



# City of Bellingham-Whatcom County Fire District 8 Regional Fire Authority Planning Committee



## **Agenda-Meeting #1**

**Date: Friday May 22, 2026**

**Time: 1:00 P.M. – 3:00 P.M.**

**Location: Bellingham City Hall - Mayor's Boardroom**

- 1. Welcome and introductions (5 minutes)**
- 2. Purpose of the committee, deliverables & expected timelines (15 minutes)**
- 3. Leadership election for the committee (10 minutes)**
- 4. Review of draft proposed charter and operating rules (30 minutes)**
- 5. Introduction to chapter 1, background and needs (10 minutes)**
- 6. Introduction to chapter 3, formation authority (10 minutes)**
- 7. Introduction to chapter 4, jurisdictional boundaries (10 minutes)**
- 8. Public comment (15 minutes)**
  - Up to 3 minutes per speaker
  - Total time: 15 minutes (or as determined by chair)
- 9. Next meeting (5 minutes)**
  - Confirm date, time, and location including ongoing meeting schedule
  - Identify/confirm agenda topics for meeting #2
- 10. Adjournment**



# City of Bellingham-Whatcom County Fire District 8 Regional Fire Authority Planning Committee Charter and Operating Rules



## 1. Mission of the Regional Fire Authority (RFA) Planning Committee.

The mission of the Planning Committee is to create and propose to the elected leadership of the City of Bellingham (“City”) and Whatcom County Fire District #8 (“District”) a plan (“Plan”) for a regional fire authority encompassing the entire territory within the jurisdictional boundaries of the District and the City, including the proposed governance, design, financing and development of fire protection and emergency service facilities and operations, including maintenance and preservation of facilities or systems, all as authorized by Ch. 52.26 RCW. The Planning Committee is advisory to the Mayor and City Council of the City and to the Board of Commissioners of the District. The Planning Committee shall seek to develop a Plan which, if approved by the voters of the City and District, will achieve the following goals and outcomes:

- A. To provide sustainable funding and service levels to meet the needs of the city and the district.
- B. To continue efficiency of operations of both the City and District.
- C. To fund specific service level improvements to better serve the residents and businesses within the proposed RFA.
- D. To ensure the Plan addresses the concerns and needs of both the city and the district and is ultimately supported by both the City Council and the District Commissioners.
- E. To provide transparent, understandable information to the public about the potential impacts of the proposed RFA.
- F. To ensure meaningful public input opportunities during the planning process, and to consider public input received in the drafting of the Plan.
- G. To ensure the governance plan for the RFA provides equitable representation of the two member agencies, and to provide sufficient flexibility in the Plan to allow additional agencies to join the RFA in the future without needing to resubmit a new RFA plan to the voters of the City and the District.
- H. To complete the Plan with sufficient detail, based on documentable information, and by a reasonable date, so that the City Council and Board of Commissioner may review and deliberate on the Plan and make an informed and timely decision whether to place the proposal on the ballot for voter approval, at a date to be identified by the planning committee.



# City of Bellingham-Whatcom County Fire District 8 Regional Fire Authority Planning Committee Charter and Operating Rules

## 2. Membership.

The Planning Committee membership shall include 3 elected representatives from the City of Bellingham and 3 elected representatives from the Fire District #8 Board of Commissioners. .

## 3. Process.

- A. Schedule. The Planning Committee will meet twice per month.
- B. Developing Preliminary Recommendations, Public Outreach Process. The Planning Committee will accomplish its mission by reviewing staff-developed reports, information, options and recommendations and considering public input. The Planning Committee will identify preliminary recommendations with respect to all items that must be included in the Plan.
- C. Periodic Updates to Council and Board. The Planning Committee will provide periodic updates to the City Council and Board of Commissioners in the form of preliminary recommendations, in order that the Council and Board may provide timely input on the development of the Plan.
- D. Council and/or Board Deliberations. The City Council and/or Board of Commission may determine they need additional time to deliberate on a preliminary recommendation from the Planning Committee, and if so, the Planning Committee will shift its work plan to not delay the schedule any further than necessary. A Council or Commission, choosing to deliberate a preliminary recommendation, will make every effort to conclude its deliberations by the end of its next regularly scheduled meeting.
- E. Reconciling Direction from Council and Board. If either the City Council or Board of Commissioners is opposed to any preliminary recommendation of the Planning Committee, they will advise the Planning Committee. The Planning Committee will then work to amend the preliminary recommendations to reconcile it with input from the City Council and Board of Commissioners and bring revised preliminary recommendations back for review by the City Council and Board of Commissioners. In the event of any apparently irreconcilable conflicts between the City Council and the Board of Commissioners, the Planning Committee will notify the Council and Board and propose a resolution. Work on the project will cease at any point at which either the Council or Commission adopt a resolution to halt work on the project.



