LEWIS COUNTY 2025 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

The Lewis County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) generally believes that the Legislature must act to protect public safety, lower residents' tax burden, restrict the use of drugs, make housing more affordable, and protect private property rights. The Commissioners will continue to work closely with the members of the 19th and 20th Legislative Districts and jointly advocate for Lewis County residents on these topics. Separately, this Legislative Agenda is focused on specific Legislative actions to enable the BOCC to more efficiently and effectively provide critical county services to our residents.

KEY OBJECTIVES

>> TRANSPORTATION

North Lewis County Industrial Access (NLCIA) funding
In 2024 the Legislature corrected the funding schedule for the Reynolds & Harrison, Westside Connector, and other North Lewis County Highway Interchange improvements. However, the project description included in the legislative budget documents was not updated to reflect the current legislative, WSDOT, City and County intent. The County supports WSDOT's request to legislatively change the scope and title of this project.

Move Ahead Washington projects
As the Legislature makes adjustments to projects funded in the Move Ahead Washington package and contemplates the possibility of a new transportation revenue package, Lewis County will advocate for additional funding to address critical needs, including:

- Ceres Hill Road bridge
- Improvements along the I-5 corridor, especially the:
    - Napavine exit
    - Chamber Way exit
    - Winlock exit
- Maintenance of county roads and bridges

>> SOUTHWEST WASHINGTON FAIR EQUESTRIAN UPGRADES

Lewis County's Southwest Washington Fair is a statutory requirement per RCW 36.90. The County received funding in the 2024 Capital Budget for the planning and pre-design of equestrian facilities at the Southwest Washington Fairgrounds Park. Phase II of this project is to construct the facility.

>> PACKWOOD SEWER PROJECT

Residents and businesses in the Packwood area currently rely on septic service. The County is working to develop sewer service, which it will own and operate. However, development of this infrastructure is prohibitively expensive – estimated at $16 million total. The state provided $8 million in the 2022 Capital Budget, and subsequently the federal government provided $1 million. The current funding gap is $7 million. We are seeking $6 million in additional state funding to complete this critical infrastructure project.

>> ELEVATOR MODERNIZATION

Lewis County has eight elevators that are likely to be "red-tagged" by the state Department of Labor & Industries because they do not meet modern ADA requirements. The total cost to replace these facilities is $1.4 million. We are seeking $1 million to replace these elevators.

>> LEWIS COUNTY HISTORICAL MUSEUM ROOF REPLACEMENT

The Lewis County historical museum has a leaking roof, which is beyond repair and threatens the landmark building and its significant collections. The County is seeking $250,000 for its replacement.

IMPORTANT TOPICS TO WATCH

Lewis County will emphasize the importance of the following issues when they are brought up for discussion by the Legislature.

Broadband

Significant portions of the County still lack acceptable internet speeds. The Legislature must continue investment in rural broadband, including exploring the possibility of subscribing certain unserved areas to alternative methods (non-fiber) service.

Fish Passage Funding

Given the significant number of culverts in Lewis County that will eventually need to be replaced, this is a significant issue. The state must assist local governments with the cost of providing fish passage.

Green Hill

Lewis County supports additional resources for the Green Hill juvenile facility to ensure the state is able to continue accepting juveniles from counties. In addition to improving security at the facility, the Legislature must update state laws regarding reimbursements for prosecutorial costs related to crimes committed at the facility.

Growth Management Act

As the Legislature considers potential changes to the GMA, Lewis County will advocate for specific changes allowing it to more effectively balance all of the Act's goals, including:

- **Local Areas of More Intense Rural Development (LAMIRDs) –** providing additional ability to expand commercial buildings located within LAMIRDs.
- **Rural Housing Alternatives –** The County seeks additional opportunities to provide affordable housing within rural areas.
- **Forest Resource Designation –** The County requires the ability to re-zone lands in the forest resource designation that were mistakenly designated to create responsible development options.

Homelessness

There is significant frustration that the state's resources to address homelessness are distributed to providers in the County without the ability to require substance use treatment, nor do they provide sufficient resources for individuals to receive behavioral health treatment. The County will advocate that homeless dollars spent in the County must be matched by funding for behavioral health and substance use disorder treatment.

Housing
As the Legislature continues to seek solutions to the affordable housing crisis, Lewis County will advocate for policies aimed at helping existing homeowners stay in their homes. Much of the state's current policy is designed to provide low-cost rental housing for unhoused people. This needs to be balanced by policies that will help existing homeowners.

Indigent Defense
Indigent defense costs the County $2 million to $3 million per year, yet the state only reimburses Lewis County approximately $100,000 for indigent defense services, placing a heavy burden on the County's discretionary budget. The County will continue to emphasize the importance that the state provide additional funding for these services, particularly if the Supreme Court adopts new caseload standards that reduce the workforce available to handle these cases.

School Funding / Trust Land Management
Three schools in the Lewis County School District are on the financial "watch" list with the Office of the Superintendent of Public Education. While the Legislature struggles to provide adequate state resources to rural districts, pressure from environmental groups causes the Board of Natural Resources to withdraw timber sales from state trust lands. Lewis County encourages the state to increase timber harvest, particularly in support of our economically distressed schools.

Voluntary Stewardship Program
Lewis County has a very successful Voluntary Stewardship Program; it is important that the Legislature not undermine it as the state considers salmon recovery and agriculture buffer proposals.

Water System Receiverships
Several small water systems in Lewis County are at risk of insolvency, and current law requires the County to assume responsibility for these systems when a failure occurs. Because routine maintenance has lagged, and the County does not currently operate any water systems, taking over these systems would be extremely expensive. PUDs and counties have brought this issue to the attention of the Legislature, primarily through the introduction of HB 1948 during the 2022 legislative session. Lewis County will support any legislative action to make it easier for counties to afford to operate these water systems when they fall into receivership, or to remove this responsibility from counties entirely.

LEWIS COUNTY 2025 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA FAQ

Q: What is the Lewis County 2025 Legislative Agenda?

A: The Lewis County 2025 Legislative Agenda is a list of specific actions Lewis County will seek to support this legislative session related to county government in an effort to bring resources to Lewis County supporting government services. These are distinct, attainable items that uniquely benefit Lewis County's interests, as opposed being statewide interests best supported through partnerships with our legislative representatives, statewide associations, and others.

Q: Is the Lewis County 2025 Legislative Agenda a list of the political or social issues the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) finds most important?

A: No. The Lewis County Board of County Commissioners generally believes that the Legislature must act to protect public safety, lower residents' tax burden, restrict the use of drugs, make housing more affordable, and protect private property rights. The Commissioners will continue to work closely with the members of the 19th and 20th Legislative Districts to jointly advocate for Lewis County residents on these topics, which relate to society at large. In contrast, the 2025 Legislative Agenda is focused on county government specifically: it is a list specific legislative actions that will enable the Board of County Commissioners to more efficiently and effectively provide critical county services to our residents.

Q: Can the BOCC support issues not in the 2025 Legislative Agenda?

A: Absolutely. The 2025 Legislative Agenda is merely meant to identify the BOCC's targeted, individual requests for county government resources. It does not speak to many social or political issues, for which it will be more successful to work not individually but collectively with many rural counties, statewide associations, our legislators, and others.

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