

2023 PUBLIC POLICY POSITIONS

This policy platform is adopted by the Governmental Affairs Council (GAC) and approved by the Board of Directors of the Shelton-Mason County Chamber of Commerce (Chamber) to provide a basis to act on local, state, and federal government issues and to support a vibrant business environment. The Chamber's Board of Directors has authorized the executive to make, on behalf of the Chamber, any positions of "support," "oppose," or "no position" that align with the policies set out below, subject to the Board of Directors' approval or modification.

PROMOTE A PRO-BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT BY:

- facilitating a market-based economy by supporting rational regulatory and tax policies, promoting incentives for business expansion, and supporting the efficient operation of regulatory agencies.
- supporting infrastructure improvements related to energy, water, air, transportation, and communications.
- promoting workforce development by supporting training and education.
- opposing state mandates that impose obligations on local agencies or businesses without providing the necessary resources to comply with those obligations.
- supporting policies that are consistent, timely, and data driven.
- discouraging policies and mandates that 'play favorites' or subjectively regulate specific industry sectors.
- encouraging regulatory approaches or mandates that are not unduly punitive or costly as well as promote the region's competitiveness for economic development and job creation.
- promoting legislation reducing excessive regulations, fees, and unfunded mandates placed on businesses that interfere with economic vitality, competitiveness, or job creation.

PROMOTE GOVERNMENT REFORM BY:

- eliminating or consolidating duplicative agency functions.
- promoting improved communication and coordination between governing bodies.
- ensuring efficiency in government programs and infrastructure projects.
- supporting greater engagement and input from the business community in the allocation of public funds and resources.

MAINTAIN AN ACTIVE AND VISIBLE CHAMBER PRESENCE BY:

- keeping governing bodies and decision makers at local, state, and federal levels informed on important regional issues.
- building coalitions and coordinating community, business, and government support for important issues.
- regularly updating members and creating opportunities for their involvement and participation in the Chamber's advocacy activities.
- advancing policies that promote local employers to remain strong and competitive, attract new businesses to the area, and encourage local entrepreneurship.
- partnering to improve community attributes that substantially influence decisions by employers and employees to locate and remain in the community, including livability, quality of health care, educational achievement, school district standings, public safety, and other factors.

The Chamber serves as the voice of business in advocating for policies and programs which create an environment in which business can thrive and expand, the following areas have been identified as critical to that environment, requiring active monitoring and engagement on behalf of our members.

AS SUCH, THE SHELTON-MASON COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE ADVOCATES FOR:

AIR, WATER & ENVIRONMENT. The Chamber embraces the idea that being a responsible business owner requires recognizing the shared responsibility to be good stewards of our natural resources. The Chamber subscribes to the premise that environmental challenges and opportunities must be addressed directly with resolution and veracity.

The Chamber advocates for:

- efforts to ensure that regulations are effective and do not prohibit job creation or curb economic growth.
- environmental strategies that allocate responsibility equitably between and across all business sectors.
- comprehensive, broad-based efforts to address air quality and water quality and quantity, while ensuring that regulations and protections are not misused, duplicative, or burdensome.
- expansion of existing efforts to monitor groundwater to maintain a good quality groundwater resource, with a focus on prevention of contamination rather than reactive clean-up programs.
- advancing the reasonable implementation and expediting of state and federal environmental regulations through measures such as, but not exclusive of others:
 - developing regulatory reforms that incent the adoption of environmentally sensitive practices.
 - efforts to achieve maximum potential while balancing the shared priorities of business and the environment.
- participation in environmentally friendly programs or measures such as:
 - voluntary, incentive-based programs to reduce overall greenhouse gas emissions.
 - policies that are dedicated to both energy conservation and the use of renewable energy.
- rejecting environmental regulatory approaches or mandates that the business community knows to be unduly punitive, costly, or reliant on unavailable commercial technology which, if implemented, will damage the region's competitiveness or result in a net-loss of jobs to our communities.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT. The Chamber supports an adopted long-term plan for the city and county, that ensures adequate supply of commercial and industrial space

The Chamber advocates for:

- an economic development strategy that includes phasing of properties for actual development handled through proactive land use and growth management policies.
- removing infrastructure constraints to facilitate future development in the downtown and the core area, including issues such as inadequacy of water supply, fire flow, electrical capacity, and the removal of derelict structures.
- ensuring that planning, zoning, and land use issues remain local decisions with minimal regional, state, or federal interference.
- processes important to business creation that are streamlined, efficient, and supported to ensure they do not become roadblocks to new economic activity.
- requiring that all new regulations and/or fees be reviewed to ensure measurable benefits that outweigh costs.