# City of Bellingham-Whatcom County Fire District 8 Regional Fire Authority Planning Committee Charter and Operating Rules

## **4. Public Input.**

All meetings of the Planning Committee shall be open to the public and shall be duly noticed as public meetings as required by law. The Planning Committee is required by statute to ensure there are opportunities for public input in the development of the Plan. The Planning Committee shall adopt a plan for public input, which will at a minimum include conducting two public information and input sessions before the Plan is approved by the Council and District. The City and District will also host a website where the public and other stakeholders can gather information and review the agendas, proceedings and materials considered by the Planning Committee. The Planning Committee may determine whether to take public comments at its meetings and shall provide the public with a means to submit written comments at Planning Committee meetings and online. If the Planning Committee determines to take public comments at its meetings, it shall approve the rules relating to such comments.

## **5. Public Communications.**

Members of the Planning Committee may be called on from time to time to comment about the activities of the Planning Committee or the subject matter under deliberation. In such communications, Members will take care to distinguish any official Planning Committee positions from individual Member positions. Members agree to refer inquiries from the press to the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Planning Committee for response on behalf of the Planning Committee.

## **6. Compensation.**

Members of the Planning Committee shall be compensated by each Member's appointing agency in compliance with the Member's appointing agency's policies (e.g., City or District).

## **7. Chair and Vice Chair of Planning Committee.**

At its first meeting, the Planning Committee will elect a Chair and a Vice Chair from among its members. One of these officers must be a city representative, and one must be a District representative. The Chair and Vice-Chair will review and approve agendas in advance of meetings. The Chair will preside over the meetings; the Vice Chair will preside over the meeting in the absence of the Chair. The Chair and Vice-Chair shall serve as



# City of Bellingham-Whatcom County Fire District 8 Regional Fire Authority Planning Committee Charter and Operating Rules

spokespersons for the Planning Committee and shall sign transmittals and reports of the Planning Committee and assume such other duties as may be delegated to them from time to time by the Planning Committee. Any vacancy in the post of Chair or Vice-Chair may be filled by the Planning Committee upon a vote of a majority of the Planning Committee.

## **8. Resignation and Appointment of Replacement Members.**

Any Member of the Planning Committee may resign, and such resignation shall be effective upon submitting written notice to the Chair and the resigning member's agency CEO (Mayor or Fire Chief). The legislative body of the resigning Member's agency shall take prompt action to appoint a replacement member.

## **9. Planning Committee Meetings.**

Notice of all meetings of the Planning Committee shall be given by the Chair or his/her designee in writing by electronic mail or personal delivery to all Members at least seven (7) days prior to the date on which the meeting is to be held; provided, however, the Panel Chair may call for special meetings, and not less than three (3) days' notice may be given for a special meeting. Any notice shall specify the date, time and place of the meeting; provided, however, notice may be waived in writing signed by the person or persons entitled to such notice, whether before or after the time at which the notice is required to be given, which shall be equivalent to the giving of such notice.

## **10. Attendance.**

Panel members may participate in meetings virtually but are strongly encouraged to attend each meeting in person.

## **11. Agendas.**

Prior to each regularly scheduled meeting, the Planning Committee, the Chair and Co-Chair shall work with staff to confirm an agenda for the meeting. At the beginning of the meeting any Member may request that the Chair add an item to the agenda. The decision whether to add an item shall be made by the Chair. Agendas will be made available to the Members electronically (by email) at least 3 days prior to the meeting. Staff supporting the Planning Committee shall make best efforts to provide all meeting materials to the Panel at least 2 days prior to the meeting date.



