

Whatcom County Council Committee of the Whole

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



Committee Minutes - Final

Tuesday, October 21, 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); AGENDA REVISED 10.20.2025**

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 1:01 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. [AB2025-656](#) Discussion with County Executive's Office and Columbia Policy Advisors on 2026 State Legislative Session

Galloway stated this item was removed from the agenda.

Jed Holmes, Executive's Office, stated they intend to bring it back on November 5th.

This agenda item was WITHDRAWN.

2. [AB2025-733](#) Discussion of preliminary Planning Commission recommendations on Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan Chapter 5, Utilities, associated with the 2025 Comprehensive Plan Update

Lucas Clark, Planning and Development Services Department, introduced the chapter.

He and Elizabeth Kosa, Public Works Department Director, answered questions about how Chapter 5 might address siting around essential public facilities, alternative fuels and energy sources, and climate impact mitigation work.

The following additional people discussed the chapter with councilmembers:

- Mark Personius, Planning and Development Services Department Director
- Dan Dunne, Planning Commission
- Gary Stoyka, Public Works Department

Councilmembers discussed Goals 5-D and 5-E and what differentiates them, whether there is opportunity to combine or expand upon them, how the proposed policies in those sections support the goals or provide a

strategy to achieve them, why they are broad, understanding what State and Federal laws are going to preempt County code, whether some concerns might be covered in franchise agreements, and if they could request that the Planning Commission give them feedback and their thoughts behind those two goals.

Councilmembers and the speakers discussed Policy 5V-2 (page 5-23 of the proposed chapter) and why it says, “The County’s waste diversion goal is to increase source-separated recycling,” if they recently amended code to transition away from source-separated recycling to single stream. They discussed whether the Solid Waste Advisory Committee (SWAC) reviewed this waste section, and that the practice of single stream is already in place.

They discussed Policies 5S-5, 5S-6, and 5S-7 (pages 5-20 and 21) regarding potentially moving water from the mouth of the Nooksack River back upstream. They discussed whether there has been discussion about adding other engineering suggestions around water in the county, that more of that conversation about water projects will be in the environment chapter, and discomfort with the language about installing pipelines for this purpose.

Donovan moved to remove the Planning Commission’s addition of Policies 5S-5, 5S-6, and 5S-7 (pages 5-20-21 of the Preliminary Planning Commission Recommended Version).

The motion was seconded by Galloway.

Councilmembers, Commissioner Dunne, and Gary Stoyka discussed whether the language should be more broad to provide more than just one option, the Planning Commission’s rationale for moving those policies forward and that it is a request to determine feasibility, amending the language so that it says to consider or enable a study on these ideas, studies regarding water storage and supply and flood control being looked at by the County’s Natural Resources Division and a compendium of water solution ideas, that a broader policy could be added to this chapter or to the draft of Chapter 10 (Environment), allowing for potential consideration of Lake Whatcom water serving a greater population in the county, and whether the Planning Commission could reconsider these policies and propose policy language for Chapter 5 that encourages alternative water supplies, and addresses the need for projects that facilitate instream flows and augment water supplies in the Nooksack.

The motion to amend carried by the following vote:

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

Nay: 2 - Stremmler and Elenbaas

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

Motion approved to remove Policies 5S-5, 5S-6, and 5S-7 (pages 5-20-21 of the Preliminary Planning Commission Recommended Version).

3. [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

Note from the Clerk of the Council: The motions made on **AB2025-513** in Committee of the Whole today (October 21st) are preliminary guidance for the Planning Commission's consideration. These motions are not intended to be a final approval of UGAs.

Donovan introduced the discussion, and spoke about a memo from the Planning and Development Services Department to Everson, Nooksack, Blaine, and Sumas about the size of their UGAs and unnecessary expansions into floodplains and agricultural areas, and stated he would like to discuss Blaine's proposal and whether it makes sense.

