

1. CALL TO ORDER/FLAG SALUTE

- The remote meeting, held via Zoom, was called to order by Chairperson Troy Meyers at 6:35 p.m. Attendance was called.

2. ATTENDANCE

- Members:
 - Mayor, Linda Springer (City of Cosmopolis)
 - Councilmember, Brandon Pauley (City of Hoquiam)
 - Councilmember, Bill Breedlove (Acting Mayor Pro Tem - City of Oakville) – Voted Remotely
 - Councilmember, Troy Meyers (City of Westport)
 - Councilmember, Frank Eshpeter (City of Westport)
 - County Administrator, Sam Kim, (Grays Harbor County)
 - General Manager, Ken Mehin (Grays Harbor Transit)
 - Regional Library Manager, Evi Buell (Timberland Regional Library) – Voted Remotely
- Staff:
 - Vicki Cummings, Executive Director
 - Mark Northrop, Planner II
 - Natalie Jensen, Office Coordinator
- Guests:
 - Community Member, Rosa Johnson (Westport)
 - Joe Calodich, WSDOT Multimodal Planning Team Lead

A quorum was established.

3. GHCOG BUSINESS

- **ACTION: Approval of Current Meeting Agenda**
Chairperson Troy Meyers asked for approval of the current meeting Agenda.

Brandon Pauley made a motion to approve; second, Frank Eshpeter. The motion passed unanimously.

- **ACTION: Approval of August 2025 Minutes**
Chairperson Troy Meyers asked for approval of August 2025 Minutes.

Frank Eshpeter made a motion to approve as amended; second, Linda Springer. The motion passed unanimously.

- **Administrative Sub-Council Report**
Executive Director Vicki Cummings reported that a Sub-Council meeting was held. The September bills and payroll were reviewed and approved, and the large Montrose bill was noted, \$138,916.07. No other action was taken.

➤ **ACTION: Approval of September 2025 Claims Batches #25-9 which includes October 2025 Payroll**

Chairperson Troy Meyers asked for approval of the August 2025 Claims Batches #25-8 in the amount of \$178,603.81.

Brandon Pauley made a motion to approve; second, Frank Eshpeter. The motion passed unanimously.

OLD BUSINESS

➤ **DISCUSSION: Attorney's Legal Analysis Regarding Potential Merger**

Chairperson Meyers summarized the attorney's letter distributed the previous week, outlining that GHCOG's purpose as a voluntary association under RCW 39.34 is to support intergovernmental cooperation in areas such as transportation, economic development, and environmental planning. He reported that the attorney concluded a merger with Greater Grays Harbor, Inc. (GGHI) is not feasible or consistent with RCW 36.70, county ordinances, or GHCOG bylaws. He explained that GHCOG's public entity status restricts membership to governmental bodies, while GGHI includes private entities, and that voting structures differ between the two organizations. Meyers also raised concerns over compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act, financial and operational risks tied to GHCOG's public status and grant funding, and the requirement to utilize the County Treasurer. Executive Director Cummings added that GHCOG's federal funding prohibits lobbying, which is a core activity of GGHI. She emphasized that lobbying could jeopardize member project funding and potentially require repayment of federal dollars.

Meyers concluded that GHCOG is an apolitical body providing collaboration among jurisdictions, with independence that supports cost savings, equitable decision-making, and networking opportunities. Administrator Sam Kim voiced concerns regarding GHCOG's overall viability, succession planning, and responsiveness. Meyers acknowledged the challenges, particularly staffing a full-time Planner, but noted that with recent hires and onboarding, the agency has a clear path forward. He added that GHCOG's value cannot always be measured annually due to the nature of long-term projects and grants.

Cummings apologized for delays in responsiveness during past staff shortages, reaffirmed her commitment to the agency's long-term success, and confirmed that a succession plan is being developed. She highlighted GHCOG's ongoing behind-the-scenes work, including review of state and federal transportation plans to ensure data accuracy, proper listing of local projects in required plans, and monitoring of federal processes to position members for funding opportunities. She also noted GHCOG's role in providing direct support to members on request.

Meyers then observed that while economic development is included in the COG's charter, its focus is primarily infrastructure, with economic development engagement being secondary. He contrasted this with GGHI's emphasis on business development and tourism and asked whether strategies should be considered to strengthen collaboration between the two organizations. Councilmember Pauley offered to reach out informally to GGHI's leadership. Cummings responded that infrastructure and economic development are closely linked and that GHCOG has previously partnered successfully with GGHI, expressing willingness to hold further discussions if members felt it necessary.

