

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, February 24, 2026

11 AM

Hybrid Meeting - Council Chambers

**HYBRID MEETING - MAY BEGIN EARLY/LATE - ADJOURNS BY 11:55 A.M.
(PARTICIPATE IN-PERSON, SEE REMOTE JOIN INSTRUCTIONS AT
www.whatcomcounty.us/joinvirtualcouncil, OR CALL 360.778.5010)**

COUNCILMEMBERS

Elizabeth Boyle
Barry Buchanan
Ben Elenbaas
Kaylee Galloway
Jessica Rienstra
Jon Scanlon
Mark Stremler

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Cathy Halka, AICP, CMC

Call To Order

Committee Chair Elizabeth Boyle called the meeting to order at 10:46 a.m. in a hybrid meeting.

Roll Call

Present: 7 - Elizabeth Boyle, Barry Buchanan, Ben Elenbaas, Kaylee Galloway, Jessica Rienstra, Jon Scanlon, and Mark Stremler

Announcements

Committee Discussion and Recommendation to Council

1. [AB2026-119](#) Resolution calling on the State Legislature to recognize public health as essential and to maintain Foundational Public Health Services funding (Council acting as the Health Board)

Clerk's note: Boyle proposed that they rearrange the order of the items on their agenda and consider AB2026-119 first.

Scanlon stated concerns around potential cuts to State funding supporting our local health department came to his attention when sitting in on a Washington State Association of Counties meeting. Whatcom County Health and Community Services found out that other counties were taking actions to encourage the legislature to make some fixes to those funds, so he asked for support from Council staff and from the Health Department to put this resolution together.

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

Champ Thomaskutty, Health and Community Services Director, spoke about the purpose of the funds and that they represent a significant portion of the Health Department's operating budget. He answered what the phrase means in the resolution (under "Now, therefore, be it resolved") that says "fix the vapor tax errors that support the Foundational Public Health Services Account," and spoke about how a shift in funds left FPHS with a smaller pot of the revenue.

Jed Holmes, Executive's Office, answered if this is also on the Council's regular legislative asks for the year, and stated it was not a specific ask but was under some of their other priorities to support.

Scanlon's motion that the Resolution be RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Boyle, Buchanan, Elenbaas, Galloway, Rienstra, Scanlon, and Stremler

Nay: 0

Special Presentation

1. [AB2026-161](#) Presentation from Public Works regarding river and flood early action opportunities

Julie Anderson, Public Works Department, started to speak, but Elenbaas requested a recess to allow for people to get to the meeting since it started early, so Boyle stated they would go into recess until 11 a.m.

The meeting reconvened at 11 a.m.

The following people introduced the presentation and read from a presentation (on file) to update councilmembers on the February 2nd Flow Split Reach Team meeting:

- Julie Anderson, Public Works Department
- Paula Harris, Public Works Department

Harris presented about the narrowing of the river over time and that it has been exacerbated by human efforts to protect levee systems by locking it in place instead of letting it naturally meander and manage sediment. The idea is to widen the river corridor and potentially set some of the levees back. They want to start with the Everson overflow corridor and are trying to develop an early action project to take a first step toward resetting the system closer to where it was in 2006. She spoke about actions that would need to be taken basin-wide and reach by reach to accomplish the action package, and short- and long-term costs of those.

Harris, Anderson, and the following additional people discussed the presentation with councilmembers:

- Jed Holmes, Executive's Office
- Elizabeth Kosa, Public Works Department Director
- Kayla Schott-Bresler, Executive's Office
- Kimberly Thulin, Prosecuting Attorney's Office

They discussed what they have to do to find the needed \$474 million to meet longer term needs, whether a berm in Nooksack (city) would be extended further north (north of Tom Road) if Council were to approve Nooksack's UGA proposal, that the final berm alignments will be the first

step in the preliminary engineering study, that the community can help make some difference by maintaining property to keep vegetation down and their area mowed, whether relocation needs are separate from the about \$474 million long term budget needs, that the berm alignment should hopefully be known within the next three months, making sure actions on the river do not have a negative impact downstream, and at what point they will address people who would be impacted by river actions.

Anderson stated the members of the Flood Control Zone District Advisory Committee voted unanimously on February 12 on a motion to request that the executive declare an emergency to authorize the immediate implementation of interim actions for flood protection. The County is still operating under the emergency that the executive declared in December. So, it is up to the Council as the Board of Supervisors to decide if they want to discuss or act on that.

Councilmembers and the speakers discussed that the emergency declaration does not allow them to create new infrastructure (just repair it), the development of a master communication plan so the community would know what the County is working on and its progress, that levees cannot be set back for five years so they want to do the channels sooner (as soon as they get a design permitted and funded), that the biggest administrative lever the emergency orders provide is waiving purchasing requirements, if there is anything they can identify for State and Federal advocacy that the Council could support, that one method of managing the river does not last forever and now we have to respond to issues we created in the past, what is needed to start that work, whether the river corridor was every historically designated as mineral resource lands and if there are barriers to designating it as such so that some of the sediment removal could be done in coordination with our mineral resource needs, how many are still displaced from their homes from flooding, if Council can use an emergency ordinance to help implement the programs Harris is talking about, and getting legal advice about that.

This agenda item was PRESENTED AND 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 12:05 p.m.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Elizabeth Boyle-via email 3/4/2026

Cathy Halka, Council Clerk

Elizabeth Boyle, Committee Chair

Meeting Minutes prepared by Kristi Felbinger

SIGNED COPY ON FILE