WCLS Strategic Plan 2027 – 2031 – Approved 9/15/2026

The successful passage of the Levy Lid Lift in 2025 means Whatcom County Library System's budget is stable for at least the next five years – and longer, with careful and deliberate planning.

Knowing that our basic financial requirements have been met gives us a unique opportunity to assess public input and make strategic decisions that improve public service, strengthen WCLS's resilience, and guide the future of the library system.

Our plan centers around the concept that to thrive over the long-term, WCLS needs to GROW – adding outlets and refining the services that our growing service area population wants and needs while continuing to learn and evolve as a system. Growth must be deliberate and sustainable, and as with every robust garden, succeeds with judicious pruning of programs and projects that are outdated or no longer serving us optimally. Together, WCLS staff will consider opportunities to innovate and evolve service delivery while carefully stewarding taxpayer dollars.

The four components of our plan are as follows:

G – GALVANIZE

Goal: WCLS inspires more Whatcom County residents to use and support their libraries.

Objective 1: Improve access to WCLS locations and outlets.

- Improve open hours, especially at small and medium-sized libraries.
- Pilot after-hours access at WCLS-owned facilities and/or other sites.
- Advocate for ongoing and improved service in south Whatcom County.
- Initiate library service area analysis for the Laurel/Meridian community.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS: Open hours per week; branch visits per month.

OBJECTIVE KEY RESULTS: Branch visits increase by 7% systemwide by 2031; secure stable location for South Whatcom Library; complete service area analysis for Laurel/Meridian.

LEAD DEPARTMENTS: Public Services, Administration

Objective 2: Enhance physical locations.

- Support the City of Blaine's efforts to build an expanded, modern library in Blaine.
- Expand number of small meeting spaces in branches.

- Seek opportunities for a larger, flexible Administrative Services building which may allow us to:
    - Add to Library of Things collection.
    - Support larger collection space.
    - Provide space to facilitate ConnectED holds pickups in schools.
    - Provide co-working spaces and flexible meeting spaces.
    - Build capacity for new opportunities.
    - Avoid costly long-term maintenance at existing location.
    - Consider co-location with other organizations.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS: Blaine Library project milestones completed; number of small meeting rooms added; Administrative Services (A.S.) real estate opportunities review conducted and funding options researched.

OBJECTIVE KEY RESULTS: Blaine Library building project underway; meeting room utilization rate increases by 5%; plan for Administrative Services building complete.

LEAD DEPARTMENT: Facilities

Objective 3: Inform the public about WCLS services and their value to individuals and society at large.

- Enhance marketing budget to reach new audiences and encourage library card signups.
- Target messages to people who live in areas of the county with low library card penetration.
- Deliver messages about the value of WCLS and libraries in general.
- Establish baseline measurement and research schedule to measure awareness of and satisfaction with library services.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS: Annual user and non-user surveys conducted. Marketing reach (impressions and engagements). Earned media mentions. Library card penetration rate (cardholders as a percentage of service area population).

OBJECTIVE KEY RESULTS: Net promoter score increases above 83. Public awareness score increases. Library card penetration increases by 15%.

LEAD DEPARTMENT: Community Relations

R – READ

Goal: WCLS cultivates and celebrates a love of reading with people of all ages.

Objective 1: Surround young people with a culture of reading, at WCLS libraries, at home and at school.

- Enhance outreach to youth, focusing on homeschool, preschool and K-12 students and their parents or caregivers.
- Enhance partnerships with Cultural Liaisons and Mobile Services to bring stories to young people in underrepresented communities.
- Integrate ConnectED holds and checkouts into regular WCLS circulation processes.
- Provide analog experiences for children and families as alternatives to screens.
- Align Youth Services staff hours with school district enrollment and local demographics.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS: Number of youth outreach contacts. Number of children/families/educators attending events.

OBJECTIVE KEY RESULTS: 10% increase in youth participation in library programs and outreach.

LEAD DEPARTMENT: Youth Services

Objective 2: Reduce wait times for popular materials.

