



STATE OF WASHINGTON

**DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS**

P.O. Box 41100 • Olympia, Washington 98504-1100

April 9, 2021

The Honorable Erin Sitterley  
Mayor, City of SeaTac  
4800 South 188<sup>th</sup> Street  
SeaTac, WA 98188-8605

Dear Mayor Sitterley:

Thank you for your letter on March 26, 2021, expressing concerns regarding the work release siting process, pointing out perceived flaws and demanding a restart of the process. I appreciate the opportunity to acknowledge and respond to your various concerns. The Department of Corrections has not made any decisions concerning the site at 18845 International Boulevard, SeaTac, and there is no intent to do so without first ensuring there is both full compliance with the obligatory requirements for siting, and there is a fully informed opportunity for public notifications, public meetings and public hearings which will allow everyone in the community to participate in the process.

As the search for potential work release sites in King County and other considered counties has not yet concluded, the formal public notifications, public participation, and public hearings required by the state law and administrative code have not yet been triggered.

The department began this statewide search for potential sites for work release expansion in four areas identified as either underserved or unserved by work release as a transition option for incarcerated individuals back to their home communities, designed to enhance public safety. These areas include Pierce County, Snohomish County, the North Central multi-county geographic area (to include Chelan, Grant and Kittitas counties) and King County. A request for proposals (RFP) was issued which resulted in responsive submissions from Chelan and Pierce counties. There were no responsive submissions from either King or Snohomish counties. Led by local community members and leaders, the Local Advisory Committee (LAC) efforts in King and Snohomish counties resulted in locations being identified as potential sites for consideration.

You acknowledged that, via a lengthy e-mail on June 1, 2020, the work release expansion project lead reached out to SeaTac City Manager, Carl Cole, to notify him of the siting search and that there was a location within SeaTac which had been referred to the LAC for consideration. This is the initial notification process used to communicate with other municipalities across the state when and if a potentially viable site for expansion has been identified to the LAC. Such notification does not indicate any intent on the part of the

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Department to fully pursue siting without other notifications or process steps. City Manager Cole replied to the project lead on June 2, 2020, "I appreciate the reach out. I will circle back on this after the current cycle of civil unrest dies down." No follow-up response was received from City Manager Cole. Our project lead did not continue to pursue a conversation with City Manager Cole. If such follow-up had occurred, it is our agency's belief that much of the angst associated with the perception that this was a final conclusion or decision made by the department would have been avoided had there been a conversation between the project lead and city manager to discuss the siting process in greater detail and share information concerning the success of the state's 12 current work release facilities sited throughout Washington.

As you indicated, in June 2020, there were other potential sites in Renton, Des Moines, and in the SODO District of Seattle under review for suitability. In late June 2020, the department paused the expansion project due to budgetary uncertainty associated with the pandemic. The pause continued until December 2020, at which time the state reviewed and determined that the opportunities afforded to individuals transitioning from correctional facilities to the community via the work release program continues to be a high priority, so the search and siting efforts would be resumed. At that time, the Department was informed the other sites being considered in King County were no longer viable. The Renton location was sold to someone intending on another purpose for the building, and the Des Moines and SODO locations did not meet the local code and zoning requirements necessary for establishing a work release facility. While these developments and determinations leave the SeaTac location as the only current site under consideration in King County, the search process has not concluded, and the LAC continues to look for possible viable locations. The siting process is ongoing and therefore there is no need to "restart the process," as you suggest.

The considerations referenced in your letter were identified and established by the LACs as a way for them to conduct a screening of potential sites. Except for the cost of acquisition, the regulatory criteria established in [RCW 72.65.080](#) and [WAC 137-57-050](#) are reflected in the LAC considerations (acquisition cost, access to public transportation, community impacts, suitability for program activities and zoning restrictions). While the acquisition cost is not directly relevant in this case because the department will be leasing any property associated with the project and not purchasing, it is impossible to know acquisition costs until and unless a lease agreement is reached with a property owner. At that point, additional detailed information would be available to the LAC for a site(s), enabling it to make a recommendation to the Secretary for preliminary approval to proceed.

The search for potential work release sites has been focused on south King County because it is considered an unserved area of the county according to the release data shared during the March 2021 LAC meeting. The Department's community corrections staff located in the community field offices in south King County currently supervise a large number of persons released from incarceration who did not have the benefit of transitioning through work release as a way to gradually transition back to their home community in south King County. Seattle currently hosts three state work release facilities with a capacity of 180 beds. Pierce County currently hosts the Progress House Work Release facility and is also the location of a siting process to locate an additional work release facility to increase

capacity and enhance public safety for people being released from incarceration and returning to their home community. Siting efforts also continue in Snohomish County and Chelan County.

The Department recognizes there are concerns about potentially locating a work release facility in SeaTac, and the perceptions that these facilities contribute to feelings of adverse economic impacts, community insecurity and fear. Placement at a work release represents an earned privilege, designed for those closest to release from incarceration to gain meaningful employment in the community and stabilize them prior to their release to the community. The privilege can be lost in the event of a violation of facility rules or for non-compliance with an individual's case plan. The Department's ability to successfully operate 12 work release facilities around the state for decades, in strong partnership with local communities, is a testament to the fact that the Department has proven to be good neighbors to those who live and work near the state's work release programs.

The work release program is designed to increase public safety and serve as a bridge between full incarceration and life back in a home community for individuals. Incarcerated individuals who complete the work release program are more likely to be successful in maintaining employment, stable housing, and in paying legal financial obligations. [Research conducted by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy \(WSIPP\)](#) indicates that work release programs have a highly positive cost/benefit impact.

Thank you again for writing us of your concerns. There are several process steps remaining prior to the LAC making any recommendations to the Secretary concerning any site and the search for a viable site in King County will continue.

Regards,



Julie Martin, Deputy Secretary  
Department of Corrections

cc: SeaTac City Council  
Carl Cole, City Manager  
Evan Maxim, Director of Community & Economic Development  
Karen Keiser, Senator  
Tina Orwall, Representative  
Mark Kuzca, Senior Administrator