022 shows a decrease of -40.63%.

The reduction in recorded documents directly affects special purpose fees our office collects for each document. See the next page for what makes up the recording fee.

40,831 Document  
Titles recorded in 2022

### Top document titles recorded:

- Deed of Trust— 8,498 (21%)
- Deed— 7,779 (19%)
- Reconveyance — 7,748 (19%)
- Appointment of Trustee—6,602 (16%)

### Documents Recorded by Month

	2021	2022	% Change from Prior Year
January	5,398	4,052	-25%
February	5,644	3,588	-36%
March	7,021	4,294	-39%
April	6,407	3,713	-42%
May	5,516	3,706	-33%
June	6,160	3,927	-36%
July	6,115	3,264	-47%
August	5,466	3,330	-39%
September	5,528	3,122	-44%
October	5,361	2,981	-44%
November	4,878	2,498	-49%
December	5,277	2,356	-55%
<b>Total</b>	<b>68,771</b>	<b>40,831</b>	<b>-40% (average)</b>

# Recording Fees

## 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.

**Total \$203.50**

Where does the money collected for a standard recording fee go?

Total Collected for Operations and Maintenance

**\$121,055**

Total Collected for Archives and Preservation

**\$371,260**

Total Collected for Affordable and Homeless Housing

**\$5,779,833**

Goes to County: \$1,752,941

Goes to State: \$4,026,892

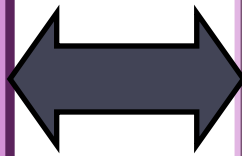
A Standard Recording Fee costs \$203.50, plus \$1.00 per additional page

## Recording Revenue

2022

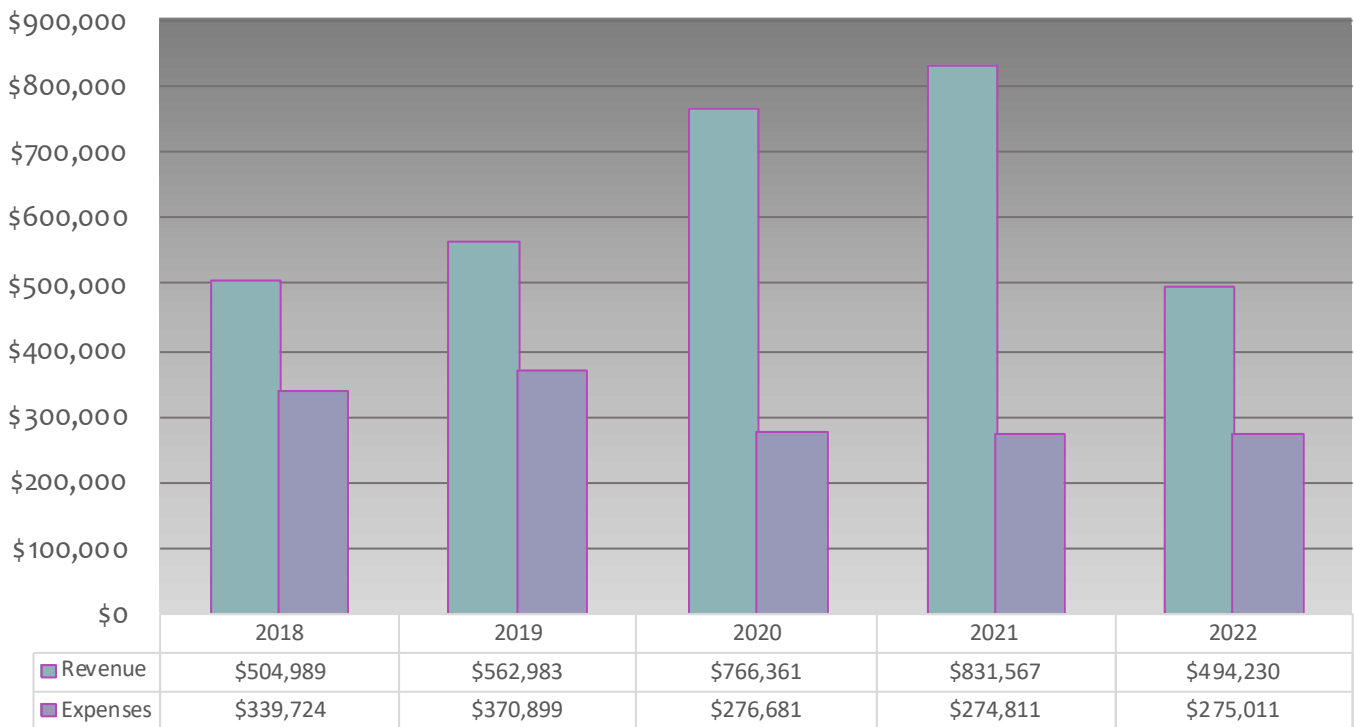
A decrease in recorded documents corresponds with a decrease in overall revenue. Total general fund revenue collected in the recording division was \$494,230. Of that, \$384,442 was collected for recording documents. The remainder of \$109,788 was collected from marriage license fees, subscription fees, copy and certified copy fees, administrative fees, search fees and other minor fees.