Meyers remarked that GHCOG's governing documents allow flexibility in meeting member needs and acknowledged a missed opportunity to communicate more clearly with the County

during administrative transitions. He invited questions related to risks such as grant funding or lobbying. Councilmember Eshpeter emphasized the importance of retaining grant funding, while Pauley noted that Hoquiam has debated GGHI membership far more than GHCOG membership and affirmed his city's strong support for GHCOG.

Meyers thanked Kim for raising concerns, framing the discussion as an opportunity for improvement, and invited members to bring forward additional agenda items. Mayor Springer of Cosmopolis expressed appreciation for GHCOG's availability and support, particularly in assisting his community during challenging times. Meyers thanked her for her comments and moved on to new business.

NEW BUSINESS

- **ACTION: Resolution #697, Grays Harbor Council of Governments 2026 Preliminary Budget**
Vicki explained this was a preliminary budget and highlighted the variances in the proposed 2026 budget. Noting specifically minor change in payroll, the 6% increase in member dues, the impact of the loss of Ocean Shores membership, and the more significant increase in expenses due to the Brownfield grant contract with Montrose and Paychex payroll services.

Administrator Sam Kim abstained from the vote in order to allow his commissioners to review the budget, leading to a pause in the agenda item.

No Quorum.

- **ACTION: Resolution #698, Staff Salary Ranges for 2026**
Chairperson Meyers reported that the director had evaluated staff performance and recommended salary increases for both Mark and Natalie, noting that the Administrative Council would also meet to consider an adjustment for the director. Executive Director Cummings outlined her process for updating salary ranges, which includes reviewing comparable agencies and state data to ensure salaries remain competitive yet sustainable within the budget. Meyers expressed appreciation for Natalie's work in updating records and policies, describing her as a self-starter, and the Board proceeded to discussion and vote.

Ken Mehin made a motion to approve; second, Frank Eshpeter. The motion passed unanimously.

- **ACTION: *Reaffirmation of Resolution #680-R: Amending Bylaws Sections 4 and 5**
Executive Director Cummings provided background on the resolution under consideration, explaining that it was prepared during a time when staffing was limited. She clarified that the resolution reduced the size of the Administrative Sub-council from five members to three, due to challenges in obtaining quorums. Cummings noted that the change was consistent with past practice and state requirements, and that the adjustment had been fully discussed prior to drafting. She confirmed that the resolution had been approved and reflected in the minutes from the November 16, 2023 meeting, and that the current step was to finalize signatures on the document.

Brandon Pauley made a motion to approve; second, Ken Mehin. The motion passed unanimously.

- **ACTION: *Reaffirmation of Resolution #681-R: 2024 Final Budget**
Executive Director Cummings reported that the budget resolution had been previously approved but not signed, and that signatures will be completed to ensure records are in order

for the upcoming state audit. Cummings emphasized that GHCOG has never received an audit finding and expressed confidence in maintaining that record, adding that if any issues were ever identified, the agency would work promptly to comply.

Ken Mehin made a motion to approve; second, Brandon Pauley. The motion passed unanimously.

4. **ALL STAFF REPORT**

➤ **Vicki Cummings, Executive Director**

EPA Brownfields Program

- Five new Phase II Environmental Site Assessment work plans were recently processed with both EPA and the Department of Ecology, with field work expected to begin within the next few weeks.
- Average cost for a Phase II assessment ranges from \$40,000–\$60,000, compared to \$20,000–\$25,000 for Phase I assessments, depending on property conditions and study requirements.
- Issued 85 Section 106 consultation letters to sovereign tribal governments in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act to ensure protection of cultural and historic resources.
- The Westport Community-Wide Planning process has been completed with strong participation; the final plan will be posted on GHCOG's website once finalized.
- Completed a draft analysis of brownfield cleanup alternatives for the Elma Theater project. The public comment period has closed, and cleanup work is expected to begin soon, followed by reuse planning for the site.

Transportation and Infrastructure

- Monitoring recent USDOT grant cancellations, including discretionary programs where some funds have been rescinded even after obligation but prior to billing.
- Vicki expressed concern over potential impacts to major funding programs such as INFRA, Reconnecting Communities, and Rural Surface Transportation Grants, which are critical to local projects like the Port of Grays Harbor and City of Aberdeen's US-12 Grade Separation Project.
- GHCOG staff will continue to track developments and plan to present a detailed update this fall, including possible board advocacy to protect local funding streams.

Transportation Policy Forum

- The next Grays Harbor Transportation Policy Forum will be held October 8 at the Port of Grays Harbor Commission Chambers.
- The upcoming forum will focus on public transportation, identifying unmet needs and regional challenges, including both public and private service providers.
- Previous forums have produced outcomes such as a countywide bridge analysis to prioritize unmet needs.

