

Whatcom County Council Committee of the Whole

**COUNTY COURTHOUSE
311 Grand Avenue, Ste #105
Bellingham, WA 98225-4038
(360) 778-5010**



Committee Minutes - Draft Minutes

**Tuesday, April 9, 2024
2:05 PM
Hybrid Meeting**

**HYBRID MEETING - ADJOURNS BY 4:30 P.M.; MAY BEGIN EARLY
(PARTICIPATE IN-PERSON, SEE REMOTE JOIN INSTRUCTIONS AT
www.whatcomcounty.us/joinvirtualcouncil, OR CALL 360.778.5010)**

COUNCILMEMBERS

Barry Buchanan
Tyler Byrd
Todd Donovan
Ben Elenbaas
Kaylee Galloway
Jon Scanlon
Mark Stremmler

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Dana Brown-Davis, C.M.C.

Call To Order

Council Chair Barry Buchanan called the meeting to order at 2:20 p.m. in a hybrid meeting.

Roll Call

Present: 7 - Barry Buchanan, Tyler Byrd, Todd Donovan, Ben Elenbaas, Kaylee Galloway, Jon Scanlon, and Mark Stremler

Announcements

Special Presentation

1. [AB2024-249](#) Presentation on Whatcom Racial Equity Commission (WREC) Appointment Process
Shu-Ling Zhao, Chuckanut Health Foundation, read from a presentation (on file) about the process for appointing new members to the Whatcom Racial Equity Commission (WREC) and Council's confirmation of those appointments at tonight's Council meeting.

This agenda item was PRESENTED.

Committee Discussion

1. [AB2024-241](#) Discussion of an ordinance amending WCC 10.34 Ferry Rates
Elizabeth Kosa, Public Works Department Director, read from notes (on file as "Ferry Council notes 4.9.2024") about the changes to the code language, including ones that were added (noted in blue) since the last time Council considered an ordinance on this section (AB2023-258) and it was vetoed for process.

She and Councilmembers discussed the proposed change to 10.34.020 I about employee trips which says that County employees (other than Public Works and the Sheriff Department) would now pay regular ticket price into the fare box. Questions included whether trips for official County employee business would be reimbursed through the individual department budgets, and what the difference would be from what the fiscal impact was before and what it would be with this change. Kosa stated the annual fare box revenue gain with this change would be \$3,360. They discussed that it would essentially be one County account covering another County account (in this case, the General Fund covering the Road Fund), whether that would be creating an administrative burden, whether any other alternatives have been considered, how much the free trips are utilized, and the fact that there are two types of employee trips happening. One is for County business and the other is an employee benefit, allowing families of an employee to ride for free, which was negotiated in lieu of having a wage increase. If both

types are counted (as in the Ferry Advisory Committee's proposal), the total Annual Fare Box Revenue Gain would be \$83,562.

Councilmembers and Kosa discussed changing the proposed language for introduction tonight to say that Whatcom County employees (not just limiting it to Public Works and Sherriff) on official County business shall be exempt from fares and these exempt fares will be tracked. They discussed tracking the number of trips and which departments are using them, applying the \$10 per trip in the Adjusted Total Operating Expense calculation for free trips associated with employee benefits but not on exempt trips for official County business, and how the trips are logged. Kosa stated it is a manual process.

Kosa presented a cost analysis and comparison of the Whatcom County Ferry Advisory Committee (WCFAC) and Whatcom County proposed changes to Whatcom County Code 10.34 Ferry Rates (on file as "WCC 10.34 Fiscal Note 4.9.2024"). She answered questions and stated they are only proposing the Public Works version of the ordinance for introduction tonight (represented in the lower box on the fiscal note, shaded in blue) with an update to the employee trips part of it as discussed. She and Councilmembers discussed how this proposed code would slow the rate of loss down (though it would not fix the overall issue), the next steps for this ordinance and the budget supplemental for using American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, looking at long term solutions, and whether they should hear from the WCFAC before adopting this ordinance.

Pam Gould, Whatcom County Ferry Advisory Committee Chair, gave the advisory committee's perspective on the proposed code revisions by Public Works. She stated they were disappointed that there were nearly no recommendations from the advisory committee that were incorporated and there were new concepts added that the advisory committee has not yet been able to weigh in on. They would like to meet with the Public Works Department and with the Public Works and Health Committee so they can have dialogue. They would also like to see a broader plan for financial support for the ferry system going forward so it is not all borne by the ferry riders and Lummi Island residents.

Councilmembers, Council staff, and Kosa discussed the timing for introducing and adopting the ordinance and budget supplemental and that the ordinance has to be passed by the first meeting in May for the fares to be effective June 1.

Donovan moved to recommend that they get the amended version up for

introduction tonight. The motion was seconded by Buchanan.

Kosa confirmed with Councilmembers what amendments they would like to see for tonight regarding employee trips.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Buchanan, Byrd, Donovan, Elenbaas, Galloway, Scanlon, and Stremmler

Nay: 0

This agenda item was DISCUSSED AND MOTION(S) APPROVED.

Motion approved 7-0 to recommend introduction of the amended version tonight.

Executive Appointment

1. [AB2024-236](#) Request confirmation of the County Executive's appointment of Kayla Schott-Bresler as Deputy Executive effective April 10, 2024

The following people spoke about the appointment and Schott-Bresler's experience:

- Tyler Schroeder, Director of Administrative Services
- Satpal Sidhu, County Executive

Kayla Schott-Bresler, Executive's Office, spoke about her responsibility in this role.

Buchanan moved that they recommend approval of the confirmation of the County Executive's appointment of Schott-Bresler (as Deputy Executive). The motion was seconded by Galloway.

