

Whatcom County Council (Special)

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



Minutes - Final

Tuesday, July 22, 2025

3 PM

Hybrid Meeting - Council Chambers

**JOINT PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING - ADJOURNS BY 4:15 P.M. -
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
Kaylee Galloway
Jon Scanlon
Mark Stremmler

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Cathy Halka, AICP, CMC

Call To Order

Council Chair Kaylee Galloway called the meeting to order at 3:04 p.m. in a hybrid meeting.

Roll Call (Council)

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

Roll Call (Planning Commission)

Planning Commission Members Present: Kelvin Barton (Chair), Daniel Dunne, Suneeta Eisenberg, Jim Hansen, Dominic Mocer, Alvin Scott Van Dalen, Nicholas Greif, Rud Browne
Absent: Julie Jefferson

Announcements**Discussion**

1. [AB2025-513](#) Presentation by the Whatcom County Planning and Development Services Director and discussion relating to preliminary preferred alternatives for the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) associated with the 2025 Comprehensive Plan Update

The following people discussed the item with the councilmembers and commissioners:

- Mark Personius, Planning and Development Services Department Director
- Alex Wenger, City of Blaine
- Chris Behee, City of Bellingham

Mark Personius, Planning and Development Services Department Director, read from a presentation (on file) on where the cities are in their preferred plans, recommendations from the Planning and Development Services Department on the county urban growth areas (UGAs), and the process going forward. He stated the Council asked for information regarding these UGA boundary layouts and proposals in relation to sea level rise modeling that the County has been doing on the marine shorelines, as well as upstream Nooksack flooding, and asked to see both the draft FEMA maps and the existing effective FEMA maps which are currently adopted but will eventually be replaced by the draft maps. He presented on the proposed changes for the study areas of each urban growth area.

Birch Bay - Approximate Timestamp: 29:02

Donovan asked if it would make sense to remove the areas in purple on the Birch Bay map from UGA Reserve since they are in an area that they were told would be increasingly subject to flooding (see **AB2025-452** presentation from today's Climate Action and Natural Resources Committee), or whether they could zone it so that things get built higher. Personius stated the UGA Reserve has underlying zoning of one unit per ten acres which is the lowest-density rural zone right now.

Blaine (part 1)- Approximate Timestamp: 31:01

Alex Wenger answered what happens if the vote to de-annex the area in East Blaine fails, and stated that if it fails, they would no longer have anything to swap, so they would go back to the status quo, and that area would stay in the city.

Donovan asked about the timing of the Council having to make a decision on Chapter 2 before the aforementioned vote takes place.

Wenger answered whether the areas in the west are served by the Birch Bay Watershed and Aquatic Resources Management (BBWARM) District, and stated they are. He answered a question about BBWARM not even having the money to complete the capital plans that they have for stormwater. He spoke about area 1, which is the area they are proposing to swap, and why it made sense to them to do that, and why area 4 would change to a UGA Reserve and not become a UGA since it is next to city limits and a UGA just to the south.

Personius answered what the impact to the County would be from growth in West Blaine in light of concerns about traffic and stormwater drainage, and how they factor in the almost 2,000 residential parcels in the existing UGA that could be affected (and maybe made unlivable) by the effects of sea level rise by 2040 and 2080 when they determine population growth.

Columbia Valley and Everson - Approximate Timestamp: 40:51

Personius answered questions about industrial zoning in Columbia Valley and whether Emergency Management was considered for area 1B in Everson which may isolate people on an "island" in the event of a flood.

Blaine (part 2) - Approximate Timestamp: 41:36

Browne spoke about the problem with the area Blaine is proposing to remove (area 1) since it was previously proposed to be an area for

workforce and affordable housing, and asked why there was a decision to take it out.

Wenger answered and stated the new owner does not want to have development on their property.

All UGAs - Approximate Timestamp: 43:35

Browne stated his concern with any of the UGA forecasts is the analysis of what the critical area impacts are, that they are far greater than anything they are forecasting, and that they should be factored in before they decide what those UGAs have the capacity to take in terms of the land. He spoke about inaccuracies with wetland delineation and a concern that they would have to convert pasture land and crop land into mitigation land in order to support density (since mitigation can only be on land that is unforested).

Hansen requested that they discuss one UGA at a time.

Blaine (part 3) - Approximate Timestamp: 46:14

Councilmembers, Commissioners, Personius, and Wenger discussed whether there is any way for the County to force annexation, that counties have been working with the Legislature to try to find more incentives for cities to annex but that it is an ongoing challenge, whether County policies contributed in some way to area 1 not being developed, the dividing line between Blaine and Birch Bay, that people in Birch Bay think this should be slowed down, an overlap between the proposed study area 6 for Blaine and study area 2 for Birch Bay (each having two different outcomes) and how those areas were studied, and that the proposals are just proposals from two different perspectives that will need to be squared in the end.

Bellingham - Approximate Timestamp: 58:51

Jim Hansen stated he thinks they should bump up the population growth to be equivalent to the job growth and he suggested that areas 1, 2, and 3 be zoned Urban Residential Mixed (UR-MX) instead of R10 since they are prime locations for population growth.

Chris Behee, City of Bellingham, addressed the comment about the de-designation of areas 1-3 from UGA to UGA Reserve. He stated putting them into reserve status is less about accommodating something different than light industrial, and more about how unlikely it is that they will annex beyond the airport within the planning period. He answered a question about

the cement plant and the Oeser Company, and stated those are not in areas 1-3 but are within the Alderwood portion of Bellingham's existing unincorporated UGA. He spoke about how they requested that those areas be modeled by the EIS consultants as light impact industrial (though they are modeled as heavy impact industrial in the draft EIS) to see what the potential impacts are.

Personius answered questions about the Alderwood area and a similar area in Ferndale and when potential zoning changes might be made, and stated they would put that on their work program for next year.

Dan Dunne spoke about Hansen's suggestion about population and about his own research on the topic, and stated they could have a conversation about it if Council wants to consider something different than what is in the multi-jurisdictional resolution. Councilmembers spoke about that maybe being a future discussion but not for today.

Councilmembers and Behee discussed why area 4 is changing from UGA Reserve to UGA (while area 7 retains its reserve designation), why Bellingham is projecting lower average household size going forward, how Bellingham came up with their employment numbers, why the UGAs and population growth numbers are not included in the City of Bellingham's water planning, and that they may need to have another joint meeting to continue this discussion on August 6.

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 4:18 p.m.

The County Council approved these minutes on September 9, 2025.

ATTEST:



Cathy Halka, Council Clerk

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to be "Kaylee Galloway", written over a horizontal line.

Kaylee Galloway, Council Chair

Meeting Minutes prepared by Kristi Felbinger