COMMUNITY SAFETY. The Chamber supports collaborative, solution-oriented efforts to deal with crime, violence, and property damage, and believes that business leaders need to take a leadership role in these efforts.

The Chamber advocates for:

- coordinated community-wide efforts to address homeless problems, with a particular emphasis on impacts to business (i.e. vandalism, cleanliness of property, etc.).
- collaborative, community-wide efforts that address common crimes, such as petty theft, untoward behavior, and drug use, with increased participation by business leaders.

CULTURE, ARTS, & RECREATION. The Chamber believes that arts and cultural activities are important elements in business attraction and retention.

The Chamber advocates for:

- coordinated efforts by local and regional visitor and arts organizations to expand and enhance cultural assets in the community and to attract visitors.
- promotion of tourism activities that stimulate business and job creation as an integral part of economic development.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. The Chamber endorses an economic development strategy that emphasizes increasing the number of wealth-producing jobs in the community and the expansion of the number of businesses and residents paying taxes and fees into the system. The Chamber advocates for:

- incentives that promote the use of local labor and materials.
- private enterprise and development projects that enhance economic development and create jobs.
- programs that provide tax credits or assistance to facilitate business growth.
- downtown revitalization efforts.
- recruitment of new businesses, creation of new businesses, and encouragement of existing business expansion.
- policies which provide additional amenities and infrastructure that improve the quality of life in the region.

EDUCATION. The Chamber endorses strategies that develop and retain local talent.

The Chamber advocates for:

- encouragement and support for programs such as the Health Sciences Academy at Shelton High School that develops alternative models for instructional delivery designed specifically to meet employer needs with regard to rigor, specificity, and timeliness.
- programs, including career and technical education and internships, that provide a foundation for local businesses to hire students and meet future workforce demands by preparing students for jobs and careers.
- programs that provide incentives for local companies to hire students.
- Increased local control and funding flexibility.
- efforts to develop a wide range of educational options for the business community, including classes, workshops, incubators, and e-centers.
- increased educational support for entrepreneurial activities and for business start-ups.
- access to higher education for employees and/or their dependents to further their education in the greater Mason County area.

EMPLOYMENT & LABOR. The Chamber believes that job creation and job preparation should be the core focus of all community leaders. We also believe in balancing the wants and needs of employees with the right for employers to operate their business successfully.

The Chamber advocates for:

- local hiring programs and practices that encourage the training and hiring of local residents.
- revisions to restrictive wage/hour laws and regulations that prevent mutually agreed upon flexible work weeks or other alternative schedules.
- workers' compensation laws that balance employer liabilities and provide fair benefits to injured workers.
- protections for businesses from new or added costs in the form of mandated wages, employee benefits, or onerous scheduling requirements.
- flexibility for employers and employees to mutually set meal and break periods, a flexible workweek, and the scheduling and/or hiring of employees.
- reform of prevailing wage laws on public works projects sensitive to the economies of each region.
- inclusion of tips in calculating minimum and living wages.
- policies that conform to and unify current state and federal family leave laws without additional mandates.
- workplace rules written in plain, simple language to ensure employers know how to comply with the law and that workers are clearly informed of their rights.
- a fair and rational system for providing health insurance while containing healthcare costs for individuals and employees.

GOVERNANCE & TAXES. The Chamber believes that government agencies should perform their roles with minimal impact on business.

