

Resolution in support of pursuing geothermal energy generation in Whatcom County

WHEREAS, the Whatcom Democrats are committed to reducing our community's reliance on fossil fuels and increasing our use of locally-generated renewable energy sources; and

WHEREAS, the center of the Earth is very hot. Nearly everywhere, temperature increases slowly with depth. Geothermal resources are reservoirs of hot water that exist or are human made at varying temperatures and depths below the earth's surface. Wells, ranging from a few feet to several miles deep, can be drilled into underground reservoirs to tap heat that can be brought to the surface to generate electricity; and

WHEREAS, geothermal power plants offer carbon-free, round-the-clock energy with limited to no intermittency, eliminating the need for paired energy storage technologies. Compared to utility wind and solar, geothermal power also has a much smaller physical footprint; and

WHEREAS, [enhanced geothermal systems](#) (EGS) have the potential to significantly increase the amount of geothermal energy that can be produced; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Department of Energy recently launched an effort to achieve “aggressive cost reductions” in geothermal energy and [announced \\$44 million to advance geothermal deployment nationwide](#); and

WHEREAS, the potential for geothermal to produce electricity in Whatcom County is significant. Estimates from the Department of Energy's National Renewable Energy Laboratory suggest that geothermal in Washington State could produce over 6,000 megawatts (MW) of carbon-free electricity – with ranges for Whatcom County of 500 MW or more, meeting nearly all its current electricity demand (Bellingham uses roughly 100 MW). Since 2011, the U.S. Department of Energy has granted \$2 million to the Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to help pinpoint areas in Washington state where geothermal energy development would be most promising. Beginning in 2018 DNR began drilling test wells in areas predicted to have high geothermal potential around Washington State. Two of these ~1,600 feet deep wells were in Whatcom County near Baker Lake and south of Mt. Baker. These test drills demonstrated a commercial scale temperature gradient.

WHEREAS, leaders in the clean energy transition – from community-owned [Sonoma Clean Power](#) to [Google](#) – are investing in geothermal because “round-the-clock renewable resources like geothermal are needed to end our dependence on fossil fuel power.”

WHEREAS, currently Washington State uses a very small amount of geothermal energy and Whatcom County has the opportunity to lead the way in developing and deploying new geothermal technology in Washington State;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that it is the policy of the Whatcom Democrats to support the investigation of the aforementioned promising technologies, and, to the extent that they are found to be feasible, the development and deployment of geothermal energy generation in Whatcom County.

Adopted unanimously (63-0) at the January 20, 2024, General Membership Meeting of Whatcom County Democrats.