

Whatcom County Council Public Works & Health Committee

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



Committee Minutes - Final

Tuesday, June 24, 2025

10:05 AM

Hybrid Meeting - Council Chambers

**HYBRID MEETING - MAY BEGIN EARLY - ADJOURNS BY 10:55 A.M.
(PARTICIPATE IN-PERSON, SEE REMOTE JOIN INSTRUCTIONS AT
www.whatcomcounty.us/joinvirtualcouncil, OR CALL 360.778.5010)**

COUNCILMEMBERS

Ben Elenbaas
Jon Scanlon
Mark Stremmler

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Cathy Halka, AICP, CMC

Call To Order

Committee Chair Jon Scanlon called the meeting to order at 10:16 a.m. in a hybrid meeting.

Roll Call

Present: 3 - Jon Scanlon, Mark Stremmer, and Ben Elenbaas

Also Present: Barry Buchanan, Tyler Byrd, Todd Donovan, and Kaylee Galloway

Announcements

Special Presentation

1. [AB2025-472](#) Update from Health and Community Services on the Healthy Children's Fund
Sarah Simpson, Health and Community Services, referenced a recent discussion with councilmembers (**AB2025-398**) about whether the county has supports for dads and spoke about a recent Cascadia Daily News article highlighting an example of a dad's group in Ferndale. She stated they have a request for proposal (RFP) out right now to expand peer support in the community and do like programming across the county. She read from a presentation (on file) about how the Healthy Children's Fund is supporting in-home child care providers, and an update on the State and local subsidy programs in light of the fact that the State did not increase its threshold from 60 percent to 75 percent of the State Median Income (SMI) as anticipated.

She and councilmembers discussed what the budgetary impact would be if the county set its subsidy threshold to 85 percent (as originally recommended) as opposed to the current recommendation of 60 to 75 percent of the SMI, and how those dollars would be spent if they did not. She answered whether they have started the work around advertising and community outreach to try to get more families signed up, and stated that is part of their RFP. She stated her recommendation is that they start at the 60 to 75 percent of SMI threshold and raise it slowly if they decide that they can, so as not to promise something and then not deliver. She answered what the subsidy is per child, and stated the current subsidy is \$300 per month per child zero to five.

Byrd spoke about being able to see what has been allocated and what is still remaining in each of the categories and where they are at in relation to the goals that were set.

Simpson continued the presentation and gave an update on the draft Healthy Children's Fund implementation plan process. She answered questions about the RAPID Survey and whether they are targeting specific populations, and stated it is open to anybody. She spoke about how people can find the survey.

She spoke about the strategies that were established in the first implementation plan, what they have done to meet those, and what they are working on, and she answered questions around workforce wages. She stated Council will receive a copy of the draft implementation plan later this week and they will schedule a 90-minute discussion about it in July. She answered when the greater community will be able to see the draft plan, and stated it will be after they get input from the Council and the Child and Family Well-Being Task Force (maybe this fall). She answered if they could see how the strategies and outcome table (in the presentation) could also include how those tie in to the goals and objectives that were defined in the original ordinance and the percentage of funding they are allocating to each of the strategies.

This agenda item was PRESENTED.

2. [AB2025-475](#)

Presentation from the Whatcom County Food System Committee

Rhys-Thorvald Hansen, Whatcom County Food System Committee Chair, read from a presentation (on file) about some of the committee's key victories this year, including the implementation of a food system dashboard, and the work of Twin Sisters Mobile Market with legislators to have mobile markets accept more of the nutrition program supplements.

Hansen highlighted challenges the food system is facing, including cuts to Federal and philanthropic food bank funding, reductions in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, an increase in Immigration and Customs Enforcement activity affecting local farm workers, and a lack of County department help with filling vacancies on the Food System Committee and providing administrative staffing.

Councilmembers and Hansen discussed the recommendations of the committee that Council direct the Health Department to re-invest in the Food System Committee and their capacity to serve their purpose, commit to ongoing funding of the Food Bank Network and food access organizations working in urban and rural settings, and integrate the 10-Year Food System Plan and the Food System Committee recommendations into the 2025 Comprehensive Plan. They discussed that the committee submitted their Comprehensive Plan recommendations on chapters seven

and eight, that they were invited to give comments on Chapter 12 around Climate Action, and that they really need a full-time staff member but would be happy with a minimum of about five hours a week of administrative support.

Aly Pennucci, Executive's Office, spoke about staff support and stated this is one of many priority challenges the County is facing and will continue to face as they have over 50 advisory committees. She stated the food system work is not a statutorily required service of the County. They recognize the need but are really facing a challenge in how they maintain the County's statutory services.

Hansen stated it is required in the ordinance for the Health Department to staff this committee, and though it does not note the specifics, the Health Department is not meeting that ordinance requirement from the Food System Committee's perspective.

Pennucci clarified that it is a discretionary choice of the Council to provide that service but not required by State or Federal law, and that is the terrible situation the County finds itself in.

Councilmembers discussed that the committee is feeling a disservice by not getting the resources it needs, that the County has set up so many committees they cannot possibly service them, that the Council unanimously approved a resolution in October of 2024 that upheld the Council's desire to reaffirm that food security is a public health priority and to invest in whatever capacity they can, and that they should maybe have a follow-up meeting for the Council to discuss what their options are.

Ann Beck, Health and Community Services, answered how much County staff time or budget went into the food system dashboard, and stated she worked on it in partnership with Chris Elder and found the money in her budget (General Fund) because she knew it was a priority for the committee. She stated she recognizes they have not been able to provide the support the committee needs.

Councilmembers discussed that this is something they should be looking at as they consider zoning in the Comprehensive Plan and where they are allocating population and employment growth, that they should also be looking at the impact on agriculture, that data like this should be available for everything the County does, having a small-group follow-up meeting with the committee to dive further into some of these issues, and looking at

what the County is required to do and not just maintaining the status quo.

Hansen stated the funding to support the Food System Committee is going to run out in quarter one of 2026 unless something changes, so the committee may cease to function and exist.

Galloway spoke about the October resolution and stated they could advocate for food security in the State Legislative agenda, and work with the Congressional delegation on elements of the Farm Bill and the nutrition title. The resolution shows that the Council has had a history of supporting this work and they have done what they can do as the legislative authority. She is not sure what more they can do given the challenges they are facing.

This agenda item was PRESENTED.

Items Added by Revision

There were no agenda items added by revision.

Other Business

There was no other business.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 11:08 a.m.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Jon Scanlon-via email 7/21/2025

Cathy Halka, Council Clerk

Jon Scanlon, Committee Chair

Meeting Minutes prepared by Kristi Felbinger

SIGNED COPY ON FILE