

Selected Washington Local Government Studies

The legislature has mandated several studies of Washington local government, some of which are described below. Many recommended legislation to improve operations; some recommendations were enacted.

Study	Source and Recommendations	Enacted Legislation
<p>2007: Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (CTED), County Financial Health and Governance Alternatives, 682 pages, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appendix D, Municipal Research and Services Center, A History of Washington's Local Governments: Washington State Local Governance Study Commission Report (Update), 129 pages 	<p>Mandated by 2007 legislation.¹ CTED was advised by a 13-member committee that included 11 county officials, the director of an economic development organization, and an Eastern Washington University professor. Recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand county authority to provide joint or consolidated services with other counties, the state, and governments in other states and Canada; facilitate service agreements. • Facilitate automation of county services where counties act as agents of state. • Provide counties with additional flexibility regarding service delivery and purchasing. • Authorize boards of commissioners to appoint county managers or administrators. • Amend the state constitution to facilitate approval and amendment of county charters. • Reduce number of county elected officials in non-charter counties by combining duties; authorize five-member commission in larger counties. • Provide greater reimbursement of counties for state services provided (court, jail, election, and tax assessment and collection) and clarify property tax funding. • Increase flexibility of county funding sources, such as consolidating 	<p>Increased reimbursement of distressed counties for state services provided.</p>

¹ Laws of 2007, Ch. 522, Sec. 127(50) (budget proviso directing CTED to conduct a "study to examine the fiscal health of counties. The study shall address spending and revenues, as well as the demographic, geographic, social, economic, and other factors contributing to or causing financial distress. The study shall also examine the financial efficiencies, cost savings, and improved levels of service that may be gained by authorizing noncharter counties greater flexibility in altering their forms of governance, including consolidating or merging constitutional or statutory functions or structures").

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	sales taxes dedicated to specific purposes into single non-dedicated source.	
1988: Legislative Budget Committee, Review of Special Purpose Districts , 45 pages	Mandated by 1987 legislation. ² Recommendations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possibly authorize counties to periodically assess utility of special purpose districts in their jurisdictions and recommend changes in organization or resource allocations. • Possibly authorize county legislative authorities to eliminate, consolidate, or otherwise maximize services provided by special purpose districts if changes would benefit public and districts would not otherwise make changes. 	
1988: Local Governance Study Commission: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vol. I, A History of Washington's Local Government, 79 pages • Vol. II, The Quiet Crisis of Local Governance in Washington, 102 pages 	Mandated by 1985 legislation. ³ The 21-member commission included eight legislators, four city representatives, four county representatives, and five special purpose district representatives. It issued a detailed history of local government and analysis of several challenges facing local governments. Recommendations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authorize counties, cities, and special purpose districts to adopt local government service agreements for providing services and facilities and transferring revenue, effective if approved by a county, cities with over half of the incorporated population in the county, and 20 percent of participating special purpose districts. • Authorize a citizens' review process involving a group of citizens elected to review local government structure in a county and propose alterations to voters. • Several revenue and structural changes, including changes to annexation procedures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Act modifying city and town annexation procedures (1989). • RCW Chapter 36.115 (1994), authorizing local government service agreements.

² Laws of 1987, Ch. 298, Sec. 7 (directing Legislative Budget Committee, in cooperation with Senate Governmental Operations Committee and House Local Government Committee, to review laws relating to all special purpose districts and recommend continuation, elimination, or modification of each).

³ Laws of 1985, Ch. 388 (creating commission to analyze several challenges facing local governments and recommend legislation).

Study	Source and Recommendations	Enacted Legislation
1966: Municipal Code Committee, Optional Municipal Code , 371 pages	Mandated by 1965 legislation. ⁴ The committee (two legislators and three city and town officials) drafted legislation authorizing cities and towns to reorganize and operate under an optional municipal code granting broad home rule authority otherwise held only by first class cities (the largest cities in the state, including Seattle), and authorizing unincorporated areas to incorporate as optional municipal code cities.	Optional Municipal Code, RCW Title 35A (1967).
1962: Citizens' Advisory Committee to the Joint Committee on Urban Area Government, City and Suburb--Community or Chaos , 35 pages	Mandated by 1961 legislation. ⁵ Citizens' advisory committee (including more than 80 Seattle, Tacoma, and Spokane metropolitan area residents) issued study of local government capacity to manage urban growth, including 46 recommendations proposing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separate local and metropolitan governments in metropolitan areas, or, alternatively, consolidated county-city governments. • Greater cooperation of counties, cities and metropolitan governments to address regional problems. • Coordination of state government functions affecting urban areas. 	Interlocal Cooperation Act (1967), authorizing local governments to enter into interlocal contracts and agreements.

⁴ Laws of 1965 (Ex. Session), Ch. 115 (creating Municipal Code Committee "to prepare and submit legislation creating a code of laws for the government of cities and towns which shall include a form of statutory home rule. Such code may revise existing law or may be so designed as not to affect existing law but rather to provide an alternative code of laws for the classification and government of cities and towns, which any city or town may elect to adopt").

⁵ Laws of 1961, Ch. 308 (creating Joint Committee on Urban Area Government, composed of eight legislators, to study and report in 1962 on urban growth issues, including incorporations and annexations, local government functions, powers, and financing, urban area service requirements, local government machinery best suited to provide urban area services, and proper role of state; also directed committee to create citizen advisory committees).