Regional and Local Planning Efforts

- Finalizing the SR-105 Corridor Management Plan, which will support an application for Federal Scenic Byway status. Public comment is expected to open this week.
- Began work on the City of Hoquiam's Park and Recreation Plan update, a required six-year update to maintain eligibility for RCO funding.

➤ **Mark Northrop, Planner II**

- September 9: Attended FEMA and ESRI webinar on Wildland Urban Interface Awareness Applications, including the Fire Property Awareness Explorer and Fire Community Awareness Explorer, which identify areas where development intermixes with wildlands and raise awareness of wildfire risk.

- September 11: Participated in a GIS webinar introducing a new online tool for performing GIS work remotely, which will be incorporated into GHCOG's GIS program.
- September 11: Attended webinar focused on local and regional priorities for the next Surface Transportation Reauthorization, noting that the current authorization expires in October 2026 and stressing the importance of local government input in shaping the next federal bill.
September 17: Participated in webinar on Rail-Grade Crossing Safety, coinciding with September Rail Safety Month.
- Attended the Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Planning Organization meeting on September 10, which covered regional transportation projects receiving or seeking funding.
- Will attend the Washington APA Conference in Tacoma next month and provide an overview and key takeaways at the next GHCOG Board meeting.
- Continued work on the Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP), coordinating with WSDOT and local agencies to review and update projects with secured funding.
 - Facilitated communication between WSDOT, CWCOC, and local jurisdictions, providing requested project documentation and feedback to help keep projects moving forward.
- Began coordination with the City of Hoquiam to update its Parks and Recreation Plan, which must be completed by March 2026 to maintain eligibility for RCO grant funding.
- Developing zoning and municipal maps for local agencies to support future planning efforts.
- Continuing to build a GIS Transportation Commit Plan file to serve as a resource for member agencies in transportation and land-use planning.
- Monitoring new funding and training opportunities to share with GHCOG members.

➤ **Natalie Jensen, Office Coordinator**

- Completed regular monthly financials.
- Completed the 2026 Preliminary Budget.
- Attended Brownfield Coalition Meeting.
- Attended Webinar: Legal Considerations for Federal Funding Challenges.
- Attended Webinar: Cash Basis Interfund Activities Accounting – WSAO.
- Attended Webinar: Legis. Update on 2025 Public Records Bills – MRSC.
- Updated the software on the backend of the GHCOG website.
- Auditing Archive Resolution Documentation.
- Set up Vicki's new Computer .
- Drove the SR 105 loop and took photos for inclusion in the Scenic Byways Plan Vicki has been working on.
- Still reviewing Data Backup solutions for the organization.
- Continuing to update and maintain GHCOG's LinkedIn page, posting Notices of Funding Opportunities (NOFOs).
- Reviewing previous audit documents for upcoming State Audit – soon to be scheduled.

5. MISCELLANEOUS BUSINESS

- None.

6. PUBLIC COMMENT

- Joe Calodich with the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) Olympic Region Planning Office provided an overview of his role and the office's key areas of work, which include conducting large-scale planning studies, reviewing local comprehensive plans

for Growth Management Act compliance, and leading pre-design efforts for upcoming WSDOT projects.

Calodich announced that WSDOT's Olympic Region has initiated a pre-design phase for a paving preservation project on US 101 in the Amanda Park–Neilton area near Lake Quinault. The project will include repaving and the implementation of Complete Streets elements, such as bike lanes, sidewalks, paths, and crosswalks. Because the project exceeds one million dollars in scope, WSDOT will be coordinating with key stakeholders, including Grays Harbor County, Grays Harbor Transit, and the Quinault Indian Nation, over the next several months as the project advances.

7. MEMBER/PUBLIC COMMENT

➤ Grays Harbor Transit, General Manager Ken Mehin

- Reported that they are currently undergoing a state audit, with the exit conference scheduled for Monday, September 22.
- Transit Board Retreat will be held on September 22 at the Grays Harbor County offices in Montesano.
- Preparations are complete for the Transit Safety and 50th Anniversary Banquet, to be held October 4 at the Log Pavilion.
- Celebrated 50 years of Grays Harbor Transit service, expressing pride and appreciation for staff and community support.

