

Whatcom County Council (Special)

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



Minutes - Draft Minutes

Tuesday, May 21, 2024

9:30 AM

Council Office Conference Room - Hybrid Meeting

**HYBRID MEETING - ADJOURNS BY 10:45 A.M. (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

Dana Brown-Davis, C.M.C.

Call To Order

Council Chair Barry Buchanan called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m. in a hybrid meeting.

Roll Call

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

Absent: 1 - Tyler Byrd

Announcements

Discussion and Approval of Motions

1. [AB2024-341](#) Discussion and approval of Council Office budget items to include as Additional Services Requests (ASRs) with the department's proposed 2025-2026 biennial budget

Dana Brown-Davis, Clerk of the Council, introduced the discussion and stated every year they get a base budget from the Executive's Office. Then, if there is anything additional that the Council wishes to add to that, they need to create an Additional Service Request (ASR) for each item. This discussion is to find out from Councilmembers what they are interested in adding to the budget for 2025 and/or 2026.

Kayla Schott-Bresler, Executive's Office, stated the General Fund balance is healthy right now at \$32 million. The target is that the minimum fund balance be 15 percent of the most recently-closed fiscal year's revenue amount, which would be about \$17 million. However, the 2024 budget has \$15 million more in spending authority than anticipated revenue so their existing commitments will quickly spend down the fund balance. It is largely due to the new criminal justice FTEs and wage pressure from existing employee commitments such as cost of living adjustments. She answered whether those numbers assume that all the criminal justice positions will be filled, and stated they projected some lapse but the numbers do represent the spending authority. She stated it is important that they maintain a very healthy fund balance because of capital projects that are before the County and the bonding commitments for the jail and NW Annex. Also, with growth in wages and FTEs, they also need to increase their Administrative Services (HR, Finance and I.T.) allocation.

Councilmembers discussed the list of "Proposals Submitted as of 5.20.2024 (v2)" attached to the file.

Deputy Clerk position ([Approximate Timestamp: 06:05](#))

Councilmembers and Council staff (Cathy Halka, Council Legislative Analyst, and Dana Brown-Davis, Clerk of the Council) discussed the unfilled Deputy Clerk position. Donovan asked whether the Legislative Analyst was doing some of the duties of the Deputy Clerk and stated that there is some interest among some of the Councilmembers in having the Legislative Analyst have more capacity, and that having a Deputy Clerk position might accomplish that. Halka stated her role was designed as 80 percent Legislative Analyst and 20 percent Deputy Clerk. She and Brown-Davis answered whether her job is actually working out that way and spoke about the projects (including the Justice Project and Council Office interns) that have taken up a lot of her time. They answered whether they feel it is a good model to have the two roles/positions combined and whether the Deputy Clerk duties have suffered because of that structure. Brown-Davis stated sometimes in the day-to-day operation it would have been nice to have expanded capacity, but right now the plan is to fill the Legislative Analyst position first and then in 2025 see how it shakes out, depending on if Council decides to make additional hires. Councilmembers discussed whether having one full time Deputy Clerk would expand the capacity of the Legislative analyst and whether there would be enough work for a 1.0 FTE, and Brown-Davis stated she thinks the office has enough work to add that position if that is what the Council decides it wants to do. Buchanan suggested having a Deputy Clerk that has some capacity for acting as a Legislative Analyst while also having a full time Legislative Analyst position.

Council/councilmember communications ([Approximate Timestamp: 14:53](#))

Councilmembers and Council staff discussed the communications role in the Council Office and the plan for a biannual Council newsletter.

Galloway stated she has an interest in expanding staff capacity for serving individual Councilmembers in communications and media relations.

Scanlon spoke about how that would help in being proactive about what the Council is doing and stated it would help to have someone who could state the Council's intent and what they are working on.

Galloway stated another piece that fits into communications is speech writing that would be tailored to individual Councilmembers.

Brown-Davis stated a good portion of the current communications position's time is spent working with the Incarceration Prevention and Reduction Task Force (IPRTF) which limits its communications capacity to a point. They could move that employee out of working with the IPRTF, but

then the IPRTF person loses their help.

County advisory group centralized administrative support and facilitation
(Approximate Timestamp: 19:29)

Donovan stated that leads them to the third item on the list, and he spoke about all the special projects that come up that Council staff has to work on.

Galloway stated there has been some interest from the administration in evaluating the duties their staff have on advisory groups and she spoke about the idea of centralized administrative support for advisory groups.

Schott-Bresler spoke about the range in the level of staff involvement on the advisory boards and stated a good starting point for conversation would be to discuss what duties the Council and Executive should have and where support needs to be added.

Brown-Davis stated it seems that one person is not going to be able to do all those agendas and ensure that all those minutes are done and asked if there would need to be a manager over other staff to do the job.

Jill Nixon, Council Office Staff, stated she can look at other counties that have a department of boards and commissions.

Halka stated the question too is where a position like this would reside since half of the boards and commissions are under the Executive and half are under the Council.

Schott-Bresler stated some effort to get a hold of it (whatever the model looks like) would be a great budget ask from their perspective.