# City of Bellingham-Whatcom County Fire District 8 Regional Fire Authority Planning Committee Charter and Operating Rules



## **12. Quorum.**

A quorum at any meeting shall consist of Planning Committee Members who represent a simple majority.

## **13. Rules of Order.**

All meetings of the Planning Committee shall be conducted in accordance with the latest edition or revision of Robert's Rules of Order, except as otherwise provided in this Charter.

## **14. Minutes.**

Summary minutes shall be kept of Planning Committee meetings, recording attendance, general discussion items, decisions and votes (where taken). Minutes shall be available to the public.

## **15. Decision Making.**

- A. Votes. The Planning Committee shall attempt to make decisions by consensus, defined as approval from not less than two-thirds of the Planning Committee members from each of the City and District. Where such consensus cannot be achieved, items may be approved by a majority of the Planning Committee Members, however, the lack of consensus shall be noted. The minutes shall reflect the votes of each member. Each Member of the Planning Committee has one vote. No proxy voting is allowed.
- B. Routine Items. Routine actions of the Planning Committee will be confirmed by the vote of a majority of the Members of the Committee.
- C. Approval of Final RFA Plan. Notwithstanding the terms of Section 1 and 2, the final proposed Plan must be approved by not less than two-thirds of Planning Committee members from both the City and District.

## **16. Staff support for Planning Committee.**

Staff support will be provided by the employees of the City. Both agencies acknowledge that additional consultant support may be necessary to develop all the information sought over the course of this effort.



# City of Bellingham-Whatcom County Fire District 8 Regional Fire Authority Planning Committee Charter and Operating Rules



## **17. Funding.**

If there are any unanticipated costs associated with the planning process, the Planning Committee will make a recommendation as to how costs of the project should be allocated between the City and District and shall forward that for action by the appropriate City/District processes.

## **18. Approval and Amendment of this Charter.**

This Charter shall be approved by vote of not less than two-thirds of the Members of the Planning Committee and two-thirds of the Members from the City of Bellingham and Fire District 8, and any amendments must be similarly approved.

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## City of Bellingham - Whatcom County Fire District #8 Regional Fire Authority Planning Committee Issue Paper

**Prepared by:** Assistant Chief Dave Pethick

**Date:** May 20, 2026

### **Title:** Background and Needs

#### **Purpose:**

Chapter 1 of the Regional Fire Authority Plan is titled *Background and Needs*. This chapter establishes the foundation for the entire plan by outlining why this effort is underway and the specific challenges it aims to address. Its purpose is to clearly describe current conditions, the operational and financial pressures we face, and the factors leading us to explore the formation of a Regional Fire Authority.

#### **Statutory References:**

There is no direct RCW requirement for a “Background and Needs” section; however, RCW 52.26.040 requires that “the planning committee must adopt a regional service plan that describes governance, design, financing, and development of fire and emergency services,” and that “the plan must include opportunities for public input.” Including background and needs statements supports the statutory purpose of transparency, public participation, and clear planning rationale by describing the conditions and challenges that justify considering a new service model.

#### **Background/ Problem Statement:**

The previous planning committee developed the following six statements. They are provided here for context and comparison. They may offer a useful starting point but will need to be reviewed and updated by the current committee. Staff has prepared updated language below those original statements to reflect current conditions, modern service demands, and the operational realities facing our agencies today.



## PREVIOUS STATEMENTS OF NEED

1. Bellingham and the surrounding areas have grown faster than our ability to meet adopted levels of service requirements for fire protection and emergency services. This growth is expected to continue to add increasing pressure on where fire protection and emergency services are provided into the future.
2. The creation of a Regional Fire Authority will allow for an increased level of service to meet these growing demands and the needs of the community and provide a stable and consistent funding source for fire and emergency services.
3. Communities are best served by a fire protection and emergency services system that has a collaborative partnership and responsibility shared among local and regional governments, the private sector, and the community.
4. Stable funding options for regional fire protection and emergency services allow for the timely development and implementation of significant fire and emergency services initiatives.
5. The City of Bellingham and Whatcom County Fire District 8 have a cooperative partnership and provide a high level of fire and emergency services to our community within the confines of available resources. Cooperation and the partnership between the City Bellingham and Whatcom County Fire District 8 began in 1997.
6. The City of Bellingham and Whatcom County Fire District 8 will be asking its citizens to vote to combine functions and services provided by the two jurisdictions into a single entity, called a Regional Fire Authority.

