Issue 02 / Monday / October 19, 2026

A note from Christopher October 19

A little closer to home

When a law reaches Whidbey, who makes it work?

One week after our inaugural edition, we are following the space between decisions in Olympia and the work of local organizations. New shelter guidance is open for comment; an audit raises questions about children's health services; and state contracting practices are being discussed. The question is not only what government approved, but what people can actually use.

What changed: New draft STEP housing guidance, a childhood lead-testing follow-up audit, and public comment opportunities. **What comes next:** Local implementation, agency responses and participation deadlines.

Whidbey's history corner

Why does one island have so many overlapping governments? Island County was created in 1853, during Washington's territorial era. Over time, counties were reorganized as settlement, transportation and administration changed. Washington became a state in 1889. The boundaries changed, but today's residents still navigate state, county, city, port, school, special-district and tribal governments, each with distinct authority and responsibilities.

A question to explore: When a road, beach, ferry route or emergency service serves several communities, who is responsible for its funding and maintenance?

Christopher John Wiegenstein, M.S.

Civic context

One island, many public budgets

Why can a government have money in one account while saying it cannot pay for a needed service? The answer often begins with the legal purpose of a fund. Unlike a general-purpose revenue source, some taxes, utility charges, bond proceeds and grants carry restrictions on how the money can be used.

This week's Following the Money explains the distinction and why recurring services need sustainable recurring revenue.

Following the Money

Why governments have separate funds

Imagine a city receives two dollars: one from a general-purpose tax and another from a voter-approved street tax. They may appear together in a financial report, but the city cannot necessarily use both to hire a police officer. Where money comes from can determine where it may go.

A fund is an accounting structure that helps governments track resources, expenditures and restrictions. Some funds exist because law, voters, debt agreements or grant conditions require money to be used for a particular purpose. Others help separate activities and show whether a service is paying its own costs.

The General Fund usually supports broad governmental functions that do not have to be accounted for in another fund. It is more flexible, but not unlimited: budgets, laws, labor commitments and other obligations still constrain spending.

Dedicated money is different. A transportation-benefit-district tax designated for transportation, a restricted grant, or a utility customer charge may have specific legal or program limits. A large balance in one account does not automatically solve a shortfall in another.

Police, emergency response and similar readiness services need recurring support: trained people, vehicles, dispatch, maintenance and facilities even when there is no active emergency. General governmental revenue often supports these costs, but fire districts, EMS levies, dedicated taxes and other arrangements can also fund them.

Key question for any public budget: What fund pays for this, what restrictions apply, and is the revenue recurring or one-time? That is more useful than asking only how much money the government has.

Common fund types

General Fund: broad governmental services. **Special revenue:** dedicated sources and purposes. **Enterprise:** business-type services such as utilities. **Debt service and capital projects:** repayment and construction accounting.

Coming next issue: Where General Fund revenue comes from - and which sources are stable, volatile or legally limited.

Your navigation guide

Find the part that matters to you

WA-01 | Budget and revenue

2027-29 state budget preparation; Oct. 20 tax-preference review meeting. No enacted tax change.

WA-02 | Health care and Medicaid

Oct. 13 childhood lead-testing audit follow-up; statewide findings, not a local testing rate.

WA-03 | Behavioral health and crisis response

HB 2429 and unfinished crisis-financing proposals remain on watch; no new outcome verified.

WA-04 | Housing and homelessness

Oct. 13 STEP draft guidance review; HB 2266 enacted; webinar Oct. 29, comments Nov. 13.

WA-05 | Local government

STEP implementation, Commerce contract standards, county budget and policy follow-through.

WA-06 | Public safety, corrections and reentry

County corrections discussion requires action-record confirmation; no new adoption established.

WA-07 | Youth, juvenile justice and developmental disabilities

Lead-testing implementation findings; DD Council planning continues without verified local award.

WA-08 | Human services and food assistance

SNAP eligibility implementation remains on watch; no new development verified.

WA-09 | Kratom and 7-OH

Federal proposed scheduling and state predecessor bills remain on watch; no final order inferred.

WA-10 | Labor and workforce

Paid Leave 2027 implementation threshold remains relevant; no new change verified.

WA-11 | Transportation and ferries

Service delivery and transportation appropriations remain distinct; no new sailing verified.

WA-12 | Technology, AI and privacy

County draft AI policy discussed in Oct. 14 packet; adoption not verified.

WA-13 | Veterans and military families

Enacted SB 5420 remains on watch; program access and local allocation unverified.

WA-14 | Energy and resilience

CREP guideline change proposed Oct. 15; comments Nov. 15; industrial RFI remains exploratory.

October 12-18 / week in review

What this could mean at home

Housing STEP guidance, childhood lead-testing accountability, Commerce contracting, conservation proposals, and Island County work-session follow-through.

WA-04 / WA-05 | Housing and local codes

Commerce opened comment Oct. 13 on STEP guidance and model ordinance. HB 2266 is enacted; guidance remains draft. Webinar Oct. 29, comments due Nov. 13. A state law does not approve a particular Whidbey site [01-02].

WA-02 / WA-07 | Children's health

The State Auditor reported Oct. 13 that earlier childhood lead-testing recommendations were not fully implemented. The finding is statewide, not an Island County testing rate [03].

WA-05 | Nonprofit contracts

Commerce announced an Oct. 29 town hall on Shared Standards for contract implementation and monitoring. No particular local grant or contract change is established [05].

WA-14 | Conservation and industry

SCC opened comments Oct. 15 on a proposed CREP completion-period change, due Nov. 15. Commerce has an industrial decarbonization RFI; neither notice is a Whidbey award [06-07].

WA-05 / WA-12 | Island County follow-through

The Oct. 14 work-session packet scheduled budget, legislative-priority, critical-area and draft AI-policy discussions. A packet is not proof of adoption [08].

October 19-25 / week ahead

The week ahead

Oct. 20 tax-preference commission and Island County commissioners; Oct. 29 STEP webinar and contracting town hall; Nov. 13 and 15 comment deadlines.

Oct. 20 | Tax-preference commission

10 a.m.-1 p.m.

Oct. 20 | Island County commissioners

10 a.m.

Oct. 29 | STEP webinar and Commerce contracting

11 a.m. and 1 p.m.

Nov. 13 | STEP comments

Deadline

Nov. 15 | CREP comments

Deadline

Around Whidbey

Ferries, highways and state parks

For residents commuting off-island, travel information can matter as much as a policy headline. Use the official links below for current travel information.

Washington State Ferries

Check current sailing schedules, vessel alerts, service notices and reservations where offered: WSDOT Ferries. Watch the Clinton-Mukilteo and Coupeville-Port Townsend routes, including schedule changes and disruptions.

Highways and construction

Check closures, construction zones and traffic conditions on SR 20, SR 525 and connecting mainland routes: WSDOT real-time travel map.

State parks and tourism

Monitor Washington State Parks for access, construction and facility notices affecting Deception Pass, Fort Casey, South Whidbey and other island destinations.

Official sources

[01] Commerce STEP guidance

[02] HB 2266 legislative record

[03] State Auditor lead-testing follow-up

[04] Tax-preference commission agenda

[05] Commerce contracting town hall

[06] SCC CREP public comment

[07] Commerce industrial RFI

[08] Island County October 14 packet