Councilmembers discussed fostering and investing in the community advisory model, having a boards and commissions liaison, the fact that there has been an ask from the advisory groups for more assistance, exploring efficiencies such as AI for notes or doing only action minutes, and revisiting this budget discussion in a couple weeks so Council can take votes on things they want included in the budget.

Councilmembers and staff discussed the “Other requests/priorities” on the list.

Additional support for the Whatcom County Food Bank Network
(Approximate Timestamp: 36:56)

Councilmembers and staff discussed the request for ongoing funding from

the County of \$2 million for the Whatcom County Food Bank Network (and \$1 million from the city), what support they are currently receiving (including American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA and Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funds), whether it would set a precedent, increasing County support to some level but then also doing some government relations work to get State and Federal support as well, the fact that there is not another human/social services area where they are requesting significant amounts of General Fund dollars since human and social services spending is attached to dedicated revenue sources, having a discussion with the Finance and Administrative Services Department about what is available in terms of banked capacity, a request from Councilmember Donovan to have a presentation from the food bank in Committee of the Whole or Finance, whether it would make sense to set aside time in the budget process for presentations for non-departmental requests, and finding a way to let the food bank know what funding would even be possible.

Increase juror daily compensation (Approximate Timestamp: 45:15)

Galloway stated she would be interested in knowing what comparable counties are paying their jurors for a daily rate and Donovan asked whether there are non-General Fund dollars that can be used for juror compensation. Schott-Bresler stated it is likely to be a General Fund request.

Increase Councilmember travel budget (Approximate Timestamp: 46:50)

Councilmembers and staff discussed the request to increase the Councilmember travel budget and how that might be structured (individual Councilmember allotments and/or a shared budget amount), suggestions that they could budget \$10,000 for each Councilmember and leave the pooled amount the same at \$10,000 or budget \$5,000 for each Councilmember and add \$20,000 to the pooled amount, and having more discussion about whether Councilmembers are interested in using some travel budget. Galloway stated she thinks there is a significant return on investment for having Whatcom County represented in the State space. Brown-Davis stated she would reach out to individual Councilmembers to see what their plans are for travel and what configuration of the budgeted funds would make the most sense.

2025 IPRTF and JPOP Facilitation (to be funded from the Jail Fund)
(Approximate Timestamp: 51:34)

Donovan asked whether this would overlap with the FTE they are talking about for advisory groups and Brown-Davis stated it is different.

Council grant program - for small projects and councilmember priorities

(Approximate Timestamp: 52:12)

Galloway described what King County has done with a similar program and stated it would be a way for Councilmembers to help with one-time capital or other programmatic requests. Brown-Davis stated they reached out to King County in 2022 and learned that they gave \$5,000-\$10,000 grants with a \$170,000 beginning balance per district. It was unclear, however, how the program was administered. Buchanan stated the City of Bellingham had a block grant program. Brown-Davis stated that King County gave four different types of grants. She talked to Whatcom County's Finance director and he was not sure how the County would administer such a program but also did not say they could not do it. Scanlon stated he could see a program like the City of Bellingham's working in unincorporated areas but they would need to make sure there was very good oversight. Donovan stated there is a distinction between district-specific versus county-wide. Stremmer asked where the money would come from and Buchanan stated that is part of this discussion.

1 FTE shared councilmember administrative support OR 7 FTE Per councilmember Legislative Aide (Approximate Timestamp: 58:00)

Councilmembers discussed the Legislative Aid model in other counties, what aids can help Councilmembers with, the best model being that aids would be County employees so they can fall under the County's rules, how a part time Councilmember with a full-time aid would work, where they would work, having aids be jointly supervised by an individual Councilmember and by Council staff, scaling the FTEs for the size of our county to 3.5 FTEs split among the Councilmembers, and how they would coordinate sharing. Brown-Davis stated she sent Councilmembers questions to answer to get a better sense of what they are looking for.

Twin Sisters Market - \$110,000 (Approximate Timestamp: 1:07:30)

Scanlon stated he thinks they should bring them in to do a presentation and stated their work is county-wide.

Last five bullet items (Approximate Timestamp: 1:07:56)

Scanlon stated he hopes the last five bulleted items (ones he contributed) are in the Executive's budget and he briefed the Councilmembers on those. Schott-Bresler stated they will be looking at the structures for each of the Administrative Services departments and it will look like a major increase in the Administrative Service allocation.

Recruitment bonuses to help fill the open corrections slots in the Sheriff's office (Approximate Timestamp: 1:10:10)

Councilmembers and staff discussed having a longevity bonus as well as a

hiring bonus since the County spends a tremendous amount on training in the first two years of employment, how many departments are in the same boat, and whether they are doing wage studies to show the County is competitive. Schott-Bresler stated it would be great to have a work session and to bring HR in to have that conversation.

Scanlon spoke about presenting the County’s budget, and department goals and progress in a more readable and trackable format (for the legislative body as well as the public) as part of the Administrative Services request.

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 10:45 a.m.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Dana Brown-Davis, Council Clerk

Barry Buchanan, Council Chair

Kristi Felbinger, Minutes Transcription