- Explore new ways to prioritize WCLS cardholders' holds.
- Strategically purchase multiple copies of high-demand titles.
- Continue to advocate for fair pricing and terms for eBooks, eAudiobooks and other digital resources and communicate purchasing and lending challenges to the public.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS: Baseline average wait time identified and tracked annually. Patron satisfaction with wait times.

OBJECTIVE KEY RESULTS: Average wait time reduced by 10% by the end of 2028.

LEAD DEPARTMENT: Collection Services

Objective 3: Promote reading and provide multiple opportunities for Whatcom County residents to celebrate books, authors and reading.

- Refine existing efforts such as Summer Reading, Whatcom READS, author visits, *Whatcomics*, *A Forest of Words*, and Open Book.
- Champion the restorative value of immersive reading in our marketing, outreach and everyday work.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS: Attendance / participation at reading-centered events and programs.

OBJECTIVE KEY RESULTS: Increased participation at reading-centered events and programs.

LEAD DEPARTMENTS: Public Services / Youth Services / Collection Services / Community Relations

O – OPTIMIZE

Goal: Optimize staff, services, programs and partnerships to improve impact and resiliency.

Objective 1: Support staff to thrive professionally.

- Implement compensation study recommendations, as negotiated and approved by the union and the Board of Trustees.
- Gradually increase a number of positions to full-time benefited, as opportunities arise.
- Reinforce learning organization culture to support curiosity, skills and leadership growth.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS: Staff training hours. Anecdotal feedback about how staff training informed their professional growth. Staff retention. Employee engagement score. Full-time benefited positions as a percentage of workforce.

OBJECTIVE KEY RESULTS: Staff retention rate >90%.

LEAD DEPARTMENT: Human Resources

Objective 2: Strengthen the library staff's role as information professionals.

- Build staff competencies related to critical thinking, digital literacy, and AI.

- Conduct thorough reference training for public services staff.
- Offer other opportunities for people of all ages to increase their literacy, digital literacy, information literacy and critical thinking skills.
- Champion intellectual freedom by educating about and advocating for access to information and the right to read.
- Explore reference librarian support for systemwide efforts.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS: Staff AI and digital literacy training completion; pre-test and post-test results of staff's digital literacy and AI awareness; reference training completion; number of public trainings conducted.

OBJECTIVE KEY RESULTS: 95% staff completion of core competencies.

LEAD DEPARTMENTS: Human Resources; Public Services

Objective 3: Craft meaningful online and in-person experiences for patrons.

- Provide enhanced customer service training.
- Improve online patron experience.
    - Investigate a mobile app that will make it easier and more convenient for patrons to access their library card and other library services on their devices.
    - Implement catalog and website upgrades (including event registration) to improve user experience.
- Consider ways to integrate BiblioCommons registration into card registration process.
- Identify optimal printing, copying, faxing, and computer registration management tool and implement it.
- Evaluate user experience at branches and adopt recommendations. Include consideration of the browsing experience.
- Evaluate library collections to align collections and shelving spaces with evolving patterns of patron usage while maintaining adequate space for other in-library functions.
- Increase funding for programming aimed at reducing social isolation and providing low-barrier opportunities for art, craft, local history, culture and learning.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS: Customer satisfaction score. Website satisfaction score. Mobile app adoption rate. Program attendance. Branch experience score. Technology service utilization.

OBJECTIVE KEY RESULTS: Satisfaction exceeds 80%.

LEAD DEPARTMENTS: Public Services, Information Technology Services, Community Relations

Objective 4: Enhance resilience and ability to withstand natural disasters and other unexpected challenges or service disruptions.

- Finalize Continuity of Operations Plan and develop Emergency Preparedness Plan; participate in countywide emergency management training and preparedness groups.
- Reduce disruptions due to Nooksack River flooding through proactive design, continued development of response plans, and collaboration with community and municipal partners.
- Prepare WCLS and the public to be climate-resilient.
- Strengthen records management practices for print and digital records.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS: Climate-resilience programs held. Records management compliance rate. Days of service disruption annually.

