

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, November 18, 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)**

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 Vice Chair Jon Scanlon 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

Committee Discussion

1. [AB2025-780](#) Discussion of an ordinance amending Whatcom County Code 2.02, County Council, to change the membership and quorum requirements of all standing council committees

Galloway briefed the councilmembers on the proposed ordinance and that it is coming back now so that it could take effect by the January reorganization meeting if it were adopted. She stated the ordinance would change the council committees to include all seven councilmembers. It also updates the pronouns in this section of code to be consistent with a resolution passed by Council a couple years ago.

Councilmembers discussed their preferences regarding three- or seven-member committees, that one of the reasons for the ordinance is to allow two councilmembers to talk with each other without quorum issues, whether there is a way to have three designated committee members who are basically responsible for doing the homework for a particular committee, looking at other models in the county and the state, and having some equivalent to a ranking minority member on the committees so as not to limit minority input.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED.

Committee Discussion, County Budgets and Levies

1. [AB2025-707](#) Ordinance amending the 2026 Whatcom County Budget, request no. 1, in the amount of \$20,970,606

Scanlon stated this discussion will be a combined discussion on the budget (this file) and the associated levies and budget requests (**AB2025-719, AB2025-721, AB2025-783, AB2025-723, AB2025-725, AB2025-788, and AB2025-795**), and that there will be a public hearing on these items on December 2, 2025. He read this and all the aforementioned files into the record.

Eric Richey, Whatcom County Prosecuting Attorney, spoke about his office's request for funding for a half-time position (see "Memo - Prosecutor Richey" on file) and answered questions. He stated the State is already funding part of a civil position for the support enforcement division of the Prosecutor's Office, and they are seeking the additional half-time funding for the civil division.

He and councilmembers discussed the support enforcement (half) position and that it is a separate division funded by the State, that the other (requested) half position will increase capacity in the civil division, and that the support enforcement funding from the State should continue for as long as needed.

Aly Pennucci, Executive's Office, discussed with councilmembers that the half position funding would likely come from fund balance in the General Fund, that this and a position in the Clerk's Office and a public records Information Services position were all noted by the Administration as critical needs in the fall, and that they recommend that the Council not try to identify an offsetting cut if they choose to support this request. She read from the "Revised Staff Memo 11.18.25," and "Substitute Executive Requested Changes for 11.18.2025" and spoke about how the third quarter financial report changed their analysis of the budget. She stated there is reason to be cautious but not overly alarmed, and they can think of the budget that the executive transmitted on October 21st as the base recommendation and the executive- and council-requested changes as amendments to that base. Those would be additional supplemental budget requests. She stated that when looking at the tables of requested changes, a decrease in revenue looks like a positive number (without parentheses) and a positive number on the expenditure side is an increase in spending. These amendments are not funding any more General Fund but are more technical amendments to the base.

Councilmembers and Pennucci discussed that moving to accept the executive's recommended changes would be accepting the whole budget before having the discussion about how they are going to pay for it, and that if they do not take the one percent in the General Fund, the caution going forward is ever greater.

Galloway moved that they recommend the executive's requested changes as outlined in the document titled "Substitute Executive Requested Changes for 11.18.2025."

The motion was seconded by Scanlon.

Galloway stated she does not see these changes as being substantively different than issues they have already discussed.

The motion carried by the following vote:

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

Nay: 0

Councilmembers discussed proposed councilmember amendments.

Scanlon moved to recommend to council to amend the budget to help pay for a countywide strategic plan as described in Supplemental Budget Request number 5225.

The motion was seconded by Galloway.

Councilmembers discussed the item with Pennucci. They discussed how the \$200,000 request is represented in the supplemental budget request, that this is just taking \$200,000 of the risk reserve portion of what was transferred from the Community Priorities Fund and spending it on the strategic plan, the benefits of having a strategic plan, that the supplemental lays out the goals for the work so people will know what they are getting and that Council will be able to review the contract to make sure it has in there what they would like to see, whether any of the work could be internalized within the County, and that execution of a contract may be delayed by the executive depending on what they see with sales tax and other revenue.

The motion carried by the following vote:

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

Nay: 0

Stremmler moved to amend the 2026 Whatcom County budget in regards to the General fund to cut \$209,000 from the Parks and Recreation Department budget currently allocated for extra help for parks facilities and Lake Whatcom forest lands and add \$209,000 to the Whatcom County Food Bank network.