Dollars collected for  
General Fund **\$494,230**



Recording revenue  
decreased by 41%  
  
Net income decreased by 61%  
in 2022 from 2021

### Annual Revenue & Expenses



## What's New

16,262 documents from 1939 –1967 were indexed in 2022 and are now available to be searched and viewed online through our Recorded Document Search.



**WAC Changes:** Revisions to map requirements went into effect on March 1. Both the graphic presentation and the quarter-quarter, section, township, and range written on the face of the map was revised. Only the quarter-quarter, section, township, and range is required. The requirement for the graphic presentation was removed.

The map checklist per WAC 332-130-050 applies to land boundary survey maps and plans, records of surveys, plats, short plats, boundary line adjustments, and binding site plans.

**Legislation passed in 2021 creating a Recording Standards Commission. Three separate committees were established in 2022:**

- Racially Restrictive Covenants: Court Ordered Alteration in Chain of Title Workgroup
- Standardized Document Titles
- Rejection Reasons

The committees are established to set rules around new & old processes for statewide standardization and consistency.

A project to scan 66 Auditor fee books & 75 commissioner proceedings volumes began in 2022 following contract negotiation. These volumes will be available online to the public through a new Historic Film Viewer added to our Recorded Document Search in summer 2023.

Once the daily work is completed staff work on indexing & verifying historical records. Information from each document is indexed so records can be researched by date, document type, names (grantor and grantee), legal description including plat name if available, and reference number to previously recorded documents. Below is the total number of documents indexed & verified by staff :

Documents indexed—91,185

Documents verified—50,346



94,092 new digitized documents from 1939—1976 were added to the recording system reducing customer wait times for these documents.

Working with the Auditor's Office, University of Washington identified about 1,500 properties with historical discriminatory covenants. These properties can be found at:

[https://depts.washington.edu/covenants/county\\_whatcom.shtml](https://depts.washington.edu/covenants/county_whatcom.shtml)

