

Whatcom County Council Committee of the Whole

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



Committee Minutes - Draft Minutes

Tuesday, October 7, 2025

1 PM

Hybrid Meeting - Council Chambers

HYBRID MEETING - ADJOURNS BY 4:30 P.M. (PARTICIPATE IN-PERSON, SEE REMOTE JOIN INSTRUCTIONS AT www.whatcomcounty.us/joinvirtualcouncil, OR CALL 360.778.5010); AGENDA REVISED 10.6.2025 (REVISED START TIME)

COUNCILMEMBERS

Barry Buchanan
Tyler Byrd
Todd Donovan
Ben Elenbaas
Kaylee Galloway
Jon Scanlon
Mark Stremler

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Cathy Halka, AICP, CMC

Call To Order

Council Chair Kaylee Galloway called the meeting to order at 1:02 p.m. in a hybrid meeting.

Roll Call

Present: 7 - Barry Buchanan, Tyler Byrd, Todd Donovan, Ben Elenbaas, Kaylee Galloway, Jon Scanlon, and Mark Stremler

Announcements**Special Presentation**

1. [AB2025-534](#) Presentation by Health and Community Services Department and VillageReach on Permanent Supportive Housing Assessment

Galloway stated this was a Council-requested carryover item in response to the interest in having more time for Council to discuss the findings that came out of the Permanent Supportive Housing Assessment.

The following people discussed the item with councilmembers:

- Kayla Schott-Bresler, Executive's Office
- Chris D'Onofrio, Health and Community Services
- Ann Beck, Health and Community Services
- Michaela Mandala, Health and Community Services

Byrd stated he hoped that they could assess the impacts and success of these programs using local data and not outdated or national data that does not apply to this area.

The speakers and councilmembers discussed that the way they define success locally is somewhat subjective, that outcomes of these programs show that they promote housing stability for the most part and play an important role in the housing system and for the unhoused population, that the assessment would show that the programs appear to be doing great if compared to the model from a decade ago but not as well when it comes to behavioral health services compared to larger metropolitan areas, that some of the data provided seemed almost contradictory in its determination of whether a program was successful, how success should be defined, that one issue is that there are not a lot of long-term program resources, that they want to look at the whole spectrum of services while understanding that some people will always need supportive housing and may not graduate from it, whether people in the programs are interviewed and evaluated for what types of issues they are facing when they enter programs and whether

they have become a healthier individual when they exit, that the public may have a different idea of what a positive outcome is than those in the public health sector, and that the study presented outcomes in a more positive or negative light depending on perspective.

This agenda item was PRESENTED.

Committee Discussion

1. [AB2025-509](#) 2025-2026 Mid-Biennium Budget Review

Aly Pennucci, Executive's Office, introduced the discussion.

Kayla Schott-Bresler, Executive's Office, read from a presentation (on file) on the EMS budget levy scenarios to address the structural imbalance of the fund, the projected ending fund balance for each scenario, the administrative recommendation on minimum fund reserves (at least three months of operating expenses) and most practical levy option (levying the full voter-approved capacity beginning in 2026), and next steps. She answered whether the \$2.5 million that they had authority to levy in 2025 but did not collect (banked capacity) is just a one-time amount, and stated over the next three years (2026, 2027, and 2028) there would be over \$7 million in banked capacity available.

She and councilmembers discussed that the fund balance projections include an increase in dispatch fees but not the two additional community paramedics that are called for in the levy plan, the need to see the “red line” (expenses in the presentation projections) being reduced or flattened before deciding on using banked capacity, that Council would need to take seriously the option of opening up the ALS and BLS contracts to have a meaningful impact on expenses, and so giving time (since those are mid-contract) for the EMS Oversight Board (EOB) to consider an executive-proposed resolution that talks about an expense prioritization process during the levy planning.

Jed Holmes, Executive's Office, spoke about variable revenues such as the Ground Emergency Medical Transportation (GEMT) and the impact (\$6 million) if that revenue is lost, and Donovan stated they should be planning for that.

Satpal Sidhu, County Executive, stated he would like support from Council to give the message that something needs to be done about the “red line.” The County taxes the people but the fire districts negotiate with the City of Bellingham, so the County has a lesser say on the expense side. There needs to be a willingness from the districts to look at the red line.

Councilmembers discussed the authority and responsibilities of the County and the City as it pertains to the funds, that they should work collaboratively with the fire chiefs to solve this problem, suggestions from councilmembers Galloway for reducing expenditures (on file in her EMS Memo), having the EOB look at potential ways to reduce costs and looking to Washington State Association of Counties (WSAC) and National Association of Counties (NACo) for help, being able to see the average cost per homeowner for any proposed tax increases for any County fund, and having that separated by incorporated and unincorporated residents.

