

Whatcom County Council Water Work Session

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



Minutes - Draft Minutes

Tuesday, July 18, 2023

10:30 AM

Civic Center Building Conference Room / Hybrid Meeting

**HYBRID MEETING - (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
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 10:32 a.m. in a hybrid meeting.

Roll Call

Present: 6 - Tyler Byrd, Barry Buchanan, Ben Elenbaas, Carol Frazey, Kaylee Galloway, and Todd Donovan

Absent: 1 - Kathy Kershner

Announcements**Floodplain Integrated Planning (FLIP) update**

Paula Harris, Public Works Department, gave a presentation (on file) on the Flow Split Reach Team spring progress workshop. She spoke about the buckets of action items that came out of the design charrette.

Donovan asked about the Early Action Projects - Side Channel Enhancement bucket and whether they are still working on getting the permits for the bigger excavation.

Elenbaas asked about the project concepts generated at the flow split charrette for “Twin View Levee Setback” and “Twin View Levee removal plus Scott Ditch overflow.” He spoke about the overflow into Everson at Scott Ditch and that in the past, that water would come in and flood and then would go away and they could continue to farm. But we do not seem to be managing our drainages the way we used to, so that causes fields of standing water that cannot be planted. If they are planning on directing water into certain areas, he would like there to be a plan to move water away once it is there. He also spoke about beaver dams which do not allow water to drain or allow fish to come up. He stated we can spend millions of dollars for fish passages for roads but fish are not getting past the six beaver dams in his half mile of ditch. There is more to managing water than planning for where it is going to go and moving infrastructure out of the way, and we have to make sure we are doing it all.

Galloway asked whether they are thinking through ways to store water since there are seasons in which we have too much water and seasons in which we do not have enough.

Gary Stoyka, Public Works Department, stated they are trying to work on integrating all of these processes. They are looking at multiple solutions for

salmon recovery, water supply, and flood protection.

Galloway stated we are looking into the possibility of expanding our vulnerability assessment to up-river riverine flooding and she suspects it will be similar to our coastal vulnerability study and we will find that our 100-year floods today are going to be like our 20-25-year floods in less than a century from now. She stated a lot of what we are doing is very reactionary since we are in a state of crisis, but she would like to know what the cities and County are doing to be more proactive and what sorts of things the Council should be thinking about in terms of policies they can implement to be more proactive.

Harris spoke about things they could do to be proactive and about where the division is with capital projects right now.

Elizabeth Kosa, Public Works Department Director, stated if they have not had a chance to see the Jones Creek deflection berm, it is pretty impressive.

Harris and Stoyka answered whether they have plans to expand their staffing and whether they need Council funding support.

Washington Conservation Corps activity overview

Gary Stoyka, Public Works Department, stated they would go to the third item on the agenda because of some scheduling issues.

John Thompson, Public Works Department, introduced the presentation (on file) and the following people presented:

- James van der Voort, Washington Conservation Corps Crew Supervisor
- Laura Thompson, Washington Conservation Corps
- Meredith McCannon, Washington Conservation Corps
- Tyler Silver, Washington Conservation Corps

They spoke about the Washington Conservation Corps (WCC) program model, who the crew members are, the main work that they do, and a few of the projects they have worked on this year.

Elenbaas asked how they classify beaver dams, whether they would be considered fish barriers, and who determines that. Thompson stated it is determined on a site by site basis and is going to be somewhat seasonal.

Clerk's note: there were technical difficulties at about timestamp 1:06:33.

Then the meeting continued.

Whatcom County Watershed Portal overview

This item was not discussed.

WRIA 1 Planning Unit update

Chris Elder, Public Works Department, stated they had a presentation a couple months ago by Dr. Bob Mitchell at Western Washington University where he has modeled some high flow scenarios looking at flood impacts throughout the Nooksack. Elder has been in communication with Paula Harris from the River and Flood Division about how she has been able to factor in some future climate modeling into their river planning. The Planning Unit sent a letter to the Council which detailed that presentation and made a recommendation to Council to try to factor in some future climate models into the riverine floodplain planning. The Planning Department, Public Works, and Emergency Management are looking at collaborating on another application to continue exploring that vulnerability and risk assessment process and to take it upriver. He thinks the Planning Unit is very supportive of the County putting energy into that framework.

Dan Eisses, Birch Bay Water and Sewer District and WRIA 1 Planning Unit, stated the Planning Unit also had discussions on the upcoming Comprehensive Plan related to water supply. They discussed the different Comprehensive Plan uses that are allowed within the commercial forestry and rural forestry zones and what the need for water supply would be there.

Watershed Planning Update

Gary Stoyka, Public Works Department, updated the Councilmembers on the following:

- For Adjudication, the last thing they have heard from the Department of Ecology (DOE) is that they will probably not file that until the spring of 2024.
- We are working with the DOE to develop the technical assistance for which the Legislature gave us money.
- We are working with the Watershed Management Board developing a mechanism to decide how to spend the money to do technical studies and a collaborative process to go along with adjudication. However, that money must be spent this fiscal year and it cannot be spent until after adjudication is filed, so if they push off the adjudication too far, we will have to ask the Legislature to re-appropriate that money because we will not have time to spend it.
- At the upcoming meeting of the Watershed Management Board on

August tenth, they will talk about the 2024-2028 implementation strategy and the process for how to spend the legislative funds.

- The County has worked with some consultants to do a Nooksack instream flow augmentation and water supply options report which will be presented at a local government caucus meeting and then to Council at a later date.
- They will plan to present the current work plan on climate action to Council in September.
- The next Water Work Session meeting will not be until September.

Other Business

There was no other business.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 11:59 a.m.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Dana Brown-Davis, Council Clerk

Barry Buchanan, Council Chair

Kristi Felbinger, Minutes Transcription