



Bellingham Whatcom County Tourism Ballot Initiatives Alert

On the ballot for City of Bellingham voters this fall are four initiatives that could greatly impact our tourism and hospitality community. Generally, the initiatives cover [landlord/tenant law](#), [policing technology](#), [labor unions](#) and [worker pay](#).

The Bellingham Whatcom County Tourism Board of Directors has voted to officially oppose No. 4.

The Bellingham Regional Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors has voted to officially oppose No. 1 and No. 4.

The election will take place on Nov. 2, 2021, with ballots mailed Oct. 13. Accessible voting units also will be made available Oct. 13. These measures will be voted on by people who live in the City of Bellingham.

Please read the initiatives and decide for yourself whether you will vote for or against them. Keep in mind that these are all-or-nothing situations, and these initiatives arrived on the ballot not through a legislative process with discussion and modeling, but through a citizen's action via petition. If the initiatives were to pass, there would be no way for the City Council to blot out or adjust certain parts of the law. The only way to adjust any part of it would be for voters to repeal it entirely or for a court to throw it out.

All the initiatives are important, but please take a closer look at No. 4, which would require:

- \$4 per hour hazard pay supplements when a state of emergency is declared in any jurisdiction that encompasses Bellingham
- Two-weeks' notice of work schedules for hourly employees
- Extra compensation for schedule changes without sufficient notice
- Employer penalties, and more.

Here are some features of this plan that will affect our industry:

1. Included in the initiative is a **mandated extra hour of pay for employees when shift changes aren't made far enough in advance**. This mandate applies whether hours are *added or subtracted* from shifts, or if a period is the same length but moves even slightly in

start and finish time. Additionally, it also requires half-time pay for all scheduled hours not worked. Outside of the additional employment expense, most businesses simply would not have the resources and systems to track these extra payments as written in this initiative.

2. **This initiative mandates that all hourly pay during a state of emergency be boosted by \$4 per hour, at employers' expense.** A state of emergency can be declared any time a jurisdiction, such as Whatcom County, is in search of federal funding to help with a difficult situation. The COVID-19 pandemic is an obvious example; Washington has been under emergency status for more than 18 months because of the pandemic. However, that's not the only state of emergency to have taken place this year. Gov. Jay Inslee declared two statewide emergencies in July due to drought and fire, and a snowstorm or cold snap likely would result in another one. These emergencies might be somewhere that doesn't affect the business or the region required to pay the hazard pay at all, causing an unnecessary and unpredictable extra cost for employers to suddenly bear.

The segments of the economy likely to feel most of the weight of these changes are the **restaurant and hospitality sectors**, which must adjust quickly to day-to-day changes in demand and activities and would lose a great amount of flexibility under this initiative for employment scheduling and employees alike.

Why we are opposed:

- Overall, the changes proposed in this initiative would likely make it harder for our tourism and hospitality businesses to bounce back from the **current, massive economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.**
- This initiative, while well intentioned, will be misapplied as written in many situations and would likely increase the cost of services, dining at restaurants, entertainment options, hotel stays, and other consumer expenses.

Learn more here in a full statement from the Washington Hospitality Association:

<https://bit.ly/3kzaZkk>