

Whatcom County Council Committee of the Whole

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



Committee Minutes - Final

Tuesday, March 21, 2023

2:30 PM

Hybrid Meeting

HYBRID MEETING - ADJOURNS BY 4:30 P.M.; MAY BEGIN EARLY
(PARTICIPATE IN-PERSON AT 311 GRAND AVENUE SUITE 101, SEE REMOTE
JOIN INSTRUCTIONS AT www.whatcomcounty.us/joinvirtualcouncil, OR CALL
360.778.5010)

COUNCILMEMBERS

Barry Buchanan

Tyler Byrd

Todd Donovan

Ben Elenbaas

Carol Frazey

Kaylee Galloway

Kathy Kershner

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Dana Brown-Davis, C.M.C.

Call To Order

Council Chair Barry Buchanan called the meeting to order at 2:15 p.m. in a hybrid meeting.

Roll Call

Present: 7 - Barry Buchanan, Tyler Byrd, Todd Donovan, Ben Elenbaas, Carol Frazey, Kaylee Galloway, and Kathy Kershner

Announcements

Committee Discussion

1. [AB2023-203](#) Update on American Rescue Plan Funding

The following people updated the Councilmembers:

- Satpal Sidhu, County Executive
- Kayla Schott-Bresler, Strategic Initiatives Special Programs Manager

Schott-Bresler answered a question by Councilmember Donovan about how to understand the proposal for the \$4.5 million that Council had originally expected to go to childcare capital and how this memo relates to using voter-approved funds potentially for a different reason. She stated the Executive is not proposing at this time that Healthy Children's Fund (HCF) dollars be shifted from other strategies into a capital strategy. The capital strategy recommendation for the HCF is merely to add in a strategy that says, capital funding to be funded by American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), and the level of funding for that strategy would just say ARPA.

Donovan stated there is a substitute version of the Resolution adopting the HCF Implementation Plan that rewrites the language of the plan they have been looking at for a couple committee meetings and at the last public hearing that says the plan was based on small capital projects and that the next two years of the implementation plan were not going to be using the Children's Fund (or any money necessarily) for capital facilities because it was written with the assumption that the Council had previously decided that those ARPA monies were going to go to capital facilities. And now we have another \$12 million of requests for capital facilities for child care. He stated it sounded like what Schott-Bresler was saying did not quite fit with what is in the Council's packet.

Schott-Bresler stated the substitute Resolution does not have this additional capital strategy in it. The capital strategy recommendation from the

Executive's Office is a separate item in the packet (on file in **AB2023-127**) that the Council can make a motion to add in to the HCF plan. The added strategy provides clarity to the public and voters and gives Council flexibility down the road to decide whether or not they would want to invest HCF dollars in capital later on, but the Executive is not recommending attaching HCF dollars to large or midsized capital projects at this time in recognition of the work that has been done through the public health and community process.

Donovan moved to leave the \$4.5 million, that is in the memo saying uncommitted, to childcare capital and leave the original implementation plan that we looked at at the last two committee meetings and the last public hearing and just proceed forward with the investments we have been planning in capital facilities for childcare using the ARPA money. The motion was seconded by Buchanan.

Councilmembers discussed the motion and staff answered questions.

Donovan restated his motion to keep the uncommitted \$4.5 million of ARPA funds dedicated to childcare capital facilities.

Satpal Sidhu, County Executive, stated our county has many priorities and the Council should be informed about where they allocate the money.

Councilmembers and staff discussed the amount of money approved for the HCF and available for programmatic needs, how to possibly use ARPA funds for multiple needs of the county, the demand for childcare capital dollars, seeing how spending goes in the other HCF strategies and then deciding whether Council wants to meet more demand for childcare capital beyond the committed \$4 million using HCF dollars in six or twelve months if the Council did not allocate the remaining \$4.5 million of ARPA dollars for capital, the understanding in the development of the HCF that ARPA money would be here for childcare capital, fully funding the responsive and recommended Requests for Proposal (RFPs) from this round (whatever that number may be) as the first priority, using the additional \$2 million a year that was not expected before the ballot (because of the property assessment increase) for other needs, the possibility that the childcare capital demand may exceed the ARPA allocation, moving \$500,000 out of childcare capital to come back to ARPA to cover the \$471,000 of staffing that should be paid out of the HCF, maintaining voter trust, what the \$4.5 million would be used for, and finding out what the average taxpayer's thoughts are on using that money.

The following people spoke about what went into building the HCF and the concerns about “Strategy Zero” (see “Capital Strategy for 3.21.2023” attached to **AB2023-127**):

- Heather Flaherty, Chuckanut Health Foundation
- Meredith Hayes, Childcare Coalition

Councilmembers discussed the motion and the speakers responded. Donovan repeated the motion.

Donovan's motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 6 - Buchanan, Byrd, Donovan, Frazey, Galloway, and Kershner

Nay: 1 - Elenbaas

Elenbaas stated he voted no because he wants more conversation.