Hank Maleng, Fire Chief (Whatcom County Fire District 16) and President of the Fire Chiefs Association for Whatcom County, spoke about discussions already taking place in the EMS Technical Advisory Board (TAB) to come up with potential cuts, and recommendations that have come from those discussions (taking the banked capacity and changing the required reserve balance percentage), why the reserve was set at 70 percent, and other ideas being discussed at the TAB, including potentially cutting some of the community paramedics, looking at the EMS office, and looking at the BLS allocation. He spoke about things they are doing already to save money, expenses they cannot control, and other things they can look at to flatten the red line. He answered questions and councilmembers discussed potential ways to decrease spending (such as paramedic training and potentially consolidating dispatch) and understanding what impact any of the cuts might have on the community so people can weigh whether the services are worth the extra cost.

Pennucci stated this conversation is highlighting the conversations they are having across all the funds in the county budget. Costs are outpacing revenues. Reduction options take more time to work through, so sometimes you have to go forward with generating more money to avoid an abrupt service reduction.

Councilmembers discussed with the Administration staff, the timeline for the budget and decision-making process, the impacts of the different scenario options on the fund and the process, being mindful of the importance of maintaining and restoring public trust and what scenario might better accomplish that, and that this is the last presentation on the budget before the executive delivers his recommended biennial adjustments.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED.

2. [AB2025-554](#) Discussion regarding Council meeting procedures requiring committee discussion

during the day for all evening introduction items

Galloway briefed the councilmembers on the traditional procedure of having an Ordinance be introduced and then discussed and recommended in committee and considered for adoption in Council two weeks later, versus the current procedure of discussing the items first in committee on the day of their introduction then following the traditional path after that. She stated there have been some clunky moments with the current way of considering items, maybe creating some redundancies or inefficiencies, so they wanted to bring it back to Council to give them an opportunity to reflect on it.

Councilmembers discussed the item and Cathy Halka, Clerk of the Council, answered questions. They discussed ways councilmembers can preview pending agenda items before an agenda is published and take a more active role in deciding what is on agendas, that having the supplemental budget request ordinances as a discussion in the Finance Committee before they are introduced allows councilmembers to vote against something in them (without triggering a re-introduction), developing an annual calendar to give councilmembers a year in review of upcoming big issues, the idea of going back to the traditional procedure with a few exceptions (budget supplementals, big issues, or at the discretion of the chairs), and why the process the Council follows is different than that of State or Federal meetings.

Scanlon moved to move back to the prior system except for having supplemental budgets under the current system.

The motion was seconded by Buchanan.

Councilmembers discussed the motion.

Aly Pennucci, Executive's Office, stated the Administration is meeting with chairs and trying to flag issues earlier (even before drafting legislation), and they are also interested in making sure councilmembers have time to discuss bigger issues. She thinks they can do that without formal direction.

Staff and councilmembers discussed whether the motion includes all budget items or just supplemental budget requests and that the Administration recommends that it just be supplementals and not every budget action.

The motion failed by the following vote:

Aye: 2 - Buchanan and Scanlon

Nay: 3 - Elenbaas, Stremmler, and Galloway

Abstain: 2 - Byrd and Donovan

This agenda item was DISCUSSED.

3. [AB2025-656](#) Discussion with County Executive's Office and Columbia Policy Advisors on 2026 State Legislative Session

Jed Holmes, Executive's Office, introduced the presentation.

Josh Weiss, Columbia Policy Advisors, read from a presentation (on file) on how the 2025 session ended, how WSAC and the Council did on their priorities, what to expect for 2026, and where they are at with agenda setting for the next session, and he answered questions about the Mosquito Fleet Act ferry bill.

Holmes spoke about when Council might be seeing draft Legislative priorities.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED.

4. [AB2025-700](#) Discussion of an ordinance amending Countywide Planning Policies, which reside in Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan Appendix C

Galloway stated that, from her reading of the memo, this is really not up for amendment or further discussion, but this is more of an update. They will introduce it this evening and have a public hearing on it at the October 21st meeting.

Matt Aamot, Planning and Development Services Department, stated there are no more amendments. It is just an up or down vote on October 21st. He answered whether there were any takeaways from the city discussions that the Council should be aware of, and stated all seven cities approved it.

Councilmembers discussed what things council worked on that were not in the ordinance to be introduced, and the added language regarding intergovernmental cooperation and tribal engagement.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED.

5. [AB2025-701](#) Discussion of proposed amendments to the 2025 Comprehensive Plan Update

Galloway introduced the discussion and stated they are creating time in each Council meeting to allow for councilmembers to put forward their thoughts, questions, and amendments.

Matt Aamot, Planning and Development Services Department, did not have an update but was available for questions.

Councilmembers discussed holding off on making amendments to Chapter

12 since they do not have a Planning Commission recommended version of that chapter yet, incorporating the Point Roberts drainage plan, seeing analysis of the future shorelines project and potential impacts of winter storms as it relates to city and county growth in vulnerable areas, and possible amendments to Chapter 7 that would acknowledge and incorporate the reality of the economic uncertainty that could result from the adjudication process.

Lauren Clemens, Climate Action Manager, spoke about where Chapter 12 is in the process with the Planning Commission, and Aamot and councilmembers discussed the timing for Chapter 2.

Galloway read from the “Council proposed Comprehensive Plan amendments” (on file) and stated that several of the items are marked as scrivener’s errors.