Matt Aamot, Planning and Development Services Department, spoke about concerns that the Planning Department had about some of the UGA proposals, including oversizing UGAs (Everson, Nooksack, and Sumas), and a new swap provision that the State Legislature passed (Blaine). Planning sent emails to the three cities to address their issues and those cities sent addendums to their proposals (on file).

Byrd spoke about the approval process regarding Blaine's UGA swap and stated he agrees that they should look at it now and not wait until after Blaine's November vote.

Donovan moved that they do not go forward with the UGA proposal for Birch Point that is coming from Blaine.

The motion was seconded by Byrd.

Aamot stated that Blaine had officially withdrawn their proposal until after the election. Also, all the cities withdrew their UGA reserve proposals for now, and those would be considered in the next year or two after the Comprehensive Plan update is done. He showed a map for Blaine that showed the UGA reserve areas withdrawn from their proposal, but clarified that Blaine has withdrawn their whole proposal because they want to wait until after the November 4th election on a de-annexation in East Blaine.

They said they will re-submit a proposal after they know the election results, so this would be guidance for Blaine to consider when they reconsider what they are going to submit.

Donovan stated his motion is both denying the UGA reserve and converting that rural to UGA (the Birch Point proposal in total) and that regardless of what happens in Blaine's election, Council should make a clear statement that this is not the best place to expand.

Elenbaas stated he supports the idea that Donovan is bringing forward but wonders if they need to amend the motion to acknowledge that Blaine has not proposed it.

Donovan amended his motion to clarify ***and moved*** that Blaine's UGA proposals do not include expansions in Birch Point.

Byrd accepted the amendment as the seconder.

Councilmembers discussed the motion, that it is sending a signal that the Council is not willing to entertain a UGA expansion in Birch Point for the City of Blaine and that Blaine's UGA proposals will not include expansions there, that they do not need to wait for the election because either way, the Council does not think this is a good place for the UGA to expand, that conversations would need to take place with the County and City to discuss what the County would need in order to address things like impacts of stormwater and traffic if Blaine were to expand to the West, and how it would affect Blaine's land capacity.

Galloway stated the motion is giving Council's guidance to the City of Blaine for when they resubmit their proposed UGA, and specifying that it not include the two areas that have "X-es" (the withdrawn UGA reserves) and the grayed-out area just to the right of that ("Rural [UGA]" on the map for Blaine discussed today).

Donovan's motion carried by the following vote:

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

Nay: 1 - Scanlon

Councilmembers concurred that they could skip the next agenda item (**AB2025-701**) so they could continue discussing more UGA proposals.

Donovan moved that they accept the Bellingham UGA proposal (as represented on the Map UGA-2 (page 9) of the Bellingham UGA Proposal

(on file).

The motion was seconded by Buchanan.

Chris Behee, City of Bellingham, summarized and answered questions about their proposal on the updated map (Map UGA-2).

Aamot answered whether Bellingham's proposal aligns with population (and particularly housing) projections and stated they did not have significant concerns.

Kiana Oos, Council staff, answered a question about notations on each jurisdiction's surplus in housing.

Donovan's second motion carried by the following vote:

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

Nay: 2 - Elenbaas and Stremmler

Donovan moved that they approve Map UGA-4 (the Ferndale proposal), with the understanding that it does not include study areas six and seven.

The motion was seconded by Buchanan.

Councilmembers looked at a map of Ferndale's proposals with those UGA reserves shown as being withdrawn, and discussed the areas in question and zoning them appropriately.

Michael Cerbone, City of Ferndale, stated this is Ferndale's current proposal and he answered questions about the map. The map that was displayed on the screen was not correct as it pertained to the area west of Enterprise Road (they are not requesting it for inclusion at this time).

Galloway stated that is also represented on the map on page nine of the Ferndale UGA Proposal (on file) document (page 10 of the PDF) and still shows (area 4) as UGA. The map on page three of the document (page 4 of the PDF) is the 2016 map and shows area 4 as a UGA reserve.

Cerbone stated the motion could be to retain the UGA as currently in existence. It is not changing, and what is currently in the Comprehensive Plan is correct.