## UPDATES FOR 2027 PROCESS

1. Bellingham and the surrounding areas have experienced significant growth, outpacing our ability to meet adopted levels of service for fire protection and emergency medical services. Calls for service increased by 35% between 2015–2025—an additional 9,000 calls per year, or roughly 25 more calls each day. This growth is expected to continue, adding substantial pressure on where and how services are delivered in the future.
2. Despite rising demand, core fire response resources have remained largely unchanged. The City has operated with the same number of primary fire response units since 1976. Staffing and station capacity have not kept pace with service needs, resulting in a system that must continually do more with less.
3. The long-standing engine–ambulance cross-staffing model, originally adopted to maximize resources, has reached the end of its practical usefulness. When a cross-staffed ambulance transports a patient, the paired engine becomes unavailable. Given that nearly 80% of calls



are EMS-related, these gaps are increasingly common and are driving down unit availability. Assessments show cross-staffed companies operating at 86–90% availability—below the 90–92% expected in a healthy system. While the addition of two BLS units has improved efficiency, it has not fully offset demand.

4. Forming a Regional Fire Authority (RFA) would allow for increased and more reliable levels of service. An RFA provides a stable, consistent, and voter-approved funding structure that can meet both current and future community needs for fire and emergency medical services.

5. Communities are best served by a fire and emergency services system built on partnership, shared responsibility, and coordinated planning among local and regional governments, private-sector partners, and the community. The development of an RFA strengthens these collaborative efforts.

6. Stable regional funding options enable timely development, expansion, and implementation of critical fire and EMS initiatives, ensuring the system can adapt to growing service demands and evolving community expectations.

7. The City of Bellingham and Whatcom County Fire District 8 have collaborated to provide a high level of service since 1997. This long-standing partnership has delivered strong outcomes within the limits of available resources, laying the groundwork for more unified regional service delivery.

8. The City of Bellingham and Whatcom County Fire District 8 will be asking their citizens to consider combining their fire and emergency medical service functions into a single Regional Fire Authority. This step would formalize existing collaboration, align service delivery, and create a sustainable system capable of meeting future demands.

In summary, increasing service demand, current operational constraints, and outdated service models are making it progressively more difficult to sustain the level of fire and EMS service expected by the community. Establishing a Regional Fire Authority offers a modern, stable, and unified framework to address these challenges and ensure that fire and emergency medical services can effectively meet both present and future needs.

**Decisions Needed:**



This chapter gives us a starting point by outlining our current conditions and challenges. The planning committee should review the draft background and needs, discuss any changes, and decide what updates are needed so this section accurately reflects our reality.

**Options and Analysis:**

**Staff Recommendations:**

This content has been carried forward from the previous planning process to provide background and a foundational starting point. Edits have been proposed to modernize the material and better align it with current organizational and community needs. Staff recommends a comprehensive review and adoption of the updated Background and Needs statements to ensure they accurately reflect present conditions and support the development of a complete and effective RFA plan.

**Committee Recommendations:**

**Implementation Steps:**

**Financial/ Administrative Implications:**



## City of Bellingham - Whatcom County Fire District #8 Regional Fire Authority Planning Committee Issue Paper

Prepared by: Assistant Chief Dave Pethick

Date: May 20, 2026

### Title: Formation Authority

#### Purpose:

The purpose of the Formation Authority chapter is to explain the legal foundation and basic organizational framework of the proposed Regional Fire Authority. It outlines where the authority to form an RFA comes from, which agencies are participating in the proposal, and how the new entity would be legally established if approved by voters. Including this chapter ensures the plan is transparent, grounded in statute, and clear about the structure and authorization behind the proposed RFA before describing any operational or financial details.

#### Statutory References:

##### **RCW 52.26.030 Planning Committee Formation/Powers**

Regional fire protection service authority planning committees are advisory entities that are created, convened, and empowered as follows:

- (1) Any two or more fire protection jurisdictions located within reasonable proximity may create a regional fire protection service authority and convene a regional fire protection service authority planning committee. No fire protection jurisdiction may participate in more than one created authority.
- (2) Each governing body of the fire protection jurisdictions participating in planning under this chapter shall appoint three elected officials to the authority planning committee. Members of the planning committee may receive compensation of seventy dollars per day, or portion thereof, not to exceed seven hundred dollars per year, for attendance at planning committee meetings and for performance of other services in behalf of the authority, and may be reimbursed for travel and incidental expenses at the discretion of their respective governing body.