The motion was seconded by Donovan.

Stremmler spoke about his motion.

Donovan stated he would like to get at least half a million dollars to the food bank for this one year so he would be willing to entertain this plus \$250,000 instead of the \$500,000 he would be proposing. They also need to have a concurrent conversation about the contract with the food bank and how it might be expanded so that they can spend the Healthy Children's Fund dollars on food for the short term.

Councilmembers discussed the motion with the following people:

- Aly Pennucci
- Cathy Halka, Clerk of the Council
- Bennett Knox, Parks and Recreation Department Director
- Christ Thomsen, Parks and Recreation Department

They discussed the motion, whether the food bank needs should be met by cutting the Parks and Recreation Department and how it would impact that department, that the Administration's preference is to go with Donovan's proposal to re-appropriate \$500,000 of budget authority for one year of funding for the community food banks and reduce the Administration's transfer of funds from the Community Priorities Fund (CPF) to the Capital Facilities Reserve Fund, that the motion would be to amend the base budget as reflected in Supplemental Budget Requests (SBRs) 5305 and 5306, how Parks utilizes temporary help and how it benefits the County in terms of revenue from campgrounds, how it would impact Parks operations at the campgrounds, and that Silver Lake Park has been used by people as a place to stay when they have a period of housing insecurity.

The motion failed by the following vote:

Aye: 3 - Elenbaas, Stremmler, and Byrd

Nay: 4 - Donovan, Galloway, Scanlon, and Buchanan

Elenbaas moved to reduce proposed or already budgeted funding for third party facilitators for boards and commissions. This reduction will affect supplementals proposed in the Executive recommended budget, which include 5016 and 5112.

The motion was seconded by Donovan.

Councilmembers discussed the motion with the following people:

- Kayla Schott-Bresler, Executive's Office

- Kimberly Thulin, Prosecuting Attorney's Office
- Miriam Karamoko, Whatcom Racial Equity Commission executive director

They discussed that this would affect the Justice Project Oversight and Planning (JPOP) Committee and the Racial Equity Commission, that the motion is just to not fund the facilitators but that those groups can still exist and be facilitated in another way, that funding for the Incarceration Prevention and Reduction Task Force (IPRTF) is required in the code, the impact the motion would have on the Racial Equity Commission, and that there is a potential in future years that the Commission will not need County funds.

The motion failed by the following vote:

Aye: 3 - Elenbaas, Stremmler, and Byrd

Nay: 4 - Galloway, Scanlon, Buchanan, and Donovan

Donovan moved to move \$500,000 from what was going to go into the Capital Facilities Reserve for one year of funding for the community food banks (represented by Supplemental Budget Requests 5220 and 5307 and 5219).

The motion was seconded by Scanlon.

Councilmembers discussed the motion with the following people:

- Satpal Sidhu, County Executive
- Kayla Schott-Bresler
- Aly Pennucci

They discussed that this would be one-time short-term support, that supporting the food banks is not a core responsibility of local government and that Council should send a resolution to the Federal and State Government, that this would not affect the risk reserve for storm related events, hesitancy about funding this with a mechanism that is not sustainable, that the County has two separate contracts with the food bank (one under the Healthy Children's Fund, and one under the Executive's Office), that the executive has the authority to cap administrative costs so that 30 percent of the funding does not get spent on food bank administration, and that a contract would come back to the Council to approve.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 5 - Galloway, Scanlon, Buchanan, Donovan, and Elenbaas

Nay: 2 - Stremmler and Byrd

Scanlon referenced his earlier-proposed amendment to add a note to the bottom of Exhibit A in the proposed ordinance titled "AMENDMENT NO. 1 OF THE 2026 BUDGET" which reads: The most recent Whatcom County Community Health Assessment was completed in 2018. The current Whatcom County Community Health Improvement Plan expires in 2026. On October 29, 2024 the Whatcom County Public Health Advisory Board and Whatcom County Board of Health approved motions recommending to the Executive that the budget for the 2025-26 biennium “include funding and staffing levels necessary to complete the Community Health Assessment.”

Champ Thomaskutty, Health and Community Services Department Director, stated they will start processing the health assessment at the end of the first quarter of 2026 or the beginning of the second quarter. Then the plan will take 14 to 16 months. He stated he thinks it would be reasonable not to pursue additional funds for 2026.

Scanlon did not make a motion.

