

# **Whatcom County Council Public Works & Health Committee**

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



## **Committee Minutes - Final**

**Tuesday, June 18, 2024  
10:35 AM  
Hybrid Meeting**

**HYBRID MEETING - ESTIMATED TIME - THIS MEETING MAY BEGIN  
EARLIER/LATER THAN 10:35 AM - ADJOURNS BY 12:35 PM (PARTICIPATE  
IN-PERSON, SEE REMOTE JOIN INSTRUCTIONS AT  
[www.whatcomcounty.us/joinvirtualcouncil](http://www.whatcomcounty.us/joinvirtualcouncil), OR CALL 360.778.5010)**

### **COUNCILMEMBERS**

Kaylee Galloway  
Jon Scanlon  
Mark Stremmler

### **CLERK OF THE COUNCIL**

Dana Brown-Davis, C.M.C.

## **Call To Order**

Committee Chair Jon Scanlon called the meeting to order at 10:20 a.m. in a hybrid meeting.

## **Roll Call**

**Present:** 3 - Kaylee Galloway, Jon Scanlon, and Mark Stremmler

Also Present: Barry Buchanan, Todd Donovan, and Ben Elenbaas

## **Announcements**

## **Special Presentation**

1. [AB2024-280](#) Presentation from Noelle Beecroft, SNAP-Ed Extension Coordinator, on the WSU Extension SNAP Ed Program

Noelle Beecroft, SNAP-Ed Extension Coordinator, read from a presentation (on file) on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and answered questions. She stated it is a community nutrition education program for low income households and described how they deliver their programming and why the work matters. She answered how they are funded, and whether they have connected with the Health Equity Zone program in East County, and stated she has not done much with that program so far. She answered how this program was named and whether that name best characterizes the program. She stated the name varies from state to state and described how it has caused some confusion at times.

**This agenda item was PRESENTED.**

2. [AB2024-383](#) Annual Report on the Food System Committee to the Whatcom County Council  
Rhys-Thorvald Hansen, Whatcom Food Network Co-Director, and Food Systems Committee chair, read from a report (on file) and spoke about the creation of the Food Systems Committee and the Food System Plan and its goals. Hansen stated they have created task forces for each of the goal areas and their hope with those is that they can decentralize some of the decision-making as well as make an easier point of entry for community members and partners to engage and partner in, and also to accelerate, implementation and monitoring. Hansen stated the report highlights the challenges they are seeing in our food system right now and that food bank visits have grown by 127 percent between 2001 and 2023. They have identified two key areas for which they are requesting Council support:

1. Commit yearly funding to the Whatcom County Food Bank Network and other critical food access organizations actively

responding to the escalating food access crisis.

2. Commit to creating and funding a full-time food system specialist staff position as outlined in the Food System Plan.

Hansen answered whether there is a recommendation for where to place a food system specialist and stated either in the Planning and Development Department or Health Department.

Ann Beck, Health and Community Services, answered whether the committee has had conversations with those departments or with the Executive's Office about that, and stated it is in County Code that the Health and Community Services Department is the one supporting the position. They are working on figuring out who the next person to support the work will be.

Scanlon stated they are going to invite the Food Bank Network and Twin Sisters Mobile Market to come and present to Councilmembers about their proposals. He asked whether the Food Systems Committee is commenting on the Comprehensive Plan update and Hansen stated they sent a number of recommendations on Chapter 7 and 8 already, and then committee member Sean Hopps will work with the Agricultural Committee to see where they can line up and make joint recommendations as they go through the second round. Hansen stated they will follow up on those recommendations by email and that they are aiming to move from an annual report to quarterly reports as they build the capacity to do so.

**This agenda item was PRESENTED.**

3. [AB2024-405](#) Presentation on Whatcom County Health and Community Services Veterans Program

Ann Beck, Health and Community Services, introduced the discussion and the following people read from a presentation (on file) and answered questions:

- Amanda Burnett, Health and Community Services
- Liz Witowski, Health and Community Services

Witowski stated they are here today to let the Council know they will be seeing an Additional Service Request (ASR) from the program later this summer to increase direct line spending for veterans' assistance from \$100,000 to \$200,000 in 2024 and to let people know about legislation (the largest in modern history) passed by Veterans Affairs (VA) in 2022 extending benefits to veterans. She answered questions about the increase in

the cost of living and how it is affecting the number of people they are able to serve, what other counties are doing with the Area Median Income (AMI) threshold for financial assistance, and why King County is the goal to reach in that regard. She stated King County has the most robust services.

Buchanan stated, as a veteran, he thanks her for her hard work and ambitions for Whatcom County's program.

Witowski continued the presentation and answered who the two Veterans Service Officers (VSOs) are in Whatcom County. She answered whether they connect veterans with WTA as a transportation option (since the transportation contract with the Opportunity Council may come to an end) and stated they do coordinate with specialized transportation at the WTA but the program is really for people for whom WTA is not going to work. She spoke about a change in 2018 at which time the veteran's specialist became a Federally accredited Service Officer under a new WDVA partnership. She became accredited herself and the Bellingham Vet Center houses a second officer (Sean Dalgarn).

Sean Dalgarn, USAF combat veteran and WWU alumnus, spoke about what his work at the Bellingham Vet Center looks like and Witowski continued her presentation.

Witowski answered whether there is capacity to handle the increase in VA healthcare benefits and stated it has become quite a challenge.

Beck continued the presentation on program costs and budget and Burnett closed it out by speaking about the strategic priorities for the next year.