Donovan clarified that his motion is to retain Ferndale's 2016 map as proposed (Map UGA-4) on PDF page four of the Ferndale UGA Proposal.

Cerbone answered questions about the map.

Buchanan stated the motion is amendable as the seconder.

The motion carried by the following vote:

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

Nay: 0

Galloway stated there were no changes to the City of Lynden.

Donovan moved to accept Lynden's proposal as described on Map UGA-5.

The motion was seconded by Stremmer.

Aamot answered a question about the map and stated Lynden is basically proposing not to change their UGA, but the map will be updated (if not already) to account for the recent change the Council made to revise the corporate boundaries of the City of Lynden to include a portion of Flynn Road right-of-way (**AB2025-579**).

The motion carried by the following vote:

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

Nay: 0

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

Motion approved that Blaine's UGA proposals do not include expansions in Birch Point (the two areas marked with a red "x" and the area marked as "Rural (UGA)" between them on the attached "Blaine UGA Proposal as discussed on 10.21.2025").

Motion approved that they accept the Bellingham UGA proposal (as represented on the Map UGA-2 (page 9) of the Bellingham UGA Proposal (on file).

Motion approved to retain Ferndale's 2016 map as proposed (Map UGA-4) on page four of the Ferndale UGA Proposal.

Motion approved to accept Lynden's proposal as described on Map UGA-5.

4. [AB2025-701](#) Discussion of proposed amendments to the 2025 Comprehensive Plan Update
- Galloway read the item into the record and stated they ran out of time for this item, so they will skip it for now.

This agenda item was NOT ACTED UPON.

5. [AB2025-708](#) Discussion of an ordinance amending the 2026 Whatcom County Budget, request no. 1, in the amount of \$20,970,606

Galloway stated the title for this item (and for **AB2025-707** for introduction this evening) was revised (see Agenda Revision Notice dated October 20, 2025 and attached to this meeting).

Aly Pennucci, Executive's Office, read from a presentation (on file) and answered what revenues are assumed in the eleven percent projected General Fund ending fund balance in 2028 (page 17 of the presentation). She spoke about several factors and stated it assumes the one percent is taken.

Kimberly Thulin, Prosecuting Attorney's Office, spoke about not being able to hear some speakers.

Pennucci answered whether the expenses rate-of-increase changes between 2026 and 2027 (on the graph on page 17 of the presentation). She stated there is a slight change, and that if nothing was done going forward, we would continue to see a modest increase in the revenue line and slightly larger increase in the expense line.

The following additional people discussed the item with the councilmembers:

- Charlene Ramont, Health and Community Services Department
- Kayla Schott-Bresler, Executive's Office

They discussed whether Council should consider anything now to get ahead of the next biennium and potentially slow the growth of expenses, that the Health and Community Services budget would remain a small percentage of the General Fund and be less than five percent with the proposed reduction, that there may be a proposal in the next biennium to separate out the dedicated funds in the Health Department to make funding sources more clear, the projects to be funded by the Community Priorities Fund, building into the Council's schedule a longer period of time to consider this budget, potential impacts of a longer process on procuring new 2026 contracts for which there is not yet budget authority, how there is still money left in the Community Priorities Fund and a request received by the Council to use some of it for the food bank, how much of the potential budget reduction scenario exercise translated into this budget proposal and why other vacant positions in other departments (other than Health and Community Services,

Public Works, and the Sheriff's Office) were not recommended to be frozen, that the Economic Development Investment (EDI) fund increase is going to fund projects that were already approved, that the levy ordinances they will be discussing next are just the mechanism in order to implement the budget proposal for the one percent increase (on most of them) and use the banked capacity in the EMS levy, the timeline for considering those for adoption, and that the Administration is introducing the entire package of legislation that is necessary to implement the proposed mid-biennium adjustment and the Flood Control Zone District budget.