Councilmembers discussed agenda item #8 (**AB2025-795**) and that it is up for introduction tonight.

Kimberly Thulin, Prosecuting Attorney's Office, stated a motion would need to be made regarding Prosecutor Richey's request if the Council was going to support that.

Scanlon moved to recommend supplemental item #5029, the additional FTE from the Prosecuting Attorney's Office.

The motion was seconded by Buchanan.

The following people discussed the motion with the councilmembers:

- Kimberly Thulin
- Aly Pennucci
- Kayla Schott-Bresler
- Raylene King, Superior Court Clerk

They discussed that the ask to the Council is to fund half of a position to address capacity needs in the Civil Division and that the State is paying for

the other half position for support enforcement, the cost of the Protection Order Facilitator position that was requested for the Court Clerk's Office (around \$100,000) and that both positions represent critical needs, that laws have changed about protection orders in the Court Clerk's Office and that the number of them has increased, that the State funding for the support enforcement position in the Prosecuting Attorney's Office will continue into the future as long as the County's efficiency in the work continues, that there may be budget lapse from a vacating position in the Prosecutor's Office but that you cannot add a position without full funding identified for it, and that it is likely that the executive would recommend these positions during the next biennial budget process if the Council were to move forward with both of them.

The motion carried by the following vote:

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

Nay: 0

Donovan moved that they add Supplemental Budget Request 5119 from the Clerk's Office for the protection order facilitator.

The motion was seconded by Scanlon.

Elenbaas discussed the motion and stated he really wants to support this.

Pennucci answered what the impact would be to other amendments Council passed, and that also draw from the General Fund, and stated it may mean that they will cast a broader net on other discretionary spending to pause until they have the year-end results for 2025 and quarter one results for 2026. There may also be some lapse there, so they will be looking at what the total impact will be and other ways to save money in the short term. She stated it makes it ever more critical to support the one percent in the General Fund.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 6 - Stremmler, Buchanan, Donovan, Elenbaas, Galloway, and Scanlon

Nay: 1 - Byrd

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

Motion approved that they recommend the executive's requested changes as outlined in the document titled "Substitute executive requested changes for 11.18 2025" (on file).

Motion approved to recommend to Council to amend the budget to help pay for a countywide strategic plan as described in Supplemental Budget Request number 5225.

Motion approved to move \$500,000 from what was going to go into the Capital Facilities Reserve for one year of funding for the community food banks (represented by Supplemental Budget Requests 5220 and 5307 and 5219).

Motion approved to recommend supplemental item 5029, the additional FTE from the Prosecuting Attorney's Office.

Motion approved that they add Supplemental Budget Request 5119 from the Clerk's Office for the protection order facilitator.

2. [AB2025-719](#) Ordinance authorizing the levy of taxes for Conservation Futures purposes for 2026
See discussion for this item under AB2025-707.
This agenda item was DISCUSSED.
3. [AB2025-721](#) Ordinance authorizing the levy of taxes for County Road purposes for 2026
See discussion for this item under AB2025-707.
This agenda item was DISCUSSED.
4. [AB2025-783](#) Ordinance authorizing the levy of taxes for County Road purposes for 2026
See discussion for this item under AB2025-707.
This agenda item was DISCUSSED.
5. [AB2025-723](#) Ordinance authorizing the levy of taxes for countywide emergency medical purposes for 2026
See discussion for this item under AB2025-707.
This agenda item was DISCUSSED.
6. [AB2025-725](#) Ordinance authorizing the levy of taxes for County and State purposes in Whatcom County, Washington, for the year of 2026
See discussion for this item under AB2025-707.
This agenda item was DISCUSSED.
7. [AB2025-788](#) Ordinance authorizing the levy of taxes for County and State purposes in Whatcom County, Washington, for the year of 2026
See discussion for this item under AB2025-707.
This agenda item was DISCUSSED.
8. [AB2025-795](#) Discussion of an ordinance amending the 2026 Whatcom County Budget, request no. 2, in the amount of \$12,120,000
See discussion for this item under AB2025-707.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED.

Committee Discussion and Recommendation to Council

1. [AB2025-807](#) Presentation on the Homeless Housing Program and request for motion to approve the final 5-Year Homelessness and Housing Plan

Clerk's note: Scanlon changed the order of the agenda items. These minutes follow the order as they were discussed.

