



Office of the Washington State Auditor
Pat McCarthy

Accountability Audit Report

Columbia County

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

Published December 30, 2024

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

December 30, 2024

Board of Commissioners
Columbia County
Dayton, 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.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Audit Results..... 4

Related Reports..... 5

Information about the County..... 6

About the State Auditor's Office..... 7

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.

However, we noted certain matters related to procurement that we communicated to County management and the Board of Commissioners in a letter dated December 23, 2024. We appreciate the County's commitment to resolving those matters.

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 Columbia 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:

- Payroll – gross wages, overtime, leave balances and accruals, and leave cash-outs
- Accounts payable – general disbursements
- Procurement – public works and purchases
- Self-insurance – unemployment
- Open public meetings – compliance with minutes, meetings and executive session requirements
- Financial condition – reviewing for indications of financial distress

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, <https://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 program, which is listed in the Schedule of Findings and Questioned Costs section of the separate financial statement and single audit report. That report is available on our website, <https://portal.sao.wa.gov//ReportSearch>.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE COUNTY

Columbia County serves about 4,100 citizens along the Snake River in southeastern Washington. An elected, three-member Board of Commissioners governs the County. Additional elected officials include Assessor, Auditor, Clerk, District Court Judge, Prosecuting Attorney, Sheriff, Superior Court Judge and Treasurer.

The County has about 100 employees who provide services including law enforcement, emergency services, road and bridge services, health and human services, culture and recreations, judicial administration and the County Fair. For fiscal year 2023, the County generated operating revenue of \$17,652,499 and operating and capital expenditures were \$12,727,021 and \$3,959,103 respectively.

Contact information related to this report

Address:	Columbia County 341 E Main St Dayton, WA 99328
Contact:	William Hutchens, Auditor
Telephone:	(509) 382-4541
Website:	www.columbiaco.com

Information current as of report publish date.

Audit history

You can find current and past audit reports for Columbia 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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