(3) A regional fire protection service authority planning committee may receive state funding, as appropriated by the legislature, or county funding provided by the affected counties for start-up funding to pay for salaries, expenses, overhead, supplies, and similar expenses ordinarily and necessarily incurred. Upon creation of a regional fire protection service authority, the authority shall within one year reimburse the state or county for any sums advanced for these start-up costs from the state or county.

(4) The planning committee shall conduct its affairs and formulate a regional fire protection service authority plan as provided under RCW 52.26.040.

(5) At its first meeting, a regional fire protection service authority planning committee may elect officers and provide for the adoption of rules and other operating procedures.

(6) The planning committee may dissolve itself at any time by a majority vote of the total membership of the planning committee. Any participating fire protection jurisdiction may withdraw upon thirty calendar days' written notice to the other jurisdictions.

#### **RCW 52.26.040 Planning Committee Formulation of service plan.**

(1) A regional fire protection service authority planning committee shall adopt a regional fire protection service authority plan providing for the governance, design, financing, and development of fire protection and emergency services. The planning committee may consider the following factors in formulating its plan:

- (a) Land use planning criteria; and
- (b) The input of cities and counties located within, or partially within, a participating fire protection jurisdiction.

(2) The planning committee may coordinate its activities with neighboring cities, towns, and other local governments that engage in fire protection planning.

(3) The planning committee shall:

- (a) Create opportunities for public input in the development of the plan;
- (b) Adopt a plan proposing the creation of a regional fire protection service authority and recommending governance, design, financing, and development of fire protection and emergency service facilities and operations, including maintenance and preservation of facilities or systems. The plan may authorize the authority to establish a system of ambulance service to be operated by the authority or operated by contract after a call for bids. However, the authority shall not provide for the establishment of an ambulance service that would compete with any existing private ambulance service, unless the authority determines that the region served by the authority, or a substantial portion of the region served by the authority, is not adequately served by an existing private ambulance service. In determining the adequacy of an existing private ambulance service, the authority shall take into consideration objective generally accepted medical standards and reasonable levels of service which must be published by the authority. Following the preliminary conclusion by the authority that the existing private ambulance service is inadequate, and before establishing an ambulance service or issuing a call for bids, the authority shall allow a



minimum of sixty days for the private ambulance service to meet the generally accepted medical standards and accepted levels of service. In the event of a second preliminary conclusion of inadequacy within a twenty-four-month period, the authority may immediately issue a call for bids or establish its own ambulance service and is not required to afford the private ambulance service another sixty-day period to meet the generally accepted medical standards and reasonable levels of service. A private ambulance service that is not licensed by the department of health or whose license is denied, suspended, or revoked is not entitled to a sixty-day period within which to demonstrate adequacy and the authority may immediately issue a call for bids or establish an ambulance service; and

(c) In the plan, recommend sources of revenue authorized by RCW 52.26.050, identify the portions of the plan that may be amended by the board of the authority without voter approval, consistent with RCW 52.26.050, and recommend a financing plan to fund selected fire protection and emergency services and projects.

(4) Once adopted, the plan must be forwarded to the participating fire protection jurisdictions' governing bodies to initiate the election process under RCW 52.26.060.

(5) If the ballot measure is not approved, the planning committee may redefine the selected regional fire protection service authority projects, financing plan, and the ballot measure. The fire protection jurisdictions' governing bodies may approve the new plan and ballot measure, and may then submit the revised proposition to the voters at a subsequent election or a special election. If a ballot measure is not approved by the voters by the third vote, the planning committee is dissolved.

#### **RCW 52.26.020 Definitions.**

The definitions in this section apply throughout this chapter unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

(1) "Board" means the governing body of a regional fire protection service authority.

(2) "Elected official" means an elected official of a participating fire protection jurisdiction or a regional fire protection district commissioner created under RCW 52.26.080.