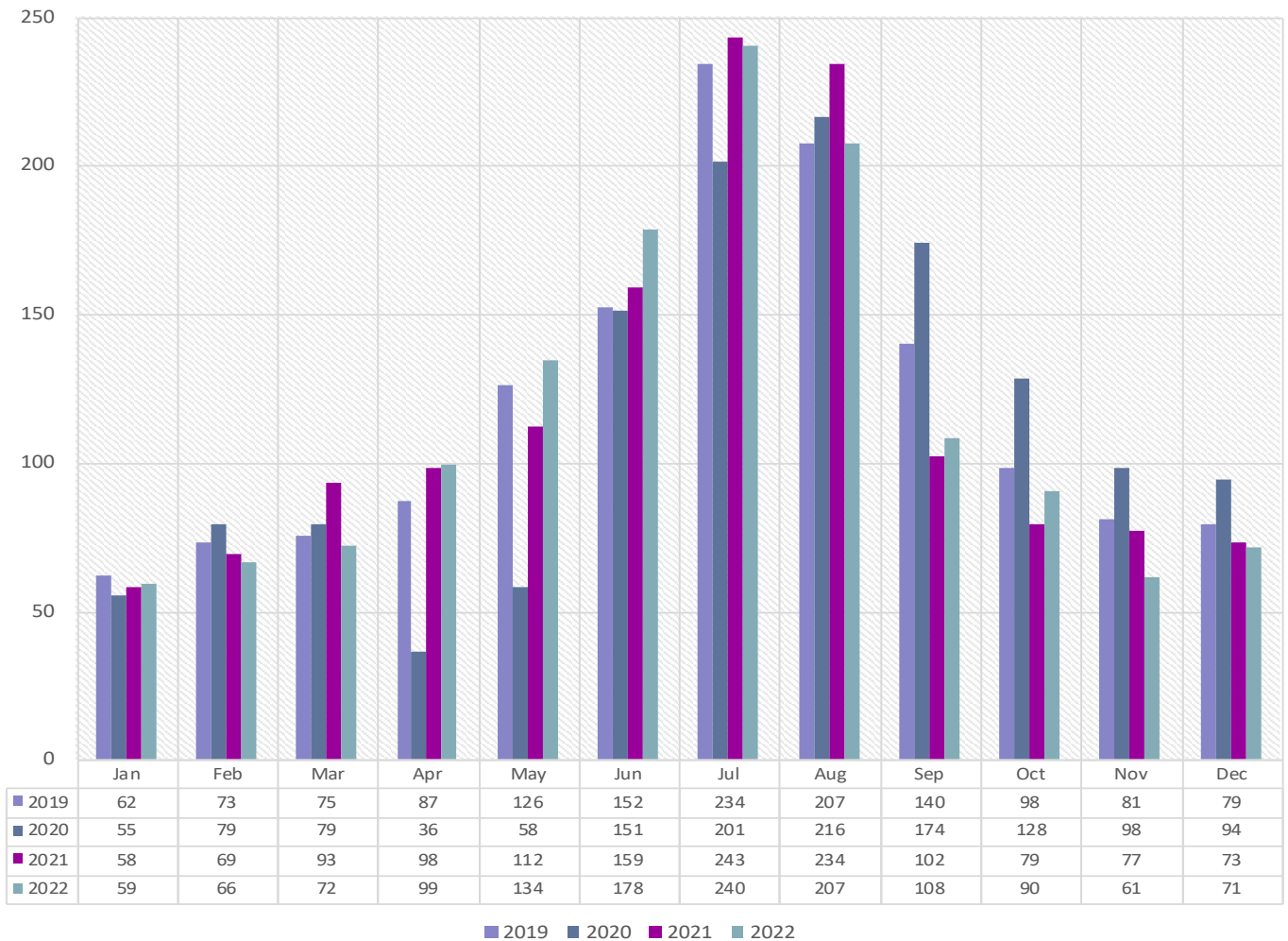
## Marriage Licensing

The number of marriage licenses issued in 2022 was 1,385, a slight decrease of less than 1% from 1,397 in 2021. Peak months for marriage license applications are June, July, and August. Couples may fill out the application online or on a kiosk in the office. Applicants have the option of making an appointment or walking in to the office. We can also mail the application packet to applicants living outside the area. Both applicants are required to sign the form before a deputy auditor or a notary public. By state law, there is a 3 day waiting period following the application process before the ceremony can take place. Applications expire 60 days from the first day your license can be used.

