

Whatcom County Council Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee

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



Committee Minutes - Final

Tuesday, May 26, 2026

2:20 PM

Hybrid Meeting - Council Chambers

**HYBRID MEETING - MAY BEGIN EARLY/LATE - ADJOURNS BY 2:50 P.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 Barry Buchanan called the meeting to order at 2:05 p.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

Special Presentation

1. [AB2026-396](#) Presentation from Whatcom County Emergency Medical Services (EMS) and Whatcom County Fire District 7 regarding EMS and Ground Emergency Medical Transportation updates

The following people read from a presentation (on file):

- Debbie Arthur, Executive's Office, and speaking as the EMS Administrator
- Ben Russell, Fire District 7 Assistant Chief of Operations

Arthur spoke about how Emergency Medical Services levy funds are invested (top expenses) and top sources of revenue, a year-end summary of the fund for 2025, that revenues were 10 percent above what was budgeted but that there should be caution going forward since some revenues are more unpredictable than others, cost-cutting measures they have instituted so far this year (reduction of one staff member), that they have been aligning staff with the priorities of the levy and the system, and that they have proposed a draft reserve policy for 2026-2028 that outlines the purpose for the fund reserve and establishes a replenishment policy if they go below the reserve target.

She answered why 2025 revenues exceeded the budget, and stated they received \$2.5 million of revenue that they did not expect from Ground Emergency Medical Transportation (GEMT) and medical fees that were paid back by individuals.

She continued the presentation on their core financial risks and EMS governance and membership.

Russell gave an overview of Ground Emergency Medical Transportation (GEMT) program (including payment timing and reconciliation, and

long-term sustainability). He answered questions about reimbursements for GEMT eligible transports, if the work on the accounting side for those could be done more collectively or if any centralized resources could be used, if there is training from the state on processing the reimbursements, and if fire departments would take on transport costs in the future if people lose Medicaid eligibility.

Arthur continued the presentation and spoke about dispatch and its expenses. She and councilmembers discussed, when it comes to dispatch, who takes the onus on the payment for something that triggers an alternate response (such as ART or LEAD) outside of EMS or a carceral setting, the upcoming What-Comm and Prospect Administrative Board meeting this week, and an interest in scheduling a “101” on the paramedic training to learn more about that program.

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 2:47 p.m.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Barry Buchanan-via email 6/4/2026

Cathy Halka, Council Clerk

Barry Buchanan, Committee Chair

Meeting Minutes prepared by Kristi Felbinger

SIGNED COPY ON FILE

