

# Whatcom County Candidates

Local citizens, with expertise in relevant issues, provided these questions. *Whatcom Watch* conducted the survey.

Candidates reviewed their statements before printing.

Responses were not edited by *Whatcom Watch*.

**Background:** In 2000, the Bellingham City Council increased water rates by \$5.00 per month to be used to purchase land around Lake Whatcom. It created the Lake Whatcom Watershed Advisory Board to purchase the land. The city asked Whatcom County to join in the land purchases, but it declined.

This year, the City Council dissolved the Lake Whatcom Watershed Advisory Board and land purchases became part of the new Water Resources Advisory Board.

**Would you favor the creation of a joint city/county Watershed Advisory Board with the sole purpose of purchasing property around Lake Whatcom?**

**Background:** Of 850 households experiencing homelessness in Whatcom County in 2023, 84 (10 percent) reported residing in vehicles not suitable for habitation. This subgroup is often concentrated in mixed residential/industrial neighborhoods where garbage, personal possessions, and biohazardous waste often encroach on traffic lanes and sidewalks. Owners are regularly cited by parking enforcement and forced to move, often at significant expense to the public, and cited owners through fines and the risk of law-enforcement contacts.

**As the number of homeless individuals continues to outpace housing availability, what actions would you take to ensure those living in vehicles receive the basic essential services?**

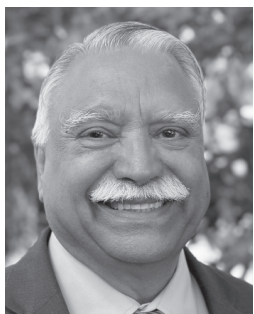
**Background:** In the Lake Whatcom watershed, the state Department of Natural Resources auctions for clearcuts in older forests occur despite its negative impact on our community's drinking water and the increased wildfire risk that plantation-style forests create. Significant tree canopy is also being lost in the watershed to new home building.

**What would you specifically do, if elected, to more vigorously prevent the loss of mature trees and legacy forestlands within the Lake Whatcom watershed?**

## Whatcom County Executive — four-year term

**Dan Purdy**  
360-922-3858

Mr. Purdy did not acknowledge receipt of the questions. He did not acknowledge the receipt of three follow-up messages left on his answering machine.



**Satpal Sidhu**  
360-305-4948  
votesatpal.sidhu@gmail.com

County uses Conservation Future Fund for past decades to purchase properties not only in the Lake Whatcom watershed, but throughout the County for community purposes, like community forest, fish habitat, land conservation easements, purchase of development rights. These funds are leveraged with state grants, Parks and Rec grants, private philanthropic funds. This is in addition to COB investments in land purchases. I need to learn more about how a joint committee can benefit the already working programs of Whatcom County. Once the Stewart Mountain Community Forest process is completed, local residents will own several thousands of acres of land in the lake watershed area.

I agree that the new housing availability and inventory is way behind the demand for housing at all levels. Whatcom County need 3-5000 new housing units annually for several years to catch up with the existing gap. Hence the median pricing and rental rates will remain unaffordable as there are no alternatives to market forces. For the residents living in RVs or other vehicles, I propose to create several 1-2-acre create safe vehicle parking places with basic services. These cannot be no-barrier places. Such initiative will require proper definite rules and standards for vehicle owners to follow.

I promised to plant one million trees during my 2019 election campaign. We now have a local non-profit organization called Whatcom Million Trees Project, who have planted and protected more than 250,000 trees. I support actions to protect legacy forests including the efforts to declare Stewart Mountain as Community Forest. County has close to 10,000 acres of forest land in the Lake Whatcom watershed. I am supporting the more investment shall be made urgently in proper forest management of community owned lands to protect them from wildfires. The recent Blue Canyon fire is a stark reminder for whole community.

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**Would you favor the creation of a joint city/county Watershed Advisory Board with the sole purpose of purchasing property around Lake Whatcom?**

**Background:** Whatcom County will undergo water rights adjudication for the entire Nooksack River basin — only the second of its kind in Washington state history. State-granted water rights allow the holder to legally use a specific amount of water each year. The adjudication process will determine water rights in Whatcom County.

**What is your vision for restoring the Nooksack River watershed so there is enough water for fish and farmers in perpetuity?**

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**What would you specifically do, if elected, to more vigorously prevent the loss of mature trees and legacy forestlands within**

## Whatcom County Council — At-Large — four-year term



**Hannah Ordos**

425-835-2857

[hannah@hannah4whatcom.com](mailto:hannah@hannah4whatcom.com)

Though I favor collaboration, I do not know the history of what occurred in 2000 to provide what my decision today would be. Prior to making that determination, as with any important decisions I would need to look at the data, engage the stakeholders and assess the benefits and trade-offs of creating a joint advisory board versus what we already have in place.

Nooksack watershed is part of WRIA which has a Watershed Management Plan and 2000 statement of work. I agree with the goals outlined which address water quantity for both fish habitat and agriculture. Before recreating the wheel, I would want to understand where we are in achieving those goals and potential barriers. What I would want to avoid is creating new time-consuming assessments that offer little benefit and work on adapting the existing plan we have to our current reality.