### 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

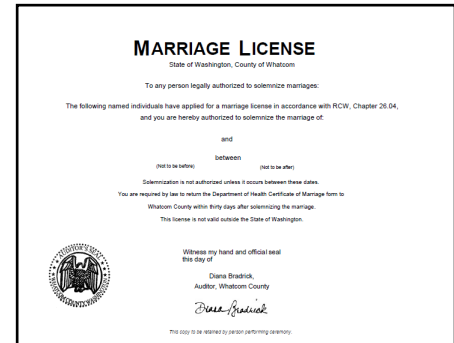
### Marriage Licenses Issued



## Marriage Licensing Fees

Auditor Fees	\$ 8.00
Prevention of Child Abuse	\$ 5.00
Displaced Homemaker	\$10.00
Certified Copy	\$ 3.00
Family Court	\$ 8.00
Family Services	\$15.00
Historical Preservation	\$ 1.00
Facility Surcharge	\$ 1.00
Grant/Attorney Gen	\$ 1.00
Historical Program	\$ 1.00
Preservation	\$ 2.00
Auditor O &M	\$ 2.00
State Library Operations	\$ 3.00
State Library-Archives Bldg	\$ 2.00
<b>Total Application Fee</b>	<b>\$62.00</b>

What makes up the marriage application fee?



The Marriage Application is available in Spanish on our website. However, the state Certificate of Marriage is only available in English.

WHATCOM COUNTY *Solicitud en línea de matrimonio*  
*Washington*

zar de Nuevo

### Cumplimente el Parte A

**Información general**

Primer nombre  Segundo  Apellido

Apellido de Soltera/apellido en el nacimiento (Si es diferente)

Fecha de nacimiento (mm/dd/aaaa)  Lugar de nacimiento  Estado  País  Desconocido

Sexo  Estado Civil Anterior  Título

**Dirección**

Dirección física   Extranjera

Ciudad  Estado  Código Postal



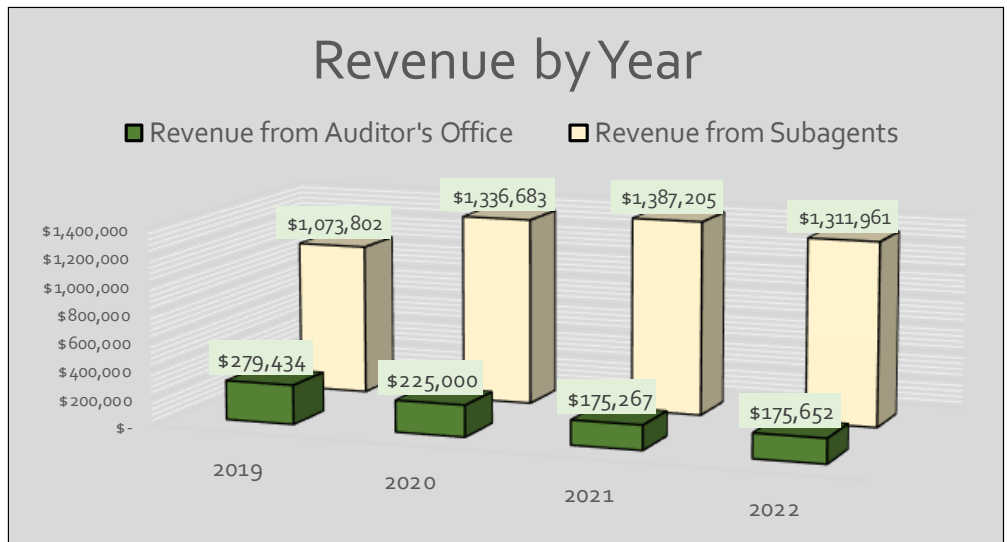
### Licensing Core Services

- 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 2022, Whatcom County licensing transactions collected \$34.9 million in state and local vehicle/vessel licensing fees. Of the fees, \$30,673,384 were allocated to the Department of Licensing and Department of Revenue 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 2022.



### Training Updates

#### Required Training

All 36 Vehicle Licensing Representatives in Whatcom



WASHINGTON STATE  
**LEARNING  
CENTER**

County completed five DOL required trainings in 2022. DOL utilizes an online training center to deliver training to all licensing offices throughout the state. Topics covered this year included Federal Heavy Vehicle Tax, Use Tax Valuation, Payment Card Industry Equipment Inspection, Introduction to Office 365/One Drive, and IT Security Awareness Training.