(3) "Fire protection jurisdiction" means a fire district, regional fire protection service authority, city, town, port district, municipal airport, or Indian tribe.

(4) "Participating fire protection jurisdiction" means a fire protection jurisdiction participating in the formation or operation of a regional fire protection service authority.

(5) "Reasonable proximity" means geographical areas near enough to each other so that governance, management, and services can be delivered effectively.

(6) "Regional fire protection service authority" or "authority" means a municipal corporation, an independent taxing authority within the meaning of Article VII, section 1 of the state Constitution, and a taxing district within the meaning of Article VII, section 2 of the state Constitution, whose boundaries are coextensive with two or more fire protection jurisdictions located within reasonable proximity and that has been created by a vote of the people under this chapter to implement a regional fire protection service authority plan.



(7) "Regional fire protection service authority plan" or "plan" means a plan to develop and finance a regional fire protection service authority project or projects including, but not limited to, specific capital projects, fire operations and emergency service operations pursuant to RCW 52.26.040(3)(b), and preservation and maintenance of existing or future facilities.

(8) "Regional fire protection service authority planning committee" or "planning committee" means the advisory committee created under RCW 52.26.030 to create and propose to fire protection jurisdictions a regional fire protection service authority plan to design, finance, and develop fire protection and emergency service projects.

(9) "Regular property taxes" has the same meaning as in RCW 84.04.140.

### **Background/ Problem Statement:**

State law requires that an RFA plan describes the legal authority under which a Regional Fire Authority would be created. While the Planning Committee does not need to make substantive decisions about formation authority—because the legal framework is already established in statute—the committee is responsible for presenting this information clearly within the plan. Including this chapter ensures that readers, stakeholders, and voters understand the statutory basis for forming an RFA, the roles of participating jurisdictions, and the process that follows voter approval or rejection. This section is primarily informational, providing essential context rather than decisions for the committee to resolve.

### **Decisions Needed:**

The Planning Committee does not need to make new decisions related to formation authority. The purpose of this chapter is to accurately outline the statutory framework and ensure the plan reflects those requirements for the reader.

### **Options and Analysis:**

#### **Regional Fire Protection Service Authority**

1. Chapter 52.26 RCW provides statutory authority for the formation of a Regional Fire Authority by the City of Bellingham and Whatcom County Fire District 8.

#### **Planning Committee Authority**

1. RCW 52.26.030 and RCW 52.26.040 provide statutory authority to form and operate a Planning Committee.



2. The participating jurisdictions formed a Planning Committee consisting of two (2) members of the Bellingham City Council, the Mayor of Bellingham, and three (3) Commissioners of Fire District 8.
3. The Planning Committee developed and presented the RFA Plan to the elected officials of each participating jurisdiction.

#### **RFA Plan Approval Authority**

1. The legislative body of each participating jurisdiction reviewed and approved the RFA Plan by Joint Resolution and called for an election to consider the plan.
2. The RFA Plan is being submitted to voters in both jurisdictions as a single ballot measure requiring 60% majority approval.
3. The Planning Committee has authority to take all necessary actions on behalf of the Participating Jurisdictions, perform all necessary duties as required to place the RFA Plan before the voters and to comply with the public hearing requirements contained in RCW 52.26.230.
4. Should the RFA Plan be approved by 60% of the voters of the Participating Jurisdictions, the Bellingham Regional Fire Authority shall be formed on, July 1, 2027, in accordance with RCW 52.26.070.
5. Upon formation of the RFA, the City and the District will continue to exist as Washington State municipal corporations. The District's continued existence is solely for the purpose of levying and collecting taxes or other district revenues to transfer to the RFA until the RFA receives its own revenue, and to provide representation on the newly formed RFA Transitional Board.
6. If the plan is not approved by 60% of the voters, fire and EMS services will continue to be provided through the City of Bellingham Fire Department.

#### **Staff Recommendations:**

This content was carried forward (and updated) from the previous planning process to provide a head start and should be reviewed for continued relevance.