Witowski answered whether the number of veterans enrolled in VA healthcare is higher in locations where people are closer to more services and whether there is anything going on in the VA to potentially add more services in our area. She stated unfortunately, there will be no Community-Based Outpatient Clinics moved into Whatcom County. One was added in Everett in 2022 and the intent was that it would pull people from Skagit County south, thus offering more space for Whatcom County veterans at the Mt. Vernon clinic.

**This agenda item was PRESENTED.**

4. [AB2024-408](#) Presentation on the Climate Vulnerability Assessment Final Report
- The following people read from a presentation (on file):

- Sue Sullivan, Health and Community Services
- Andrea Petzel, Broadview Planning
- Valerie Pacino, Broadview Planning
- Rachel Gregg, Environmental Science Associates (ESA)
- Lamai Cox, Environmental Science Associates (ESA)

Gregg answered how Columbia Valley fits into the list of specific populations and communities which are more at risk than others, given how acute the wildfire smoke is there compared to anywhere else. She stated that area is shown in beige on the map (on page 17 of the presentation), indicating it is one of the areas that might need attention.

Sullivan answered whether they will be sending recommendations to the Planning and Development Services Department for how the County should be directing new development out of high-hazard areas for their consideration in the Comprehensive Plan update, and stated Planning will be using this assessment as part of the climate chapter of the Comprehensive Plan. She answered whether there will be discussion with Councilmembers about where the county is at for this summer as it relates to wildfire smoke, and stated they will be hearing more about it in July.

The speakers discussed with Councilmembers whether the story map presented is live and accessible via the Health and Community Services website and what the step looks like for turning the draft report into plans and budgets. Sullivan stated the website will be available after this meeting, and she answered whether the Health Department will be advising the cities on strategies such as tree canopy cover, and whether Health and Community Services will be involved in running cooling centers in the summer or just advising on that. She stated peer jurisdictions are telling her that their local emergency management partners are leading the planning and operations while Health is participating in the public health outreach, education, and intervention component.

George Roche, Prosecuting Attorney's Office, answered whether the County has something in place for its employees to help identify who might be more susceptible to heat or smoke events, and stated due to changes in State law, the County enacted new policy. The policy is temperature-based and essentially mirrors State law at this point.

Matt Klein, Sheriff's Office Division of Emergency Management (DEM), spoke about coordinating with the Health and Community Services Department, and the City of Bellingham Office of Emergency Management

so they are able to support the whole community effort in Whatcom County.

Scanlon asked about the Map Your Neighborhood program through the Washington State Military Department and whether it includes the types of questions that would be needed for neighborhoods and communities to be prepared for smoke and heat, and Sullivan stated she could look into that.

Donovan asked about misting areas and splash parks and that those could be tangible things the County could invest in.

**This agenda item was PRESENTED.**

### **Committee Discussion**

1. [AB2024-314](#) Ordinance establishing Whatcom County Code Chapter 2.180 Naming County-Owned Public Buildings, Properties, Parks, and Facilities

Scanlon gave an update since the last meeting, and stated he would like to recommend that they push this off for another few weeks because the Parks and Recreation Commission is going to take it up at their meeting this Thursday, and he believes their input will be helpful since Parks does not have a process for naming various things. He stated Bennett Knox from Parks also has some good questions for Councilmembers regarding costs for things like signs and plaques.

Bennett Knox, Parks and Recreation Department Director, stated the other part for them is that as they go into the master planning process, there are going to be a lot of opportunities to generate some external funding. He answered how soon they would get helpful and relevant feedback from the Parks and Recreation Commission that can then inform this ordinance, and stated they should get feedback pretty quickly but would like to then do some research on what other Parks departments have as far as policies. That way they can come back to Council with an initial framework of what they would propose. He would push for the 23rd of July if that is possible.

Buchanan stated there are no time constraints on this.

***Scanlon moved*** that they recommend to hold this item to July 23rd and have it back in this committee.

Donovan asked whether the idea is to take Parks out of this ordinance and Scanlon stated he would like to see Parks in it.

Galloway spoke about the concern of the Parks Department (as noted in “Parks comments for 6.18.2024”) and suggestion to have separate code for Parks that is similar to that for road naming, and whether that should be considered concurrently.

**Scanlon's motion that the Ordinance be HELD IN COMMITTEE to July 23rd and come back in this committee carried by the following vote:**

**Aye:** 3 - Galloway, Scanlon, and Stremmler

**Nay:** 0

Motion approved that they recommend to hold this item to July 23rd and have it back in this committee.

### **Items Added by Revision**

There were no agenda items added by revision.

### **Other Business**

Scanlon stated they are hoping to get the Child and Family Well-Being Task Force in here in July and one item Councilmembers had an interest in last time was the question of where to potentially place this work. He asked if there were any other items Councilmembers wanted to hear about when they come.

He stated the Salish Current had an opinion piece looking at the make-up of County Health Boards and specifically that of Whatcom County. He asked Councilmembers to take a look at the article and stated he thinks it is something they could explore. They could look at how changes in other counties are working out.

He stated he met up with former Bellingham Councilmember Kristina Michele Martens about her Health Equity Zone work in East County. He answered whether there would be potential opportunity for them to come and give a presentation about what they are working on or for having a resolution that might support their efforts. He stated the program will give a report to the State by the end of next month, so once that report is done, Council could ask them to come in. He will coordinate with Chuckanut Health Foundation on that.

Councilmembers discussed other business.

### **Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 12:16 a.m.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL  
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

**Jon Scanlon-via email 6/26/2024**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dana Brown-Davis, Council Clerk

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Jon Scanlon, Committee Chair

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Kristi Felbinger, Minutes Transcription

SIGNED COPY ON FILE