The following people spoke about a request for additional funding for the food banks:

- Mike Cohen, Bellingham Food Bank Executive Director
- Sam Norris, Foothills Food Bank Executive Director

They answered whether this request would be in addition to the \$500,000 the County has previously committed (as listed on the memo) and to be expended in the latter half of this fiscal year, whether there has been conversation with city councils to see if there can be some additional leveraging of city dollars, how the County is making sure the percentage of allocation and appropriation is equitable for the food bank that is not in a city limit, whether the food banks have the ability distribute frozen meat and whether it has to be USDA inspected, whether the request is for \$500,000 for this year and additional funds for next year, and whether the Council has flexibility on whether they use ARPA or other funds. The speakers stated the request is for an additional \$1 million in 2023 and \$1 million in 2024 and Schott-Bresler stated there is flexibility on the timeline.

Galloway spoke about ideas for using uncommitted ARPA funds and a concern about the sustainability of this request.

The speakers answered what would happen the following year (2025) if they get the requested funding and whether the need will ever go down.

Councilmembers discussed that the 2023 Farm Bill is coming up so the Council could work with our congressional delegation on that bill to make

sure our food security needs are being met from a Federal perspective, considering the services our food banks are providing in the event of an emergency when people may not be able to access a grocery store, what the child and family plan says about food security, how this fits in with land use policies as it relates to providing jobs for the East County community and services like grocery stores, whether there are any other food banks in their consortium, and whether there are any food banks that are not participating.

Schott-Bresler and Sidhu answered whether the Administration has a recommendation in this document for funding food banks.

Kershner moved that the Council allocate \$1 million for the Lummi ferry fare box deficit. The motion was seconded by Frazey.

Councilmembers discussed the motion.

Schott-Bresler answered whether there are ARPA funds available for both the ferry and the food bank.

Elenbaas suggested they use \$1 million of the uncommitted \$4.5 million for childcare capital to fund the food banks and asked if funding the ferry would take \$1 million from something else.

Donovan stated he would support Kershner's motion and asked whether they could find money for the ferry and food banks from the unallocated ARPA money or from the \$2.7 million that was mentioned by the administration that was not included in the memo, but not out of the \$4.5 million that is allocated for childcare capital.

Sidhu suggested maybe the Council could hold on this. It does not have to be decided today.

Kershner suggested they look at the HCF Implementation Plan to see if there is room in that for a \$1 million benefit to food banks to help families and children.

Sidhu answered whether he is asking that the Council does not make a decision on ARPA funds for ferry deficits and stated we are getting information from the State on the ferry and we should get that information first and also get the facts right.

Kershner withdrew her motion with the expectation that more information will be coming.

Frazezy withdrew her second and spoke about why she supports funding for the ferry.

Sidhu stated Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA) has a good financial balance sheet.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED AND MOTION(S) APPROVED.

Motion approved to keep the uncommitted \$4.5 million of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds dedicated to childcare capital facilities.

Committee Discussion and Recommendation to Council

1. [AB2023-127](#) Resolution adopting the Healthy Children's Fund Implementation Plan

Erika Lautenbach, Health and Community Services Director, briefed the Councilmembers and stated the food systems committee has completed a food systems plan and will be bringing that forward to Council in April. She briefed Councilmembers on the changes that were made to the Healthy Children's Fund Implementation Plan (HCFIP) and answered questions about proposed changes to clarify the competitive bid process (page 40 of the plan) and whether there has been conversation about getting some of these providers on the MRSC roster, whether there is anything in the plan about food security, and what we do when we have families who cannot access food.

Kershner stated she hopes there is room in the plan for expanding for where the need might be, and would like it built in that if we discover needs that need to be incorporated, we are able to put them in there.

Galloway moved to recommend the HCFIP but Buchanan stated the hearing is still open, so **Galloway withdrew** her motion. She stated she is open to the idea of "Strategy Zero" (see "Capital Strategy for 3.21.2023" attached to this file) but wants to make sure it is being fully vetted by our community members, partners, and the Child and Family Well-Being Task Force. She asked if it was okay to keep this a living document in case they feel they need to enhance it in the future and Councilmembers discussed that.

Elenbaas stated he really thinks they probably missed something if they do not have some form of food security worked into this plan.

Galloway asked whether the hub and spoke model will stay in the plan and Lautenbach stated it will.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED.

- 2. [AB2023-158](#) Ordinance declaring public necessity for and the authorization to acquire certain property rights by eminent domain for the E. Smith Road and Hannegan Road Intersection Improvements Project

Andrew Hester, Public Works Department, briefed the Councilmembers and answered whether it would be beneficial if Elenbaas volunteered himself to try to speak with the property owners before the County continues to take legal action.

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 4:19 p.m.

The County Council approved these minutes on April 11, 2023.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Dana Brown-Davis, Council Clerk

Barry Buchanan, Council Chair

Kristi Felbinger, Minutes Transcription

SIGNED COPY ON FILE