The Chamber advocates for:

- processes which actively seek as much input as possible from impacted stakeholders prior to making decisions regarding fees or regulations.
- ensuring that taxes and fees are broad-based and not targeted at specific industries or businesses.
- streamlining oversight agencies and protocols to simplify and avoid duplication and/or inconsistent regulations.
- requirements for cost-benefit analysis ensuring economic impacts are weighed before imposition of new cost mandates on employers.
- regular review of government-imposed impact fees to ensure that fees reflect current, accurate costs and growth projections, with a goal of ensuring new development pays its fair share of infrastructure costs while preventing fees from becoming impediments to economic growth.
- increased emphasis on maintenance and upkeep of community assets such as roads, buildings, and other infrastructure. Long-term maintenance costs should be built into planning for new projects, ensuring that long-term maintenance funding is available.
- aggressive reviews of all public sector expenses to reduce and eliminate costs where possible including outsourcing, consolidation within and across agencies, and reorganization of existing operations.

HEALTH. The Chamber believes that the health and safety of our community is paramount and essential to ensure the future of our businesses and workforce. In the post-COVID era, we support regulation that is consistent, data-driven, and timely.

The Chamber advocates for:

- adequate notice for policy changes, particularly when involving businesses that have perishable goods, inventory, and staffing requirements.
- data-driven changes that remain in line with existing stated priorities.
- funding and relief for the most vulnerable industries provided in a simple, accessible manner and in a timely fashion.

HOUSING. The Chamber recognizes the significant need for affordable and workforce housing in order to improve the quality of life for our residents. To address the ever-widening gap between income earnings and housing costs, we support land regulation reforms that accurately account for a project's timeline and expectations. The Chamber's efforts to improve access to affordable housing will ultimately serve as a key tool in encouraging businesses to locate, stay, and grow in Mason County.

The Chamber advocates for:

- expediting the distribution of outstanding bond funds to improve affordable housing supplies for low-income individuals, veterans, the "missing middle," and others.
- modernizing land use designations to address regional needs such as affordable housing and community development.
- legislation that expedites infill development while ensuring compliance with land use and energy regulations.
- policies seeking to increase affordability of housing and to provide a broader spectrum of housing opportunities for residents.
- avoiding initiatives aimed at imposing rent-control policies, which have historically limited supplies of affordable housing
- permitting agencies that are accountable, customer service oriented, and efficient.

INFRASTRUCTURE & TRANSPORTATION. The Chamber believes that an appropriate role for government is to ensure that infrastructure investments meet the needs of commuters and commerce.

The Chamber advocates for:

- appropriate impact fees developed based on real-world costs and adopted growth projections.
- timely and appropriate investments in infrastructure that do not become barriers to businesses operating successfully.
- policies that repair the local, regional, and state transportation system in a fiscally responsible manner, accommodating future economic and population growth.
- utilizing local private sector business as an alternative to public agencies in the design and construction of infrastructure and transportation projects.
- prioritizing programs such as broadband connectivity that complements education, livability, development, and more.

LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT. The Chamber believes in the importance of strategically planning and developing residential and commercial amenities that will help attract jobs and economic investment.

The Chamber advocates for:

- market driven development, both commercial and residential, which may include a variety of development densities.
- policies that streamline the development process at the city and county level.
- policies that promote affordable low income and workforce housing.
- land use, planning, housing, and zoning issues that attract, retain, encourage, and promote business development.
- refraining from policies that negatively impact our natural resource industries.

STATE BUDGETING. The Chamber encourages state legislators to adopt a budget that promotes a healthy economy, provides for more efficient operations, curbs spending, and allows for businesses to remain competitive in the global market. The Chamber advocates for:

- operating in a fiscally responsible manner, placing priority on legislation maintaining and prudently utilizing the rainy-day reserve fund.
- ensuring that tax policy does not unduly target or burden any business, especially small business.
- options and tools to local governments and agencies to fund infrastructure that enables economic growth, such as rural broadband and housing, and provides local incentives to encourage industrial development.

ABOUT OUR POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Incorporated in 1922, the Shelton-Mason County Chamber of Commerce is the largest, oldest, and most broadly-based business organization in Mason County, Washington. The Chamber develops its policies and practices based on the underlying principle that creating and promoting a collaborative pro-business environment at the state, regional, and local level will directly enhance private enterprise and quality of life.

This basis is essential to maintaining a vibrant market-based economy. In determining a position on proposed legislation and other public policy issues, the Chamber is guided by its mission to build a stronger local economy with emphasis on the above-named areas.