

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, May 21, 2024
3:25 PM
Hybrid Meeting**

**HYBRID MEETING - ADJOURNS BY 4:30 P.M., MAY BEGIN EARLY
(PARTICIPATE IN-PERSON, SEE REMOTE JOIN INSTRUCTIONS AT
www.whatcomcounty.us/joinvirtualcouncil, OR CALL 360.778.5010); AGENDA
REVISED 5.20.2024**

COUNCILMEMBERS

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

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Dana Brown-Davis, C.M.C.

Call To Order

Council Chair Barry Buchanan called the meeting to order at 3:40 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. [AB2024-338](#) Discussion and project update regarding the implementation of the new Financial System

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

- Perry Rice, Administrative Services Department Information Technology Manager
- Brad Bennett, Administrative Services Department Finance

They answered why they put \$3 million in the project fund if the contract with iKW Solutions (implementation consultant) was only \$1.2 million in 2022, and stated there are more components than just the consultant and there are more phases. They answered how late into last year they thought they could go live in that year (2023) and why the project now needs another year. Rice stated they did everything they could, but trying to get a project of this magnitude done in ten months was overly ambitious. He answered whether the money forecasted to be left over (\$949,946) is enough to finish the last two phases and stated he thinks it will go a long way toward phase II but it is nowhere close to what will be needed in phase III. He spoke about the costs for Yakima County for implementing a financial (ERP) system and stated the cost for their system was \$5 million and then over \$5 million for their new asset management system. Bennett answered whether there was an initial assessment done to determine what the cost would be, and stated the consultants had planned on just moving over what was in the County's World system. The problem, however, was that they were on the World system so early on (1994) that things were structured around the limitations of the old system and that was too much "baggage" to just bring over to the new one. Rice stated the initial contract with iKW was in line with the costs that the consultant came up with in the original assessment. He spoke about how they have scrutinized every single invoice and time stream and that they now have a new project manager at the County's request.

Satpal Sidhu, County Executive, stated it is not just about the consultant's hours; it is also a strain and time constraint on our own employees and they are meeting and coming up with a plan for that.

Byrd stated maybe the Administration should consider having someone on staff that has a focus on AI and how the County can start integrating that. Sidhu stated he just gave a presentation at Western Washington University about AI and government and he would like to share that with the Council too.

Scanlon stated, in light of an earlier conversation today that \$2 million might be too much to make sure that people can eat in this county, and discussions of cost overruns and delays, he hopes the County is being hard on some of these contractors to make sure they are getting things done on time.

Byrd spoke about looking at using the balance to hire County staff to do the work.

This agenda item was PRESENTED.

Committee Discussion

1. [AB2024-326](#) Discussion of a draft resolution requesting the County Executive prepare a proposal for the expansion of year-round shelter capacity and establish a homelessness and shelter subcommittee of the Whatcom Housing Advisory Committee

This agenda item was WITHDRAWN.

2. [AB2024-336](#) Update from the investigative committee assigned to review recent employment law decisions

Buchanan stated he, Elenbaas, and Donovan have met a number of times and the one thing they have picked up on are some values and objectives from a letter sent to them from County employees (read at the May 7 Council open session). He read the four requests in the letter and stated they are guiding principles they have adopted in their work. He stated they have identified a number of people involved in the process to interview, have started those interviews and are continuing that process, and are developing a scope of work for what a third party "look" would look like in terms of policies and events that led up to this incident.

Donovan stated when they are interviewing people they are asking them what can be improved. The goal of the process is to take from all these interviews what they can learn about not just this one incident, but also policies and procedures generally that they can then give to an outside

third-party person to do the “top-to-bottom-look” at processes. They hope, fairly soon, to get the scope of work out and then do a Request for Proposal (RFP) or somehow find someone outside of the county that can compare our policies to whatever best practices or better practices might be.

Elenbaas stated the focus is on making sure they come out of this process with a system in place in which everybody feels safe, and that they can trust, if they do have an issue, that they can bring it forward in an appropriate manner and it will not end up being front page news. There have been some recurring themes with a lot of people they have talked to and everyone has been up front. He stated he tries to ask everybody if there is anything they would like to see from them moving forward so that they are staying broad and open-minded in their approach.

Byrd asked about the timeline and whether they could have regular executive sessions where the rest of the Council can hear more detailed information or updates and ask questions of the committee members, and Buchanan stated the group would love to do that. Donovan and Buchanan stated they should get through the first round of people they have identified to interview in the next two weeks.

George Roche, Prosecuting Attorney’s Office, stated they can go into executive session any time the Council so moves. Buchanan stated they are not ready to do that today and Byrd stated maybe there are certain milestones at which they could meet in executive session.

Byrd asked whether they will discuss the list, sent by HR via email, of employees and names for separation agreements, and Roche stated the separation agreements themselves and the list they keep are public information but if they want to know the County's perspective on those, they need to have that conversation in executive session.

Stremmer asked whether the third party coming in is to assist with events that have happened up until now or with looking ahead, and Elenbaas stated they would be looking at what we do now and helping with structuring something in the future.

Scanlon thanked them and asked about whether it makes sense to research what other counties of similar size are doing regarding being a part of the risk pool or not, and what that might mean for this Council. He asked if the three Councilmembers would want to lead that or whether they should have a separate process for working with staff on some research.

Elenbaas stated they are identifying a few areas where there may be gaps and that need to be shored up, and he thinks learning more about exactly how the risk pool functions is something they are keenly interested in. Buchanan stated it is definitely part of the work they are doing.

Scanlon stated, regarding looking at best practices with harassment, he has been reminded to not just look at sexual harassment, but at all types, such as bullying and retaliation. He stated it sounds like they will lean on that third party to analyze already-published best practices and it might be interesting to bring some of that analysis here in an open session.

Galloway stated she requests that these updates be on every Council agenda and Buchanan stated that is what he has asked.

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 4:23 p.m.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Dana Brown-Davis, Council Clerk

Barry Buchanan, Council Chair

Kristi Felbinger, Minutes Transcription