Donovan moved that all of the changes that Councilmember Galloway noted as scrivener in nature be accepted as amendments. On the attached table of amendments, they are (by chapter-amendment item number): 6-#1, 6-#4, 7-#1, 7-#2, 7-#4, 7-#5, 9-#3, 12-#1, 12-#3, 12-#16, and 12-#25.

The motion was seconded by Buchanan.

Councilmembers discussed some of the scrivener changes on Galloway’s form.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Buchanan, Donovan, Galloway, Scanlon, Stremmler, Elenbaas, and Byrd

Nay: 0

The following people answered questions:

- Mark Personius, Planning and Development Services Department Director
- Aly Pennucci, Executive's Office

Councilmembers and the speakers discussed working with Planning and Development and Public Works staff to get some of Galloway’s listed questions on Chapter 6 answered, getting feedback from the Bicycle / Pedestrian Advisory Committee, Chapter 6 item #18 regarding a proposed amendment to Policy 6L-3, whether adding the word “multimodal” to that policy might restrict the impact fees to those types of transportation

systems and maybe adding a couple sentences about the legislative intent there so it can be clear for the future, that Galloway's proposed amendment to Policy 6L-3 reinstates what was originally recommended by County staff, and the question of whether they should set a goal for a minimum percent of the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) to fund bike/pedestrian infrastructure improvements (see item #19 under Chapter 6).

Donovan moved to amend to adopt Galloway's proposed change #18 for chapter 6 (policy 6L-3) which is returning the impact fee language to what was originally there (staff-recommended language) so that it reads:

Adopt a transportation impact fee ordinance requiring new development to fund a proportionate share of the costs of multimodal transportation system improvements that benefit and are reasonably related to new development.

The motion was seconded by Byrd.

Dan Dunne, Planning Commission, spoke about the definition of multimodal and that the Planning Commission voted to include motorized vehicles in that definition.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 6 - Byrd, Donovan, Galloway, Scanlon, Stremmer, and Buchanan

Nay: 0

Abstain: 1 - Elenbaas

Scanlon moved to approve amendment #4 for chapter 4 which amends Goal 4G to add tribes and fire districts so that the first sentence reads:

Coordinate with non-county facility providers such as cities, tribes, school districts, fire districts, and other special purpose districts...

The motion was seconded by Donovan.

Councilmembers discussed the motion and what the whole goal states for context.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 6 - Donovan, Galloway, Scanlon, Stremmer, Buchanan, and Byrd

Nay: 0

Out of the Meeting: 1 - Elenbaas

Galloway spoke about her proposed replacement language for Goal 4-K (item #8 under Chapter 4) and councilmembers discussed it with Aamot and Personius. Personius stated they are OK with the proposed language, but no motion was made by Council.

Galloway stated she would work with staff to identify a path forward for a more efficient amendment process and she encouraged other councilmembers to get their proposed amendments submitted.

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

Motion approved that all of the changes that Councilmember Galloway noted as scrivener in nature be accepted as amendments. On the attached table of amendments, they are (by chapter-item number): 6-#1, 6-#4, 7-#1, 7-#2, 7-#4, 7-#5, 9-#3, 12-#1, 12-#3, 12-#16, and 12-#25.

Motion approved to adopt Galloway's proposed change #18 for chapter 6 (policy 6L-3) which is returning the impact fee language to what was originally there (staff-recommended language) so that it reads:

Adopt a transportation impact fee ordinance requiring new development to fund a proportionate share of the costs of multimodal transportation system improvements that benefit and are reasonably related to new development.

Motion approved to approve amendment #4 for chapter 4 which amends Goal 4G to add tribes and fire districts so that the first sentence reads:

Coordinate with non-county facility providers such as cities, tribes, school districts, fire districts, and other special purpose districts...

6. [AB2025-702](#) Discussion regarding efforts to address blighted properties and related health impacts in Columbia Valley

Scanlon briefed the councilmembers on the discussion (**AB2025-630**) that was held on this topic at the most recent Health Board meeting and other input that was received, and stated what would be helpful would be direction from the Council so that he and Councilmember Byrd can work on the draft ordinance that Byrd has started to draft, which addresses working on this issue county-wide.

Byrd spoke about the draft ordinance which aims to streamline the County's process of dealing with identified properties and stated it would formalize a task force. He asked whether the ordinance needs to include proposed code language.

Kayla Schott-Bresler, Executive's Office, stated they recognize that this is a big community need and that East County is an underserved area. She asked if the intent was to establish a community task force or an interdepartmental working group between some County departments, and stated they have concerns about establishing new task forces on specific issues without

having a more global conversation around task forces, advisory boards, and how much staff time this institution is spending on those things. She stated they are really struggling to take on new initiatives right now.

Councilmembers discussed that this might actually alleviate some of the staff workload, that this task force should have a sunset clause and could just be short-term, that they could theoretically establish the task force by resolution and not actually have it codified, and that they could include one of the deputy executives in their conversations.

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 4:31 p.m.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Cathy Halka, Council Clerk

Kaylee Galloway, Council Chair

Meeting Minutes prepared by Kristi Felbinger