

Whatcom County Council (Special)

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



Minutes - Draft Minutes

**Tuesday, December 30, 2025
4:30 PM
Hybrid Meeting - Council Chambers**

**HYBRID MEETING (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 4:30 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

Discussion and Action

[AB2025-872](#) Resolution authorizing the use of Healthy Children's Fund dollars for flood relief assistance for families with vulnerable children

Galloway asked if the proposed resolution's sponsors, Councilmembers Buchanan and Stremler, would like to present it.

Elenbaas moved to approve the second substitute resolution. Donovan seconded the motion.

Byrd asked which substitute Elenbaas was moving for approval.

Kirsten Smith, Council Staff, stated that a second substitute was shared at 4 p.m. which made additional changes to the first substitute.

Stremler stated that the idea for the resolution came from his experiences helping clean up homes in Nooksack that were damaged in the recent flood. He said one of the most impactful things he saw was a young boy hauling a Christmas tree out of the house and throwing it onto the pile of debris. He said assistance from the state or federal government is unsure, and these people have a need now. He said he has been in communication with the Whatcom Long Term Recovery Group about the community's immediate needs, and he believes they are doing a stellar job for people. He stated that these experiences led him to start thinking about how county resources could be used to support vulnerable children and families.

Buchanan stated that he asked the Whatcom Long Term Recovery Group about how funds from the county could be used to support families recovering from the flood, and they submitted a plan showing how the money could be used to support displaced families.

Galloway asked for clarification about the motion to approve the substitute resolution.

Elenbaas stated he just reviewed the second substitute, and the main change is to the name of the resolution, so he has no problem moving the second substitute for approval.

Donovan asked how the funds would be administered.

Kayla Schott-Bresler, Deputy Executive, stated that all disaster response and recovery contracts flow through the Division of Emergency Management (DEM), so she would expect any funds for human services needs to go through that same structure and be supported by the Human Services team at the health department.

Donnell Tanksley, Whatcom County Sheriff, stated that he spent quite a bit of time in Everson, Nooksack, and Sumas, and he stopped on patrol to help a family at their house. He said when he walked into the living room, it was not possible to see the floor tiles under the mud. He stated that the Council has his support to use any available local funds to support families impacted by the flooding, as federal and state funds may be long delayed or unavailable. He added that it is important to consider how the funds will be distributed, whether there are any legal requirements that must be met, or whether there are ways to expedite the process.

Stremler said that a representative of the Whatcom Long Term Recovery Group is available in Council Chambers to respond to questions.

Galloway asked for clarification from legal about how any funds would be distributed.

Kimberly Thulin, Prosecuting Attorney, stated that the resolution expresses Council's intention to support the use of up to \$750,000 Healthy Children's Fund dollars for purposes that fall within the scope of the fund; it does not authorize the actual expenditure of funds.

Scanlon said that he completely agrees with the idea behind the resolution, and he would like to hear from DEM about what families with children ages 0-5 need following the flood.

Matt Klein, Deputy Director of DEM, stated that there is a need for temporary housing. Following the last flood in 2021, some folks were in hotels for up to 9 months.

Amy Rydel, Whatcom County Health and Community Services (WCHCS),

thanked councilmembers for showing up and supporting the community throughout the flood response. She stated that they are seeing needs for housing and basic needs, including food. She said they have strong partnerships with the Whatcom Long Term Recovery Group and the North Sound ACH. She said that they have personally connected with 575 people who have reached out for help, 37 of whom are families with children ages 0-5.

Scanlon asked how temporary housing is currently being funded.

Rydel answered that the North Sound ACH has provided their own funding. The Community Foundation has been collecting money through their resiliency fund.

Scanlon asked about the cost in terms of future plans and projects if the Healthy Children's Fund dollars are not ultimately reimbursed by the state or federal government.

Sarah Simpson, WCHCS, stated that there is an approved implementation plan in place, so staff would have to reassess current funds and engage in another discussion with Council about potentially improving a new implementation plan.

Elenbaas stated that his priority is to get the money out to the groups that need it right now.

Byrd said that a number of people involved in leadership and management of the Whatcom Long Term Recovery Group were also involved in the lawsuit relating to the Healthy Children's Fund levy. He asked for clarification from legal about whether that is an issue, or whether the use of the funds in this way could be used in court by groups seeking to overturn the levy.

Thulin stated that she does not have concerns about a conflict with the Healthy Children's Fund matter currently before the Court of Appeals. She clarified that the resolution does not have the force of law, adding that any expenditures that are ultimately made as a result will be subject to financial and legal review to ensure they comply with the terms and scope of the Healthy Children's Fund ordinance.

Galloway asked Thulin to walk councilmembers through proposed changes in the second substitute resolution.

Thulin provided an overview of her proposed changes, which clarify the

legal parameters for the use of Healthy Children's Fund dollars.

Stremler stated that the Healthy Children's Fund generates over \$1.5 million in interest, which goes back into the fund, so he does not see how future plans or projects will be impacted by the use of the \$750,000 today. He said the intent of the resolution is to help families who need it today.

Elenbaas stated that he has a hard time with the new language proposed by legal, as everyone knows Council has an intention to put the money back in the fund if possible. He added that he would love to hear from the Whatcom Long Term Recovery Group about how funds could be used.

Scanlon asked a question about the gift of public funds.

Thulin clarified that the Healthy Children's Fund has particular parameters and legal limitations. However, response to a public disaster is a valid purpose for governmental assistance, though there are still parameters with that as well.

Galloway asked if changing the word "may" to "supports" in the second whereas clause on the second page would work.

Thulin stated that it would.

Galloway moved to strike "may" from the second whereas clause on the second page and amend to "supports." Elenbaas seconded the motion.

Councilmembers discussed the motion.

Klein stated that DEM would be pursuing every avenue possible to reimburse county expenditures and will keep Council and the Executive informed throughout the process.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 6 - Buchanan, Byrd, Galloway, Scanlon, Stremler, Elenbaas

Nay: 1 - Donovan

Galloway moved to amend the first be it further resolved statement to read "be it further resolved that the Council supports the reimbursement of any Healthy Children's Fund dollars pursuant to the terms of the Healthy Children's Fund used to support families impacted by the 2026 storm events with state or federal disaster relief dollars that arrive at a later date."

Scanlon seconded the motion.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 6 - Buchanan, Byrd, Galloway, Scanlon, Stremler, Elenbaas

Nay: 1 - Donovan

Elenbaas's motion that the Substitute Resolution be APPROVED AS AMENDED carried by the following vote:

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

Nay: 0

Enactment No: RES 2025-050

Items Added by Revision

There were no agenda items added by revision.

Other Business

There was no other business.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 5:31 p.m.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Cathy Halka, Council Clerk

Kaylee Galloway, Council Chair

Meeting Minutes prepared by Jenna Gernand