Good forestry management practices are an important part of reducing negative impacts. We have numerous programs and considerable investment has been made in the development of a comprehensive plan to mitigate these and others risks within the Lake Whatcom Watershed. As a member of the council, I would look to the experts, ask thoughtful questions and support what makes the most sense for our community.



**Jon Scanlon**

360-592-3149

[jon@electionscanlon.com](mailto:jon@electionscanlon.com)

Everyone deserves access to clean drinking water. Improving Lake Whatcom water quality requires partnership between Whatcom County and the City of Bellingham. I support land acquisition around Lake Whatcom because a forested watershed delivers better water quality. Whatcom County should help. If a new board is the best path forward, then I support it. If the work is meaningful and has impact, then I think we will have people who will want to serve. However we approach it, we need to achieve our goal of acquiring more land in the Lake Whatcom watershed to protect the health of our community.

The Nooksack River watershed is a beautiful place that sustains all of us. I envision a restored watershed with salmon habitat, healthy farms and forests, and safety for communities during floods. I support the adjudication process. Adjudication is the best venue to determine water rights, which are necessary for Tribes, farmers, and landowners to plan for the future. When making decisions, I will reach out to experts and impacted communities. When deciding between different priorities, I will lean on my environmental values, my experience working with smallholder farmers and Indigenous communities, and my career-long focus on reducing poverty and inequality.

A forested watershed is healthier and costs communities less. I support maintaining mature trees and legacy forestlands throughout the Lake Whatcom watershed, including on state trustland. In recent years, DNR has proposed several logging plans that could negatively impact our watersheds. Some of the recent DNR proposed timber sales were pulled because residents spoke up in opposition. I will continue to advocate for healthy forest habitat in the Lake Whatcom watershed. I support continued land acquisition and working with our state legislators to pursue additional protection on our state forestlands so that public lands provide a benefit to water quality.

## Whatcom County Council — Ward 4 — four-year term



**Kathy Kershner**

360-220-7535

[kathy@votekathykershner.com](mailto:kathy@votekathykershner.com)

No, I think the measures the county has already implemented are doing the job of managing water quality in the watershed, including the reconveyance of 8800 acres from DNR to Lake Whatcom Park.

The adjudication process is a legal endeavor that could take many years to resolve. The adjudication process will not restore the Nooksack River watershed, it will only grant legal access to the water in the watershed. We have to continue to be creative in solving the water quantity issue. We have too much in the rainy season and not enough in the summer. I am in favor of creating the capacity for storing water in the winter to be released during the summer months when we get little rain to restore flows for fish and create enough water for the human users as well.

I have already vigorously protected 8800 acres in the Lake Whatcom watershed during my first term as Chair of the council. The Department of Natural Resources has environmentally friendly forestry practices, there is science that supports managed forests as preventative effort to reduce damage caused by wildfires and disease as well as maintain a diverse range of flora and fauna. Development regulations in the county prevent unmitigated tree canopy removal and there are already strict requirements to manage all stormwater running off properties due to development.

**Mark Strempler**

360-851-1776

Mr. Strempler did not acknowledge receipt of the questions or three follow-up messages left on his answering machine.

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**What would you specifically do, if elected, to more vigorously prevent the loss of mature trees and legacy forestlands within the Lake Whatcom watershed?**

## Whatcom County Council — Ward 5 — four-year term



**Jackie Dexter**  
360-305-8390  
j.dexter.forcounty-council5@gmail.com

Protecting our sources of drinking water is a priority of mine and that extends throughout the watersheds. Preserving native trees, plants, and fungi will not only retain the soils and prevent erosion, but also provide a filtration system for the groundwater entering Lake Whatcom. If we, as a county, do not support the City of Bellingham's drinking water, that could lead to future pressure on Whatcom County's water sources, like the Sumas-Blaine aquifer. I support the formation of a joint city/county Watershed Advisory Board with its sole purpose in acquiring lands around Lake Whatcom for the preservation of our drinking water.

I support the adjudication process led by the Department of Ecology, to better establish where the water is being drawn from, and how we can assess to best allocate it. I support this process and the determination of how much each legal holder can withdraw. I advocate for healthy habitat for the salmonids and other fish of the Nooksack River, and then allocation towards farms and families. I have novel ideas for water conservation during our times of deluge for use during periods of drought and look forward to collaborating with the agencies and stakeholders in implementing solutions.

If elected, I will work vigorously with the Department of Natural Resources in advocating for more sustainable techniques in timber harvest, not removing mature, old growth forests. I would encourage zoning these mature forest stands to a conservation status or a Whatcom County Critical Area Ordinance for greatest carbon sequestration. If we must timber harvest, encourage it in areas previously harvested and support best management practices. I would work with land conservation groups in acquiring more of these critical forests around Lake Whatcom for watershed protection and propose a tree retention program to prevent tree loss due to development.



**Ben Elenbaas**  
425 395-4833  
elenbaas4council@gmail.com

No.

If there isn't enough water in Western Washington, where is there enough? The political games need to stop. We can negotiate a strategy that encompasses low flow scenarios, which occur on occasion. When the political games end, recovery will happen.

The Forests within the watershed are intensively managed. However, science tells us that effective management includes harvest.