The following people read from a presentation and answered questions:

- Ann Beck, Health and Community Services
- Chris D'Onofrio, Health and Community Services

They answered how they think the current five-year plan has done, where goals are in the plan that address things like lowering point-in-time counts and how current counts compare to past years, and what their research on prevention looks like.

Scanlon moved and Donovan seconded that the Request for Motion be RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL. The motion carried by the following vote:

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

Nay: 0

3. [AB2025-821](#) Presentation from Health and Community Services on the Children and Families Program and request for motion to approve the next Healthy Children's Fund Implementation Plan

Sarah Simpson, Health and Community Services, read from a presentation (on file) and answered questions about the timeline for the next implementation plan and how many children could be served with the available drop-in childcare slots.

Scanlon moved and Buchanan seconded to recommend the Healthy Children's Fund Implementation Plan to Council.

Councilmembers and Simpson discussed whether the language in the implementation plan regarding supporting vulnerable children and families is sufficient and compatible with continued investment in the food bank system using Healthy Children's Funds if Council so chooses, and whether they need to establish some sort of legislative intent to do so, and Simpson stated she sees that the commitment is laid out in the plan.

Scanlon's motion that the Request for Motion be RECOMMENDED FOR

APPROVAL carried by the following vote:

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

Nay: 0

2. [AB2025-820](#) Request for motion to approve Whatcom County's 2026 state legislative session priorities

Jed Holmes, Executive's Office, referred to the "Revised Draft Legislative Priorities" and the following person also spoke:

- Josh Weiss, Columbia Policy Advisors

Elenbaas spoke about adding language to the section regarding "Superior Court Funding for Adjudication Needs" and stated he would like it to be flexible enough that we could spend it on a negotiated settlement if we walk that road.

Holmes stated the Administrative Office of the Courts has a request very specifically for the Court's needs and that is what they are supporting, but that it could go under "Technical Assistance for Water Users Affected by Adjudication."

Elenbaas stated he would also think that if we could find a negotiated settlement, we would be telling the State that we may be looking for assistance in implementing that, so set that as a priority as well. He will work on some language.

Councilmembers and the speakers discussed whether "REET 4" (the affordable housing REET) is included in the priorities under some of its broad themes or in Washington State Association of Counties' (WSAC's) priorities, that the related bill is not likely to pass this session, whether raising the number for the senior exemption is still in conversation, the allocation for the Swift Creek cleanup, and that the WSAC legislative priorities may expand as the Legislative Steering Committee is currently contemplating some urgent issues.

Scanlon moved and Donovan seconded that the revised draft legislative priorities be RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 5 - Buchanan, Donovan, Galloway, Scanlon, and Stremler

Nay: 2 - Byrd, and Elenbaas

Committee Discussion, FCZD Budget and Levies

9. [AB2025-711](#) Resolution adopting 2026 budget for the Whatcom County Flood Control Zone District and Subzones (Council acting as the Flood Control Zone District Board of Supervisors)

Scanlon read this and the next two agenda items (**AB2025-709** and **AB2025-784**) into the record to be discussed together.

The following people briefed the councilmembers and answered questions:

- Elizabeth Kosa, Public Works Department Director
- Julia Green, Public Works Department

They and the councilmembers discussed the one percent levy option (**AB2025-709**) and that it would help the fund stay within the minimum fund balance of \$5 million, that the Flood Control Zone District budget is not assuming the increase and would be able to continue operating as normal without it, that they used to use more of this funding source for Lake Whatcom but that projects are mostly funded now by the Lake Whatcom Stormwater Utility or REET, that the fund balance will continue to diminish over time and that a one percent increase is more palatable than a large amount all at once, that they maybe should be taking banked capacity in this fund so the utility can function how it was supposed to (to add capacity), and that the \$5 million minimum fund balance might be out of date.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED.

10. [AB2025-709](#) Resolution authorizing the levy of taxes for the Whatcom County Flood Control Zone District for 2026 (Council acting as the Flood Control Zone District Board of Supervisors)

See discussion for this item under AB2025-711.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED.

11. [AB2025-784](#) Resolution authorizing the levy of taxes for the Whatcom County Flood Control Zone District for 2026 (Council acting as the Flood Control Zone District Board of Supervisors)

See discussion for this item under AB2025-711.

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 4:28 p.m.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Cathy Halka, Council Clerk

Kaylee Galloway, Council Chair

Meeting Minutes prepared by Kristi Felbinger