The Auditor’s office monitors the training compliance of all vehicle licensing representatives as part of our subagent office oversight.

## 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 2022

In 2022, Auditor's Office licensing staff processed 40,712 vehicle and vessel tab renewals and title transfers. The six subagent offices in Whatcom County processed 255,850 combined transactions.

## Online Renewals

Renewing registration online remained a popular choice in 2022. Whatcom county licensing offices processed 80,191 online renewals.

Customers can choose to have an office mail their tabs out or go into an office and pick them up. The Auditor's office continues to process online renewals for pickup only.

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 eight 100-question licensing qualification tests
- Verified that three clerks completed the required 1800 hours to become Certified Licensing Operators

## Yearly Transaction Stats

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
3701 - Auditor's Office	81,732	80,748	73,239	53,718	40,969	40,712
3715 - Bellingham Auto <sup>1</sup>	66,219	64,576	54,531			
3724 - Valley Drug	14,788	14,398	15,584	20,743	20,170	20,030
3727 - Lynden F.P.	26,193	27,018	28,474	34,085	32,700	32,980
3728 - Blaine C.C.	13,112	13,304	13,766	18,056	16,881	17,649
3729 - NW Licensing	53,434	53,249	56,713	64,156	60,014	49,862
3730 - Ferndale Auto	32,991	36,356	41,488	47,170	49,225	52,098
3731 - Auto Lic of Bham <sup>2</sup>			7,391	73,371	83,953	83,231

1 - 3715 Closed 10/24/2019

2 - 3731 Opened 10/26/2019



## License Plate Shortage - Continues into 2022

COVID interruptions continued throughout 2022. License plate production at Department of Corrections was hit by production delays due to COVID outbreaks, supply limitations due to aluminum shortages, and equipment breakdowns. The plate shortage expanded to include not only standard mountain plates but also many of the personalized and special background plates as well. Several types of tabs and decals were also impacted by production delays.

Licensing offices pivoted to issuing “virtual plate” permits for out of stock plates. These 60-day permits allowed customers to use their vehicles while waiting for their physical plates. The production delay was so extensive that customers might have required more than one permit before their plate was produced. Licensing clerks continued to communicate with customers and mailed out additional permits as needed.

Once the plates were made, customers could pick them up at an office or have them mailed. In 2022, Whatcom County licensing offices mailed 399 sets of plates due to the production delays.

## Fee Increases - July 1, 2022

Two legislative bills resulted in fee increases for Licensing:



### ESSB 5987

- ◆ Bill passed in 2015 with a scheduled increase in 2022
- ◆ \$10 “additional weight fee” added to passenger vehicles and light duty truck registrations
- ◆ Revenue goes to transportation projects and services

### ESSB 5974

- ◆ Plate fees increased from \$20 - \$40 per plate depending on the type of transaction. Permit fees and Out of State Vehicle Check fees increased from \$25 - \$50 depending on the type of transaction.
- ◆ Portion of funds raised goes to Move Ahead WA fund

The Licensing division works with local dealerships, credit unions, and banks to communicate all licensing changes. We also provide a fee chart that outlines the common transactions for easy reference. Proactively communicating the changes to our business partners minimizes the impacts to customer transactions.

## New Special Background License Plates

**WA Wine** - Available for order Nov 1, 2022. Displays Washington wine country landscape.

Funds raised support Washington tourism.



### Patches Pal

Available for order

Oct 1, 2022. Displays J.P. Patches and Gertrude from the J.P. Patches show. Funds raised through the special license plate support Seattle Children’s Hospital Strong Against Cancer program.



# Auditor's Office



Pictured from left to right: First row - Morgan Kalkwarf, Diana Bradrick, Stacy Henthorn, Amy Grasher. Second row - Susan Stafford, Kellye Conner, Laura Bauthues, Agy Pitalo. Third row - Taylor Friar, Tania Corliss, Kehli Whitmer, Arcenia Huerta LeVain, Becca Rouse

Not Pictured: Kathleen Zatine, Nic Covell, Sarah Breckenridge

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