#### **Committee Recommendations:**



**Implementation Steps:**

**Financial/ Administrative Implications:**



## City of Bellingham - Whatcom County Fire District #8 Regional Fire Authority Planning Committee Issue Paper

Prepared by: Assistant Chief Dave Pethick

Date: May 20, 2026

### Title: Jurisdictional Boundaries and Annexations

#### Purpose:

The purpose of the Jurisdictional Boundaries and Annexations chapter is to identify the proposed boundaries of the Regional Fire Authority and explain how those boundaries may change over time. This chapter provides clarity on the area the RFA will serve at the time of formation and outlines the statutory processes for future annexations or boundary adjustments. By documenting both current and potential future boundaries, the plan supports transparency for voters and ensures alignment with state law.

#### Statutory References:

##### **RCW 52.26.290 Annexation of territory.**

Territory that is annexed to a participating jurisdiction is annexed to the authority as of the effective date of the annexation. The statutes regarding transfer of assets and employees do not apply to the participating jurisdictions in the annexation.

##### **RCW 52.26.300 Annexation of fire protection jurisdiction within reasonable proximity to authority.**

- (1) A fire protection jurisdiction that is located within reasonable proximity to the boundary of a regional fire protection service authority is eligible for annexation by the authority.
- (2) An annexation is initiated by the adoption of a resolution by the governing body of a fire protection jurisdiction requesting the annexation. The resolution requesting annexation must then be filed with the governing board of the authority that is requested to annex the fire protection jurisdiction.
- (3) Except as otherwise provided in the regional fire protection service authority plan, on receipt of the resolution requesting annexation, the governing board of the authority may adopt a resolution amending its plan to establish terms and conditions of the requested



annexation and submit the resolution and plan amendment to the fire protection jurisdiction requesting annexation. An election to authorize the annexation may be held only if the governing body of the fire protection jurisdiction seeking annexation adopts a resolution approving both the annexation and the related plan amendment.

(4)(a) An annexation is authorized if the voters in the fire protection jurisdiction proposed to be annexed approve by a simple majority vote a single ballot measure approving the annexation and related plan amendment.

(b) An annexation is effective on the date specified in the ballot measure. In the event the ballot measure does not specify an effective date, the effective date is on the subsequent January 1st or July 1st, whichever occurs first.

### **Background/ Problem Statement:**

The Regional Fire Authority Plan must define the boundaries of the area to be served on the date of formation and must describe how those boundaries could change in the future through annexations or adjustments. Clear boundary definitions are essential for establishing service responsibilities, taxation authority, and long-term planning. While the statutory processes for annexation are already established, the Planning Committee must determine the proposed initial boundaries and document the procedures the RFA will follow when boundary changes occur.

### **Decisions Needed:**

1. Determine the proposed jurisdictional boundaries of the RFA at formation.
2. Establish the annexation procedures to be included in the RFA Plan, consistent with RCW requirements.

### **Options and Analysis:**

#### **Recommended Boundary and Annexation Framework**

#### **Boundary Changes Not Requiring an RFA Plan Amendment**

##### **a. City annexations of areas already within District 8**

These annexations do not change RFA boundaries because the area is already inside the RFA. No asset or employee transfers are required under RCW 52.26.290.



**b. City annexations of areas not in District 8**

These territories automatically become part of the RFA on the annexation's effective date (RCW 52.26.290) and become subject to RFA taxes, charges, and bonded indebtedness (if approved as part of annexation). Any required asset or employee transfers occur between the annexing entity and the RFA.

**c. Annexation of District territory by a non-participating city**

On the effective date, the annexed territory is automatically removed from the RFA. The RFA is not obligated to transfer RFA assets or employees; the annexing city may only receive assets or employees from District 8, if any.

**d. RFA annexations of unincorporated territory**

Under RCW 52.26.090(g), the RFA may annex adjacent unincorporated areas using the procedures in RCW 52.04.001–52.04.051.

**e. Partial mergers**

Under RCW 52.26.090(g), the RFA may participate in partial mergers using the authority in RCW 52.06.090 and 52.06.100.

**Boundary Changes Requiring an RFA Plan Amendment**

**a. Annexation of adjacent fire protection jurisdictions**

The RFA may expand to include additional fire protection jurisdictions using the plan amendment and annexation procedures in RCW 52.26.300.