Galloway spoke about the potential pathways for the timeline for considering the budget. Two of the pathways would include introducing the budget and associated levy ordinances this evening. They would then have a single public hearing for all of that at their November 5th meeting. Upon conclusion of that public hearing they would technically be eligible to take action. The other alternative, if they do not feel like they are ready to take action, would be to have a motion to hold and to set forward a timeline for having November 18th dedicated to amendments and reintroduction should those amendments be substantive, with final action proposed for a special meeting on the afternoon of December 2nd.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED.

6. [AB2025-710](#) Discussion of a 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)

Galloway read the item into the record and stated the related resolution (**AB2025-709**) is on for Council introduction and would be the levy resolution that would raise the revenues necessary to pass a balanced budget for the Whatcom County Flood Control District.

Aly Pennucci, Executive's Office, stated the resolution does propose a one percent increase, which is about a \$.69 estimated impact to the average homeowner.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED.

7. [AB2025-712](#) Discussion of a resolution adopting the 2026 budget for the Whatcom County Flood Control Zone District and Subzones (Council acting as the Flood Control Zone District Board of Supervisors)

Gary Stoyka, Public Works Department, read from Exhibit A of the resolution regarding the Flood Control Zone District proposed 2026 budget. He spoke about what they had to trim from the budget to maintain

the required \$5 million fund balance, and that they also considered the lapse (unused funds) in order to get there. He stated they have it under control for this year, but would have to look at it again if they had a big flood event or implemented more capital projects. Several long-term flood-related capital projects are being planned, and they will definitely need a lot of outside funding, but having to pay ten or twenty percent match on those will increase their need for more funding.

Donovan stated it is an odd thing that they have always had a flat rate for the fund balance instead of a percentage and it has been \$5 million for a long time. \$5 million from 20 years ago is probably \$7.5 million now. He stated they need to examine the health of that and he asked when they should consider making the required fund balance a percentage or something more modern.

Stoyka spoke about taking the banked capacity twice before and answered whether there is additional banked capacity remaining. He stated his understanding is that there is not. He answered questions on local revenue sources for the increase in flood projects.

Stremmler stated they took banked capacity in 2023 but zero in 2024 and 2025, so there is capacity there.

Galloway spoke about her growing anxiety about what happens when the next flood or natural disaster comes and FEMA is not responding, the State emergency department is tapped out, and it lands on the County, as the local jurisdiction, and we have no money to do anything about it. She stated it is important to think about setting expectations for the community, because at some point we are not going to be able to commit to the levels of service that we have had considering the current budget constraints.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED.

8. [AB2025-720](#) Discussion of an ordinance authorizing the levy of taxes for Conservation Futures purposes for 2026

Aly Pennucci, Executive's Office, stated the average impact to a homeowner is estimated at about \$.15.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED.

9. [AB2025-722](#) Discussion of an ordinance authorizing the levy of taxes for County Road purposes for 2026

Aly Pennucci, Executive's Office, stated the estimated impact, only to properties in unincorporated Whatcom County, is about \$5.70 annually for

a home that is valued at \$650,000.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED.

10. [AB2025-724](#) Discussion of an ordinance authorizing the levy of taxes for countywide emergency medical purposes for 2026

Aly Pennucci, Executive's Office, stated with the combined use of banked capacity and one percent, this will generate about \$2.7 million annually, and the estimated impact to an average homeowner (at \$650,000 home value) is \$28.53.

Galloway stated this received recommendation from the EMS Oversight Board.

Debbie Arthur, new EMS administrator, introduced herself and spoke about her work experience.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED.

11. [AB2025-726](#) Discussion of an ordinance authorizing the levy of taxes for County and State purposes in Whatcom County, Washington, for the year of 2026

Aly Pennucci, Executive's Office, stated this is the General Fund levy that is proposing to apply the one percent annual increase, excluding the portion of this levy that is dedicated to the Healthy Children's Fund. The estimated impact to the average homeowner is \$4.09 a year and it will generate \$387,351.

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.

The County Council approved these minutes on November 5, 2025.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Cathy Halka, Council Clerk

Kaylee Galloway, Council Chair

Meeting Minutes prepared by Kristi Felbinger

SIGNED COPY ON FILE