Councilmembers congratulated Schott-Bresler.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Byrd, Donovan, Elenbaas, Galloway, Scanlon, Stremmler, and Buchanan

Nay: 0

This agenda item was FORWARDED TO COUNCIL WITH RECOMMENDED MOTION(S).

Motion approved 7-0 to recommend approval of the Executive's appointment of Schott-Bresler as Deputy Executive

Committee Discussion and Recommendation to Council

1. [AB2024-090](#) Resolution identifying Whatcom County approaches to the fentanyl emergency
- Buchanan and Elenbaas updated the Councilmembers and agreed that the version they are considering is "Revised Resolution for 4.9.2024."

Nick Lewis, Lummi Indian Business Council, thanked the Councilmembers and stated they are the first county that has taken this stance in this manner and now it has become a template for other places. Buchanan thanked him and his Council for their work.

Elenbaas thanked Buchanan and Lewis.

Donovan moved and Scanlon seconded that the Resolution be RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL.

Councilmembers discussed the motion and Galloway stated she had some suggested amendments.

Galloway moved to amend the resolution to add a whereas statement that reads:

Whereas, involuntary displacement of people experiencing homelessness is estimated to worsen overdose and hospitalizations, decrease initiations of medications for opioid use disorder, and contribute to deaths among people experiencing homelessness.

Elenbaas asked whether that idea is already in the resolution.

The motion was seconded by Scanlon.

Councilmembers discussed where in the document the new clause should go and decided it should be after the whereas statement on page one that starts with, "WHEREAS, the use of fentanyl continues spreading..."

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 6 - Donovan, Elenbaas, Galloway, Scanlon, Buchanan, and Byrd

Nay: 1 - Stremmler

Galloway moved to amend to add an additional whereas clause that reads:

Whereas, the housing crisis in Whatcom County and high barrier eligibility requirements for supportive housing programs limit access and availability for safe, secure, and affordable housing which

is essential for stability, recovery, sobriety, and preventing drug use and overdose

The motion was seconded by Scanlon.

Elenbaas stated he has concerns with the proposed language and thinks it might be contradictory to striking a balance between harm reduction and holding people accountable.

Buchanan stated during the Behavioral Health Advisory Committee meeting yesterday it was announced that there is going to be an effort to look at our supported housing model to see if it is following all the best practices across the nation and is effective. They will be hiring a consultant. He would like to know the results of that work before he would commit to anything around this.

Lewis stated when you look at the definition of permanent supportive housing, the State definition is actually very general and vague. When we talk about high barriers or eligibility, those are often put on by ourselves. It is more an internal process to lower or raise those barriers, depending on circumstances, as we see fit.

Councilmembers and Lewis discussed the proposed language about high barrier eligibility requirements.

Galloway amended her motion **and moved** to amend the resolution to add a whereas statement that reads:

Whereas, the housing crisis in Whatcom County limits access and availability to safe, secure, supportive, and affordable housing which is essential for stability, recovery, sobriety, and preventing drug use and overdose

The amended motion was seconded by Scanlon.

The motion to amend carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Elenbaas, Galloway, Scanlon, Stremler, Buchanan, Byrd, and Donovan

Nay: 0

Councilmembers discussed the motion to recommend approval of the resolution as amended.

Donovan's motion that the Resolution be RECOMMENDED FOR

APPROVAL WITH PROPOSED AMENDMENT(S) carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Buchanan, Byrd, Donovan, Elenbaas, Galloway, Scanlon, and Stremler

Nay: 0

Motion approved 6-1 (with Stremler opposed) to amend to add a whereas statement after the 7th statement on page one of the Resolution that reads:

Whereas, involuntary displacement of people experiencing homelessness is estimated to worsen overdose and hospitalizations, decrease initiations of medications for opioid use disorder, and contribute to deaths among people experiencing homelessness.

Motion approved to amend the resolution to add a whereas statement after the one above that reads:

Whereas, the housing crisis in Whatcom County limits access and availability to safe, secure, supportive, and affordable housing which is essential for stability, recovery, sobriety, and preventing drug use and overdose.

2. [AB2024-253](#) Resolution in support of expanding access to affordable and reliable internet for all residents of Whatcom County

This agenda item was NOT ACTED UPON.

This item was not discussed.

3. [AB2024-254](#) Resolution repealing Resolution 2023-054 (a resolution establishing an independent review of countywide fire and emergency medical services structures)

Stremler briefed the Councilmembers and ***moved*** that they recommend approval of the resolution. The motion was seconded by Elenbaas.

Councilmembers discussed the motion, the concerns that have been raised about the resolution, whether the process is collaborative, the process for the Request for Proposal, and what the Council would do with the results of the study.

Satpal Sidhu, County Executive, stated we all work for the benefit of the people and not for individual organizations. He asked whether there is contention from the people who are vested in the system or from the public who is paying for it. He asked that the fire districts come forward and be part of the study and stated it is our responsibility to revisit something to see if we can do it better.

The MOTION TO RECOMMEND FAILED by the following vote:

Aye: 2 - Elenbaas, and Stremler

Nay: 5 - Buchanan, Byrd, Donovan, Galloway, and Scanlon

4. [AB2024-252](#) Resolution supporting modernization of the Economic Development Investment (EDI)

Board

This agenda item was NOT ACTED UPON.

This item was not discussed.

Items Added by Revision

There were no agenda items added by revision.

Other Business

There was no other business.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 4:33 p.m.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Dana Brown-Davis, Council Clerk

Barry Buchanan, Council Chair

Kristi Felbinger, Minutes Transcription