OBJECTIVE KEY RESULTS: Plans completed and annual reviews conducted. Annual reduction in service disruption hours.

LEAD DEPARTMENTS: Administration; Facilities

Objective 5: Steward physical and fiscal assets to maximize taxpayer investment and sustain services as long as possible with existing levy funding.

- Continue ongoing building maintenance to preserve physical assets and to minimize unexpected expenses.
- Maintain integrity of computer network by following IT industry best practices and conducting triennial cybersecurity audits.
- Approach projects with fiscal and environmental sustainability in mind – looking for solutions that are cost-effective over the long term and have a minimal negative environmental impact (e.g. “double bottom line”).
- Refine long term capital budget plan for fleet, furniture, fixtures, and equipment as well as capital facilities investment strategy.
- Identify and sunset materials / collections / projects / services that no longer serve us to make space for new opportunities.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS: Deferred maintenance projects completed. Double bottom line matrix developed.

OBJECTIVE KEY RESULTS: Bi-annual cybersecurity audit conducted and key recommendations implemented. Deferred maintenance backlog eliminated by 2031. Long-term capital budget plan completed.

LEAD DEPARTMENTS: Facilities, Information Technology Services, Administration

Objective 6: Expand private fundraising and advocacy capacity to support capital projects and major initiatives countywide.

- With WCLF, identify ways to increase staff support for fundraising efforts.
    - Explore ways to add staff hours and/or grantwriting capabilities.
    - Consider contracting for additional services.
- Collaborate with Friends of the Library organizations to advocate for libraries.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS: Private funds raised annually. Number of active donors.

OBJECTIVE KEY RESULTS: Annual private fundraising revenue increased by 20%. Fundraising goal met for Blaine Library project.

LEAD DEPARTMENTS: Administration; Whatcom County Library Foundation

W – WELCOME

Goal: All people feel welcome at WCLS.

Objective 1: Work proactively with vulnerable communities to reduce barriers, promote equity, and ensure quality library service.

- Build on existing work of Cultural Liaisons.
- Leverage collections, programs, and services to reflect the diversity of Whatcom County, by focusing on targeted groups, which could include (TBD):
    - Hispanic community
    - Punjabi community
    - Lummi Nation
    - Nooksack Tribe
    - Ukrainian community
    - Russian community

    - New adults
    - Senior citizens
    - Disabled people
    - Neurodivergent people
    - Faith-based communities
    - LGBTQIA+ communities
- Provide staff and trustee education to support culturally competent library services and policy.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS: Participation from targeted communities. Annual Cultural Liaison contacts. Circulation of multilingual materials. Staff cultural competency training completed.

OBJECTIVE KEY RESULTS: Participation of underserved populations increased by 25% by 2031.

LEAD DEPARTMENTS: Public Services, Human Resources

Objective 2: Provide young people ways to play at WCLS libraries, indoors and outside, to support their learning, expression and growth.

- Choose "things" for youth Library of Things that encourage narrative play (dolls, puppets, role playing games, etc.)
- Explore opportunities to install outdoor play structures at or adjacent to WCLS facilities, to attract families and offer young people a library space to develop motor and social skills.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS: Youth Library of Things circulation; outdoor play installations completed; Family visits with children (door count sampling).

OBJECTIVE KEY RESULTS: Family visitation and youth engagement at libraries increased by 20%.

LEAD DEPARTMENTS: Youth Services; Facilities

Strategic Plan Outcomes

- Increased number of WC residents using WCLS services.
- Increased number of active cardholders.
- Increased number of WC residents who perceive value in WCLS.

- Improved user experience through skillful staff interactions and enhanced physical and online spaces.
- Increased reading and library engagement for people of all ages.
- Young people realize their full potential through literature, connection, and play.
- Strengthened resilience for WCLS and the community in the face of economic or other hardships.
- Staff find opportunities to develop and flourish professionally.

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