



Office of the Washington State Auditor
Pat McCarthy

Accountability Audit Report

Thurston County

For the period January 1, 2023 through December 31, 2023

Published December 16, 2024

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**Office of the Washington State Auditor
Pat McCarthy**

December 16, 2024

Board of Commissioners
Thurston County
Olympia, Washington

Report on Accountability

Thank you for the opportunity to work with you to promote accountability, integrity and openness in government. The Office of the Washington State Auditor takes seriously our role of providing state and local governments with assurance and accountability as the independent auditor of public accounts. In this way, we strive to help government work better, cost less, deliver higher value and earn greater public trust.

Independent audits provide essential accountability and transparency for County operations. This information is valuable to management, the governing body and public stakeholders when assessing the government's stewardship of public resources.

Attached is our independent audit report on the County's compliance with applicable requirements and safeguarding of public resources for the areas we examined. We appreciate the opportunity to work with your staff and value your cooperation during the audit.

Sincerely,

Pat McCarthy, State Auditor
Olympia, WA

Americans with Disabilities

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, we will make this document available in alternative formats. For more information, please contact our Office at (564) 999-0950, TDD Relay at (800) 833-6388, or email our webmaster at webmaster@sao.wa.gov.

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AUDIT RESULTS

Results in brief

This report describes the overall results and conclusions for the areas we examined. In those selected areas, County operations complied, in all material respects, with applicable state laws, regulations, and its own policies, and provided adequate controls over the safeguarding of public resources.

In keeping with general auditing practices, we do not examine every transaction, activity, policy, internal control, or area. As a result, no information is provided on the areas that were not examined.

About the audit

This report contains the results of our independent accountability audit of Thurston County from January 1, 2023 through December 31, 2023.

Management is responsible for ensuring compliance and adequate safeguarding of public resources from fraud, loss or abuse. This includes the design, implementation and maintenance of internal controls relevant to these objectives.

This audit was conducted under the authority of RCW 43.09.260, which requires the Office of the Washington State Auditor to examine the financial affairs of all local governments. Our audit involved obtaining evidence about the County's use of public resources, compliance with state laws and regulations and its own policies and procedures, and internal controls over such matters. The procedures performed were based on our assessment of risks in the areas we examined.

Based on our risk assessment for the year ended December 31, 2023, the areas examined were those representing the highest risk of fraud, loss, abuse, or noncompliance. We examined the following areas during this audit period:

- Procurement – public works and professional services
- Budget compliance
- Accounts receivable – utility billing for storm and surface water fees
- Personal use of County credit
- Accounts payable – credit cards
- Cash receipting – timeliness and completeness of deposits, voids and adjustments in various departments
- Payroll – gross wages, overtime and leave cash outs

- Jail – inmate accounts, inmate property, inmate charges to other jurisdictions, work release, and kitchen purchases and inventory
- Compliance with state grants
- Use of restricted funds – county road fund, interfund loans and transfers
- Open public meetings – compliance with minutes, meetings and executive session requirements
- Financial condition – reviewing for indications of financial distress



SUMMARY SCHEDULE OF PRIOR AUDIT FINDINGS

Thurston County

January 1, 2023 through December 31, 2023

This schedule presents the status of findings reported in prior audit periods.

