1. PURPOSE OF THE POLICY

A. To ensure compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Washington State law regarding the presence of service or assistance animals in Skagit County facilities.

B. To clearly define various types of service/assistance animals and provide guidelines for Skagit County employees regarding the rights of citizens and fellow employees who have service animals.

C. To set behavioral guidelines for service animals to protect Skagit County citizens and staff from injury and to prevent damage to public property while they participate in services and sponsored programs by Skagit County within Skagit County facilities.

D. To prohibit pets from being brought into most Skagit County facilities.

2. SCOPE

This policy applies to all elected officials, employees, volunteers and visitors of Skagit County facilities unless otherwise governed by statute.

For the purpose of this policy, "service animal" means an animal that is trained for the purposes of assisting or accommodating a disabled person's sensory, mental, or physical disability. RCW 70.84.021

3. DEFINITIONS

A. Fully Socialized

To be fully socialized means the animal will not, except under rare occasions, bark, yip, growl or make disruptive noises; will have a good temperament and disposition; will not show fear; will not be upset or agitated when it sees another animal; and will not be aggressive.
B. Partner/Handler

A person with a service animal where a partner is a person with a disability and a person without a disability is a handler.

C. Pet

A domestic animal kept for pleasure or companionship.

D. Service Animal

The (ADA) defines a service animals or assistance animal as "...any animal individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability. Services include, but are not limited to, guiding individuals with impaired vision, alerting individuals who are hearing impaired to intruders or sounds, providing minimal protection or rescue work, pulling a wheelchair, or fetching dropped items."

Any animal meeting this definition for an individual with a disability is considered a service animal regardless of whether it has been licensed or certified by a state or local government or a training program. If there are questions about whether an animal is a service animal or questions regarding disabilities contact the Risk Management for assistance.

E. Team

A person with a disability, or a handler, and his or her service animal is a team. The twosome works as a cohesive team in accomplishing the tasks of everyday living.

F. Trainee

An animal undergoing training to become a service animal is a trainee.

4. GENERAL POLICY

A. Skagit County allows service animals to accompany persons with disabilities in its facilities accessible to the public. Disabled employees may also have service animals in the facilities in places where the employee would have normal access in the performance of their duties provided the safety of the team or other employees is
not jeopardized. Employees must register their service animals with the Risk Management Department.

B. Pets are prohibited in county facilities except as may be allowed at the Skagit County Fair per rules established by the Fair Manager, or Skagit County Parks per rules established by the Parks Director and/or Board. An elected official or department head may grant permission for a pet to be in a county facility for a specific reason at a specific time. (e.g., a pet dog used for a demonstration in an aggressive dog training class)

5. TYPES OF SERVICE ANIMALS

A. Guide Dog

A carefully trained dog that serves as a travel tool to persons with severe visual impairment or who are blind.

B. Hearing Dog

A dog who has been trained to alert a person with significant hearing loss or who is deaf when a sound, e.g., knock on the door, occurs.

C. Service Dog

A dog that has been trained to assist a disabled person who has a mobility or health impairment. Types of duties the dog may perform include carrying, fetching, opening doors, ringing doorbells, activating elevator buttons, steadying a person while walking, helping a person up after a fall, etc.

D. SSigDog

A dog trained to assist a person with autism. The dog alerts the partner to distracting repetitive movements common among those with autism, allowing the person to stop the movement (e.g. hand flapping).
E. A Seizure Response Dog

A dog trained to assist a person with a seizure disorder; how the dog serves depends on the person’s needs.

F. Any animal as defined in RCW 70.84.021.

6. GUIDELINES FOR COUNTY EMPLOYEE

A. Allow a service animal to accompany the partner at all times and everywhere on campus except where service animals are specifically prohibited.

B. Do not pet a service animal without permission of the partner/handler; petting a service animal when the animal is working distracts the animal from the animal's duties.

C. Do not feed a service animal. The service animal may have specific dietary requirements. Unusual food or food at an unexpected time may cause the animal to become ill.

D. Do not deliberately startle a service animal, or attempt to separate a partner/handler from his or her service animal.

E. Employees who require a service animal must notify their supervisor and register the animal with the Risk Management/Human Resource Department. Human Resources may require that the employee submit a prescription/statement from a physician if the need for the service animal is not obvious.

F. Employee service animals are subject to the behavior standards required of a service animal belonging to a facility visitor.