**Staff Recommendations:**

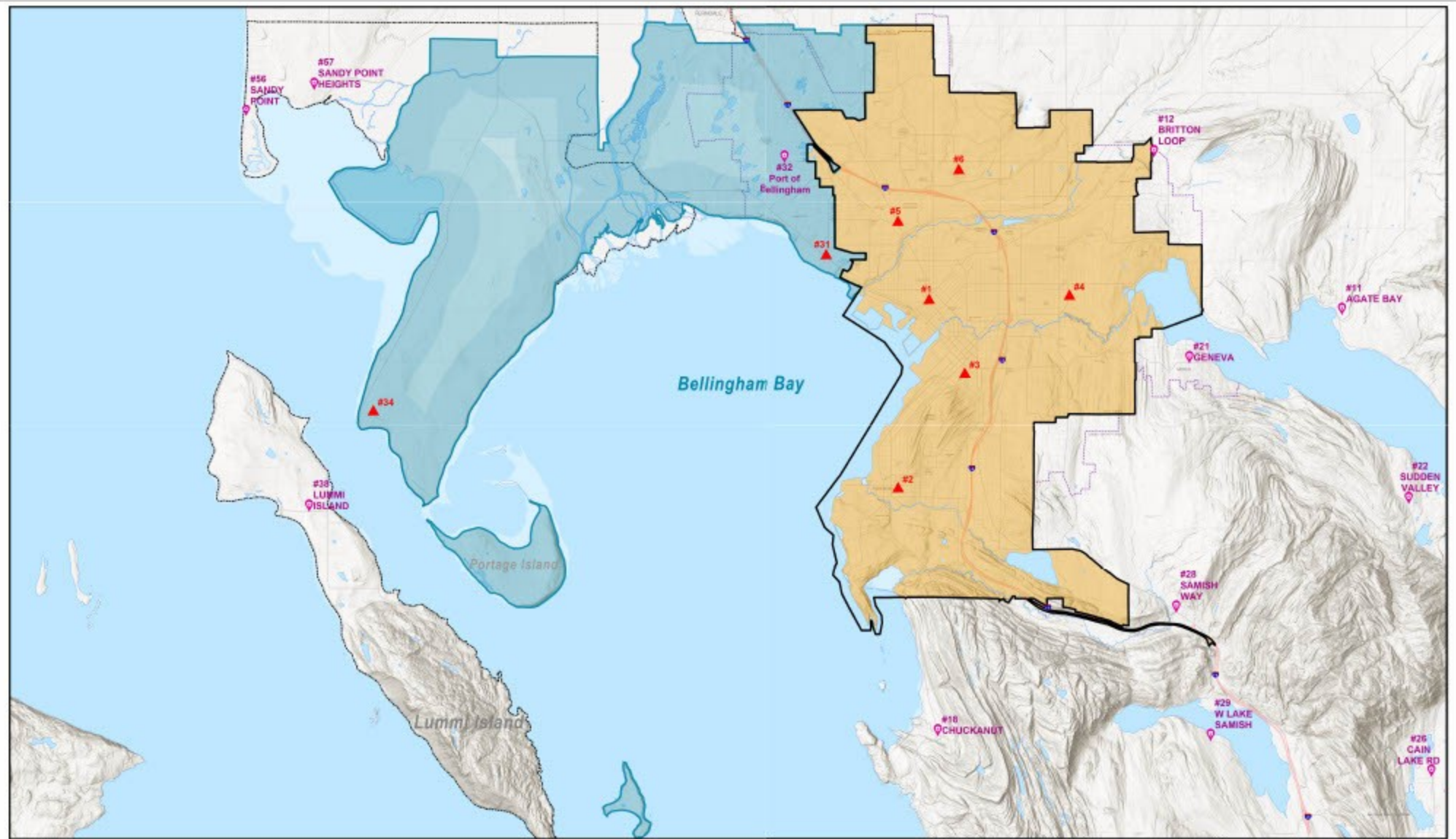
1. Adopt the boundary map showing the combined existing legal boundaries of the City of Bellingham and Whatcom County Fire District 8.
2. Adopt the annexation language above to ensure compliance with RCW 52.26 and to support clarity and predictability for future boundary changes.

**Committee Recommendations:**

**Implementation Steps:**



**Financial/ Administrative Implications:**



### Proposed Regional Fire Authority Boundaries



City of Bellingham



Fire District 8



Fire Stations



Fire Stations outside RFA



NORTH

0 25 50 75  
feet