➤ Grays Harbor County, County Administrator, Sam Kim

- Reported that budget season is underway, with the County implementing a target-based budgeting approach, a step toward zero-based budgeting for greater fiscal discipline and accountability.
- A new Chief Operations Officer is standardizing county processes—reducing multiple procedures into one unified system for areas such as hiring and procurement.
- Discussed upcoming departmental centralization efforts to improve efficiency, predicting available FTEs through natural consolidation.
- Emphasized that last year's 10% budget reduction was achieved with no layoffs, furloughs, demotions, or pay cuts, and similar stability is expected this cycle.
- Reported on a successful Housing Summit, with plans to continue follow-up meetings focused on supply-side solutions involving developers, bankers, and realtors to address housing shortages.
- Announced an upcoming Health Symposium next month, focusing on improving community health and reducing Grays Harbor's historically high opioid-related death rates, which have recently declined from the highest to second highest in the state.

➤ City of Westport, Councilmember Frank Eshpeter

- Reported significant progress on the Vertical Evacuation Tower project, noting the committee's persistence over eight years and the successful reinstatement of project funding.
- The golf course project is advancing, pending final environmental impact review, with an upcoming meeting planned between the developer and the Quinault Indian Nation.
- Attended a Port of Grays Harbor meeting where the Village at Half Moon Bay project was presented, describing plans for approximately 500 homes, a 100-room hotel, and commercial development including shops and restaurants.

- The city has initiated work on a new Facilities Master Plan and will begin reviewing and updating street codes and design standards, as some existing streets do not meet current width and safety requirements.
 - Noted that the fire hall street paving project revealed narrow lanes that cannot accommodate two fire trucks simultaneously, prompting the development of a corrective plan.
 - Pacific Ave. redevelopment project turning an old dump site into a park and 3rd community meeting place utilizes the Brownfield grant.
 - Had a hearing on the binding site plan for the LODGE at Half Moon Bay set to have 100+ rooms, 7500 event center and parking garage.
 - Brought two new deep wells online.
- City of Hoquiam, Councilmember Brandon Pauley
- The city is conducting a major zoning review and addressing traffic safety concerns at the Sumner Avenue intersection near Fairway Grocery, with planned parking adjustments to improve pedestrian safety.
 - The northern district fire response coverage is being re-evaluated, noting that the current agreement is not functioning as anticipated.
 - Discussed developments at Eldon Bargewell Park, where the Planning Commission will consider a recommendation not to add RV parking on the Emerson side in order to preserve existing trees and maintain the park's character.
 - Explained that previous site assessments found the other two sides of the triangular park unsuitable for RV parking due to underground utilities and design limitations.
 - Noted that discussions with the Planning Commission will continue regarding the final recommendation for the site's future use.
- City of Cosmopolis, Mayor Linda Springer
- The city is entering budget season, the first budget meeting scheduled for October 1.
 - Reported a significant budget deficit, primarily due to costs associated with the construction of the new municipal building, which exceeded initial projections.
 - Expressed confidence in city staff's ability to address the deficit responsibly.
 - The City is renegotiating its sewer contract, which previously ran from 2013–2023, with payments made one year in arrears.
 - Negotiations for 2024 rates are underway; substantial rate increases are anticipated.
 - City leadership is exploring ways to adjust rates to minimize hardship on residents.
 - Work is underway to update the City's Comprehensive Plan, last formally adopted in 1978, with a complete but never-adopted 2001 draft being used as a foundation. The update aims to be completed this year with outside assistance and support from GHCOG.
 - The City is also updating its Parks Comprehensive Plan before the 2026 expiration to remain eligible for state funding.
 - Noted significant community progress on park projects through grants, donations, and volunteer work.
 - Fire Chief Nick Falley accepted a new position with Grays Harbor County Emergency Management, while continuing to serve Cosmopolis as Volunteer Fire Captain.
 - The Festival in the Park was highly successful, featuring 24 vendors, three musicians, a pancake breakfast hosted with the Volunteer Fire Department, and support from the Lions Club.
 - The city partnered with Timberland Regional Library to bring library services to the Community Center (former City Hall) on the first Tuesday of each month, aligning with Senior Day.

- Collaborated with the YMCA, Aberdeen Parks Department, and Grays Harbor Learning Coalition for Young Families and Children to provide summer youth and family programs and expand community services for both seniors and young families.
- The Daniels housing project is progressing.
- Seismic retrofitting and upgrades at the elementary school are nearly complete; classes began on schedule.
- The city welcomed a new superintendent and vice principal for the school district.
- Expressed gratitude to GHCOG and fellow members for their collaboration and support during challenging financial times.
- Plans to reach out to neighboring mayors and members to continue sharing ideas and resources.

8. ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 7:50 p.m.

Sam Kim made a motion to adjourn; second, Brandon Pauley. Motion passed unanimously.

GRAYS HARBOR COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS
115 S. Wooding St., Aberdeen, Washington 98520

Troy Meyers	Date	Vicki Cummings	Date
Chairperson		Executive Director	