7. REQUIREMENTS OF SERVICE ANIMALS, TRAINEES AND THEIR PARTNERS/HANDLERS

A. Vaccination

The animal must have current immunizations against diseases common to that type of animal. Dogs must wear a rabies vaccination tag and other licensing tags as required by Municipal Codes in Skagit County.
B. Health

The animal must be in good health with good hygiene. Partners/handlers are responsible to maintain a clean service animal at all times.

C. Leash

All local municipal codes require dogs to be on a leash at all times while in public places.

D. Under Control of Partner/Handler

The partner/handler must be in full control of the animal at all times. The care and supervision of a service animal is solely the responsibility of its partner/handler.
A trainee will be under the control of the handler, housebroken and fully socialized. If the trainee begins to show improper behavior, the handler will act immediately to correct the animal or will remove the animal from the premises.

8. WHEN A SERVICE ANIMAL CAN BE ASKED TO LEAVE

A. Disruption

The partner of an animal that is unruly or disruptive (e.g. barking, running around, bringing attention to itself) may be asked to remove the animal from county facilities. The partner may be prohibited from bringing the animal into any county facility until the partner takes significant steps to mitigate the behavior, if the improper behavior happens repeatedly. Mitigation can include muzzling a barking animal or refresher training for both the animal and the partner.

B. Health

Ill service animals are not allowed in public areas. A partner with an ill animal may be asked to leave county facilities.

C. Poor Hygiene/Unclean Animals

Partners with animals that are unclean may be asked to leave county facilities. Partners/handlers shall be responsible to keep the service animals clean and well groomed even during inclement weather seasons.
Animal that become wet from walking in the rain or mud or from being splashed by a passing automobile, but is otherwise clean, should be considered a clean animal. Animals that shed in the spring shall be groomed to maintain a work environment that is hair free.

9. PROHIBITED ACCESS FOR SERVICE ANIMALS

A. Mechanical Rooms/Custodial Closets

Mechanical rooms, such as boiler rooms, facility equipment rooms, electric closets, elevator control rooms and custodial closets, are off-limits to service animals. The machinery and/or chemicals in these rooms may be harmful to animals.

B. Areas where Protective Clothing is Necessary

Any room where protective clothing is necessary is off-limits to service animals. Examples include, chemical laboratories, wood shops, and metal/machine shops.

C. Areas where there is Danger to the Service Animal

Any room where there are sharp metal cuttings or other sharp objects on the floor or protruding from a surface; where there are hot materials on the floor; where there is a high level of dust; or where there is moving machinery is off-limits to service animals.

D. Access Exceptions

1) Moving Equipment

A manager of an operation/facility with moving equipment may grant permission to a team to enter the area with moving machinery. Admission for each team will be granted or denied on a case-by-case basis. The final decision shall be made based on the nature of the machinery or class and in the best interests of safety for the team. Example: The machinery in a shop may have moving parts at a height such that the tail of a large dog could easily be caught in it; this is a valid reason for keeping large dogs out. However, a very small hearing dog may be shorter than any moving part and, therefore, considered for admission to the area.
2) Case-By-Case

The Department Head/Supervisor may grant access to other designated off-limits areas on a case-by-cases basis not withstanding conflicts to this policy.

3) Approval for Exceptions

To be granted an exception, a visitor seeking admission for his or her animal to an off-limits area should contact the Department Head or Supervisor of the office or facility, or the Risk management Department. An employee should submit a written request.

10. LIABILITY

Any property damage, destructions or personal injuries caused by or as a result of the service animal will be the sole responsibility of the service animal's owner/partner/handler. Service animal owner/partners/handlers will hold harmless Skagit County, its elected officials, officers and employees from any and all claims, causes of actions, damages, costs, loss of service, expenses and compensation whatsoever, growing out of consequences with their service animal in or around Skagit County facilities or grounds.

11. EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

In the event of an emergency, county staff should understand that a service animal may become disoriented from the smell of smoke from a fire emergency, from sirens or wind noise, or from shaking and moving ground. The partner and/or animal may be confused by the stressful situation. Staff should be aware that the animal is trying to be protective and, in its confusion, is not to be considered harmful. Staff should make every effort to keep the animal with its partner. However, the staff's first effort should be toward the partner; this may necessitate leaving an animal behind in certain emergency evacuation situations.

12. GRIEVANCE

Any partner dissatisfied with the decision made concerning a service animal should follow the applicable Skagit County Internal ADA Accommodation Request and/or Appeal/Grievance Procedures within the Collective Bargaining Agreement.