

6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m. Special Joint Meeting with the Skagit County and Cities of Burlington, Mount Vernon and Sedro-Woolley Regarding North Star (Public Health, Chinook Conference Room, 301 Valley Mall Way, Suite 110, Mount Vernon)

1. Dinner and Networking

2. Call to Order and Roll Call:

Mayor Ryan Walters convened the special joint meeting with the Skagit County Board of Commissioners Chair Ron Wesen, Burlington Mayor Bill Aslett, Mount Vernon Mayor Peter Donovan, and Sedro-Woolley Mayor Julia Johnson at 6:15 p.m.

Councilmembers present from the City of Anacortes included Christine Cleland McGarth, TJ Fantini, Carolyn Moulton, Luke Currier, and Anthony Young.

Skagit County Commissioners Peter Browning and Joe Burns were present.

Councilmembers present from the City of Burlington included Elizabeth Turman-Bryant, Kelsey Freeman, and James Stavig.

Councilmembers present from the City of Mount Vernon included Navor Tercero, Mary Hudson, Randy West, Hannah Oliver, and Demi Daman.

Councilmembers present from the City of Sedro-Woolley included Paul Cocke, and Nora Pederson.

Other staff in attendance included Skagit County Public Health Director Monica Negrila, Skagit County Assistant Public Health Director Sarah Hinman, Skagit County Senior Public Health Analyst George Kosovich, Skagit County District Court Judge Jenifer Howson, Skagit County Community Health Coordinator Kasandra Church, Skagit County Communications Coordinator Andrea Harrison, and Clerk of the Board of Skagit County Commissioners Linda Hammons.

Skagit County Chair Ron Wesen provided welcoming remarks and updates regarding senior services in Skagit County and the Meals on Wheels Program. He clarified that there were two (2) components of the senior services program which were the senior centers and the senior nutrition components. He noted that while senior centers would continue to operate as usual with no immediate changes planned, Skagit County's contract for Meals on Wheels and congregate meals would end on June 30, 2026, with Northwest Regional Council being responsible for selecting a new provider. It was noted that Skagit County was committed to providing equipment, delivery vehicles, and \$250,000 in startup funding for the new provider. He also expressed appreciation for the partnership with the cities and noted that Skagit County would continue open communication with the cities.

Skagit County Chair Ron Wesen acknowledged that the City of Sedro-Woolley had withdrawn its approval of the Interlocal Agreement from the North Star Initiative, while noting their continued participation in the discussions. Mayor of Mount Vernon Peter Donovan, City of Burlington Mayor Bill Aslett, and Skagit County Commissioner Joe Burns thanked City of Sedro-Woolley Mayor Johnson and recognized her leadership role in founding North Star, and her contributions to the partnership.

3. Meeting Goals and Agenda Overview:

Ms. Negrila provided an overview of the agenda and meeting goals which included continuing to build trust and collaboration across jurisdictions, review the 2026 North Star Workplan, review the draft mapping of each jurisdiction's funding allocations and provide input on next steps, identify opportunities for alignment and coordination across jurisdictions, and share updates across jurisdictions.

Communications Coordinator Andrea Harrison provided an overview of North Star, a public-private partnership aimed at addressing homelessness and behavioral health issues in Skagit County. She explained that North Star's activities focused on coordinating crisis response, expanding recovery support, strengthening behavioral health services, and facilitating access to housing. More information about North Star can be found at the website: <https://northstarskagit.org/>.

4. Public Comments:

No public comment was provided.

5. Relationships Building and North Star Updates:

Assistant Public Health Director Sarah Hinman highlighted key accomplishments, including the First Step Center, Martha's Place, and the upcoming STAR Center, emphasizing the collaborative efforts across jurisdictions to address community needs.

6. Review of the 2026 North Star Workplan:

There was discussion about collaborative housing and shelter projects across cities and the county. Ms. Negrila highlighted progress made since 2021, including the opening of 48 new beds at the STAR Center, with a ribbon-cutting ceremony scheduled for Friday, March 20, 2026, at 3:00 p.m.

There was a discussion that addressed concerns about Martha's Place, a 70-unit housing facility with \$1.5 million annual operational costs and clarification that the First Step Shelter served 423 individuals year-round and 456 seasonally.

Participants identified potential areas for regional collaboration, including supporting people in jail through programming and chaplaincy services, addressing bridge housing gaps, and developing strategies for service-resistant individuals. There was also a discussion about the North Star Work Plan, which followed three strategic pillars: durable governance, effective community-based systems of care, and safe and stable housing for everyone.

Ms. Negrila outlined key deliverables for 2026, including strengthening the steering committee, implementing a community-facing data dashboard, continuing work on regional opioid Settlement Funds, and developing an integrated recovery housing model.

Participants broke into groups to discuss the priorities and opportunities for collaboration in their jurisdictions, with one group exploring bridge housing ideas and another addressing funding sustainability, media representation, and the need for greater transparency and tribal partnership.

7. Funding Allocation Mapping Review:

Public Health Analyst George Kosovich presented a comprehensive overview of housing and behavioral health funding sources, highlighting both flexible and restricted funding categories. Participants discussed opportunities for better coordination, including creating a unified funding calendar, standardizing reporting requirements, and improving information sharing about successes and challenges. The group also addressed concerns about Martha's Place, a permanent supported housing project, with Ms. Johnson proposing a future meeting to discuss the program's challenges and successes in detail.

8. Updates and Opportunities for Alignment Across Jurisdictions:

Ms. Negrila reported that the Skagit Recovery Café secured a legislative allocation of over \$2 million from the Washington State Legislature's 2026 budget. This funding would be used to purchase the Recovery Café's building; and the Skagit Community Detox Center, located at 201 Lila Lane in Burlington, had received \$258,000 for the transitional housing project.

Ms. Harrison provided a video presentation about the crisis response team and the Stabilization, Treatment, and Recovery (STAR) Center, highlighting successful collaboration between agencies and the positive impact of North Star initiatives on the community.

9. Wrap-Up and Next Steps:

- Share follow-up email with unduplicated and bed-night data for First Step Shelter and seasonal shelter to clarify numbers served.
- Add deeper dive presentation on Martha's Place operations, challenges, and improvements to agenda for next joint meeting.
- Organize presentation or session on current drug trends and their effects for elected officials at a future meeting.

- Compile and share meeting summary via email, incorporating group discussion notes and action items.
- Develop and propose a consistent county/city funding calendar and explore common or shared application and reporting forms for agencies funded by multiple jurisdictions.
- Consider adding a public funding matrix to the North Star website showing all city/county contributions to various projects/programs for transparency.
- Plan for future agenda items on bridge housing, including matrix of existing organizations, locations, capacity, and services, as suggested by group discussion.
- Schedule and send save-the-date for May 21, 2026, North Star Connect Symposium.
- Send reminder notice of next joint meeting on June 16, 2026, and recovery forum on June 30, 2026.

III. ADJOURNMENT:

Mayor Walters adjourned the proceedings at 8:05 p.m.