

Whatcom County Council (Special)

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



Minutes - Draft Minutes

Thursday, August 15, 2024

1 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 Barry Buchanan called the meeting to order at 1:02 p.m. in a hybrid meeting.

Roll Call

Stremler read a statement from Councilmember Elenbaas regarding the agenda items since he was not present at the meeting.

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

Absent: 1 - Ben Elenbaas

Announcements

Discussion and Action

1. [AB2024-507](#) Ordinance amending the 2024 Whatcom County Budget, request no. 11, in the amount of \$100,000

**Galloway moved and Donovan seconded that the Ordinance be ADOPTED.
The motion carried by the following vote:**

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

Nay: 1 - Stremler

Absent: 1 - Elenbaas

Enactment No: ORD 2024-043

2. [AB2024-533](#) Request authorization for the County Executive to enter into a contract agreement between Whatcom County and Pacifica Law Group, LLP for legal services for the Whatcom County Council for pre-election review of Initiative 2024-01 in an amount not to exceed \$60,000

Galloway moved and Donovan seconded that the SUBSTITUTE Contract be AUTHORIZED.

Donovan asked if this is a substitute contract and Buchanan stated it is, and that the judge from Superior Court wanted to make a change.

George Roche, Prosecuting Attorney's Office, answered questions and Councilmembers discussed whether the Council can weigh in on campaign issues.

**Galloway's motion that the SUBSTITUTE Contract be AUTHORIZED
carried by the following vote:**

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

Nay: 1 - Stremler

Absent: 1 - Elenbaas

Discussion

1. [AB2024-510](#) Discussion regarding membership of Council standing committees and other potential changes to meeting logistics

Cathy Halka, Clerk of the Council, briefed the Councilmembers and requested that the focus of their discussion be related to the goals of the Council, what challenges they are hoping to address, what they all agree is working and not working, and what the Council hopes to achieve by making changes.

Donovan stated his memory of what precipitated this is that they were trying to deal with quorum issues of three-member committees and that would be his main interest in what they would try to accomplish.

Buchanan stated if they have committees with seven members, there would be more opportunity to work together in small groups of two or three which they cannot do now because of quorum issues.

Galloway spoke about Councilmembers being able to collaborate, the choices of making small changes to the system to try to achieve better outcomes or re-evaluating the entire system, also looking at system changes in the Council's relationship with the Administration, such as looking at the Finance processes of the County for contracts, whether the Council wants to be full time or remain part time, and the idea of creating study sessions for policy discussions or having more committee meetings.

Byrd stated the State and County Codes and County Charter require meetings to be public and that is why the restrictions exist. By going to a seven-person committee, so they can meet in smaller groups outside of that, is really is a work-around to the intent of those laws. He suggested moving the larger discussions to COTW, scheduling additional committee meetings as they deem necessary, and having committee meetings in off (Council meeting)-weeks.

Scanlon stated if they were to adjust their calendar he would think it would be to allow for more time to study issues. He suggested scheduling additional meetings on days when they meet for the Health Board or Water Work Sessions.

Donovan spoke about acting on agenda items in committee (and especially in Committee of the Whole) and then again in Council on the same day, and stated he is not sure what the utility of that is.

George Roche, Prosecuting Attorney's Office, answered whether there is anything in the law that requires a certain amount of "readings" of an agenda item, and stated it would be covered in the introduction process for ordinances. He stated the Committee of the Whole voting to recommend approval to the Council is rather redundant, and he would be surprised if that is a requirement under law.

Donovan stated most of the other counties (as presented in the attachments in **AB2024-420**) do all their business in the daytime, but there is a sense on this Council that more people are able to get to the evening meetings, so Councilmembers want to have a discussion again in the evening.

Councilmembers spoke about the following goals and ideas:

- Be more efficient with their time
- Have more time to consider complicated issues
- Have avenues for Councilmembers to work together more
- Have more scrutiny on what is on agendas and have more manageable agendas during the day
- Manage the agenda up front before a meeting to make sure they have enough time to deal with things
- Identify topics in advance that will be of interest to the community and have a single vote during the day on the items that will not be highly controversial
- Look at logistics for when County staff should be available at meetings
- Hold multiple public comment periods (morning and evening)
- Vote once on most items
- Have Committee of the Whole meetings on off-Tuesdays and vote once on agenda items during that time
- Have Council strategic planning once a year to form goals and priorities for the year

Councilmembers and staff summarized and discussed the ideas, keeping the existing breaks in the meeting calendar, whether they could do anything differently with presentations, such as length or time scheduled, the fact that committee chairs preview their upcoming agendas and choose how

much time they would like for their meeting based on the information that agenda file preparers have provided, preparing a best practice document for chairs, having a conversation with the Executive’s Office so Council can continue good relationships with department heads, scheduling **AB2024-420** (the Ordinance amending Whatcom County Code 2.02.080, Standing Committees) for further discussion after having another work session, making small changes to the system as opposed to massive changes at once, and scheduling this agenda item again for September 24 in Committee of the Whole to give Council staff time to prepare recommendations.

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 1:53 p.m.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Cathy Halka, Council Clerk

Barry Buchanan, Council Chair

Kristi Felbinger, Minutes Transcription