Audit Period: January 1, 2022 through December 31, 2022	Report Ref. No.: 1034739	Finding Ref. No.: 2022-001
Finding Caption: The County did not comply with state procurement laws and improperly used Real Estate Excise Tax 1 funds.		
Background: The audit found that the County paid \$7,520,429 to a lessor for leasehold improvements without requiring the lessor to competitively bid this project as required by state law when a project is executed at the cost of the local government. The County also purchased furniture and equipment totaling at \$1,855,201 with \$242,224 of this not being included in the original contract. Since the remaining \$242,224 was not in the original contract, the County was required by state law to separately procure them. The County used REET 1 funds for the purchase of \$1,855,201 in furniture and equipment which is not an allowable use of REET 1 funds. Also, the County ended 2023 with a REET 1 negative cash balance of about \$327,000.		
Status of Corrective Action: (check one) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fully Corrected <input type="checkbox"/> Partially Corrected <input type="checkbox"/> Not Corrected <input type="checkbox"/> Finding is considered no longer valid		
Corrective Action Taken: <i>The County appreciates the opportunity to provide the State Auditor’s Office with an update on actions taken in response to this recommendation. While the County’s Prosecuting Attorney’s Office disagreed with the legal perspective of the State Auditor, in the abundance of caution the County agreed to remedy the situation. The information from this finding has been shared and discussed with at all levels of County government, including the Board of County Commissioners, Internal Audit Committee, Financial Management Committee, management, and staff. In addition, the County has taken the following actions:</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reimbursed REET 1 for furniture costs totaling \$1,855,201. 2. Remedied the negative REET 1 cash balance. 3. Educated personnel involved in the leasing process to enhance understanding of when leasehold improvements are a public work. 4. Educated personnel involved in procuring furniture about the need to compete each individual item when using an ITB process. 5. Currently in the process of updating the County Procurement Policy and associated procedures to enhance controls for all procurement types. 6. Created a vetting team to research new or unique transactions to include in addition to Commissioner’s staff, the Auditor’s Office staff, Prosecuting Attorney’s staff, and the county’s Internal Auditor. <i>We appreciate the continued collaboration with the State Auditor’s Office in improving government.</i>		

RELATED REPORTS

Financial

Our opinion on the County's financial statements and compliance with federal grant program requirements is provided in a separate report, which includes the County's financial statements. That report is available on our website, <http://portal.sao.wa.gov/ReportSearch>.

Federal grant programs

We evaluated internal controls and tested compliance with the federal program requirements, as applicable, for the County's major federal programs, which are listed in the Schedule of Findings and Questioned Costs section of the separate financial statement and single audit report. That report includes federal findings regarding internal controls and compliance over reporting for the Community Development Block Grants/Entitlement Grants and suspension and debarment and subrecipient monitoring for the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds. That report is available on our website, <http://portal.sao.wa.gov/ReportSearch>.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE COUNTY

Thurston County covers the southern region of Puget Sound, serving more than 300,000 residents. Its mission is to provide quality, timely and responsive service to its residents in the most cost-effective manner. These services include public safety (sheriff, judicial and emergency services), construction and maintenance of roads and bridges, sanitation facilities, health and social services, culture and recreation facilities and activities, water quality, flood control, planning and zoning services, and general administration services.

An elected, five-member Board of Commissioners is the primary policy-making body, exercising budgetary and financial control for the County. Additional independently elected officials, together with other departments, administer the County's daily operations as well as its 1,200 full-time employees. For fiscal year 2023, the County had a general fund operating expenditures budget of \$132.2 million.

Contact information related to this report

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Information current as of report publish date.

Audit history

You can find current and past audit reports for Thurston County at <https://portal.sao.wa.gov//ReportSearch>.

ABOUT THE STATE AUDITOR'S OFFICE

The State Auditor's Office is established in the Washington State Constitution and is part of the executive branch of state government. The State Auditor is elected by the people of Washington and serves four-year terms.

We work with state agencies, local governments and the public to achieve our vision of increasing trust in government by helping governments work better and deliver higher value.

In fulfilling our mission to provide citizens with independent and transparent examinations of how state and local governments use public funds, we hold ourselves to those same standards by continually improving our audit quality and operational efficiency, and by developing highly engaged and committed employees.

As an agency, the State Auditor's Office has the independence necessary to objectively perform audits, attestation engagements and investigations. Our work is designed to comply with professional standards as well as to satisfy the requirements of federal, state and local laws. The Office also has an extensive quality control program and undergoes regular external peer review to ensure our work meets the highest possible standards of accuracy, objectivity and clarity.

Our audits look at financial information and compliance with federal, state and local laws for all local governments, including schools, and all state agencies, including institutions of higher education. In addition, we conduct performance audits and cybersecurity audits of state agencies and local governments, as well as state whistleblower, fraud and citizen hotline investigations.

The results of our work are available to everyone through the more than 2,000 reports we publish each year on our website, www.sao.wa.gov. Additionally, we share regular news and other information via an email subscription service and social media channels.

We take our role as partners in accountability seriously. The Office provides training and technical assistance to governments both directly and through partnerships with other governmental support organizations.

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