

Whatcom County Council Special Committee of the Whole

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



Committee Minutes - Final

Tuesday, February 4, 2025

9 AM

Hybrid Meeting - Council Chambers

**HYBRID MEETING - ADJOURNS BY 9:55 A.M. (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 Stremler

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Cathy Halka, AICP, CMC

Call To Order

Council Chair Kaylee Galloway called the meeting to order at 9:01 a.m. in a hybrid meeting.

Roll Call

Present: 6 - Barry Buchanan, Todd Donovan, Ben Elenbaas, Kaylee Galloway, Jon Scanlon, and Mark Stremler

Absent: 1 - Tyler Byrd

Announcements

Committee Discussion

1. [AB2025-081](#) Discussion relating to population and employment projections for the County as a whole, Urban Growth Areas, and the Rural & Resource Lands associated with the 2025 Comprehensive Plan Update

Matt Aamot, Planning and Development Services Department (PDS), introduced the presentations and answered what the goal is for the Council in hearing them. He spoke about the history of the non-binding resolution and the time it has taken because of the new housing allocation requirement from the State and conversations that have taken place about that.

Donovan spoke about the sense that PDS has been driving projections above the Office of Financial Management (OFM) medium numbers, and asked when the Council was ever asked what the goal should be for countywide planning.

Aamot stated if the Council wants to go with a different projection than what is presented in the County/City proposals, it is up for discussion but hopefully, the County, cities, and Planning should all try to get on the same page.

City of Bellingham

Approximate Timestamp: 10:12

Chris Behee, City of Bellingham, read from a presentation (on file) regarding Bellingham's urban growth area (UGA) preliminary growth proposal and answered questions. He spoke about working towards a strategy encouraging growth in UGAs and minimizing growth in rural areas (as written in the City of Bellingham's letter), and answered what the City's plan is for addressing the lack of land capacity and how they will be on target to accommodate 25,000 people across the various housing types. He stated the bulk of the growth that Bellingham is anticipating is going to land in the existing city limits, and spoke about how the projection of 18,000

needed homes is calculated and how they would accomplish that.

Approximate Timestamp: 30:02

Aamot read from a presentation (on file) on the Birch Bay, Cherry Point, and Columbia Valley UGAs and answered questions.

Birch Bay UGA

He stated the technical report middle scenario for Birch Bay is lower than growth experienced in the last three decades and also lower than the county proposal. He answered how population and job growth projections in Birch Bay line up with sea level rise scenarios, and stated they would be looking at increasing residential zoning density outside of that floodplain or sea level rise area. He answered whether they plan on engaging the newly formed Birch Bay Community Advisory Committee through the Comprehensive Plan update, and stated they do. He answered why the County's preliminary proposal for employment growth is so different than the technical report middle projection and what kind of employment they are hoping to drive in to Birch Bay. He answered whether population growth above the OFM medium projection would be accomplished with just zoning changes in the existing UGA, and stated if they allow middle housing (duplex, triplex, fourplex) they anticipate that no expansion of the UGA would be required with the County's proposal. He answered whether they have taken into account that the population has changed to be more year-round residents rather than part-time, and he spoke about determining the occupancy rate.

Scanlon stated there may be some data from the feasibility study for incorporation that they might want to look at too when that data comes in.

Cherry Point UGA

Approximate Timestamp: 42:11

Aamot answered if projections have been informed by any coordination with the land owners at Cherry Point to make sure their future plans align with the employment growth projections. He stated they are hoping to get more information about that from an industrial study being done by the Port of Bellingham, and they have also a market factor for land they realize will not be developed and they could modify that based on the Port's information.

Columbia Valley UGA

Approximate Timestamp: 46:47

Aamot stated the preliminary land capacity analysis indicates that the

Columbia Valley UGA could only accommodate the County-proposed employment growth with a potential rezone of almost 40 acres to light impact industrial. He answered whether they would plan to put that light industrial land as far as possible from where people live.

City of Blaine

Approximate Timestamp: 52:31

Alex Wenger, City of Blaine, stated (because of time constraints) he is willing to come back next week to present.

This agenda item was 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 9:55 a.m.

The County Council approved these minutes on February 25, 2025.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Cathy Halka, Council Clerk

Kaylee Galloway, Council Chair

Meeting Minutes prepared by Kristi Felbinger

SIGNED COPY ON FILE