

Whatcom County Council Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee

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



Committee Minutes - Final

Tuesday, July 22, 2025

11:15 AM

Hybrid Meeting - Council Chambers

**HYBRID MEETING - MAY BEGIN EARLY - ADJOURNS BY 12:00 P.M.
(PARTICIPATE IN-PERSON, SEE REMOTE JOIN INSTRUCTIONS AT
www.whatcomcounty.us/joinvirtualcouncil, OR CALL 360.778.5010)**

COUNCILMEMBERS

Barry Buchanan
Tyler Byrd
Jon Scanlon

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Cathy Halka, AICP, CMC

Call To Order

Committee Chair Barry Buchanan called the meeting to order at 11 a.m. in a hybrid meeting.

Roll Call

Present: 3 - Barry Buchanan, Tyler Byrd, and Jon Scanlon

Also Present: Todd Donovan, Ben Elenbaas, Kaylee Galloway, and Mark Stremmler

Announcements

Special Presentation

1. [AB2025-532](#) Presentation of updated independent jail capacity analysis and draft report related to new public health, safety and justice facility

Kayla Schott-Bresler, Executive's Office, introduced the presentation.

Adam Johnson, STV Project Manager, stated this presentation will be expanding on what they presented last time.

Eric Ratts, DLZ Architects and Engineering Vice President, read from a presentation (on file). He spoke about the model they used for the study, which looks at data from past jail use to plot broad trends that are used to map anticipated future demand, and that the rate of bed capacity projections can be affected by legislative changes down the road. He spoke about the four data types they look at to project the rated bed needs, which are county population trends, admissions to the County jail, average daily population (ADP), and average length of stay (ALOS).

He answered whether there is an assumption that the growth trends in the four data types are linear or whether they take other things, such as changing legislation or potential success of diversion programs, into account, and stated statistical models are usually linear but they do factor in success rates and what the County is currently doing to some degree.

He then presented recommendations for the number of rated beds needed in the jail today, and used the 80 percent rule to also figure in a 20 percent margin to account for peak population periods and the ability to have special housing units, and another 20 percent to account for growth by the year 2030. He then applied that formula for 2040, and 2050 and answered questions about those recommendations.

He answered whether the 20 percent growth factor is flexible and could be changed to a different number (such as 10 percent) and stated it absolutely is, but it gives the county an opportunity to capture some of the bed needs that they will have in the future at today's cost.

He spoke about the beds the County might need for classification or separation of inmates, how many might be needed in each of the three time periods, types of special housing units, and that special spaces (including special housing units, laundry, kitchen, visitation, etc...) should be built for 2050 so that they do not have to add them later in an area that is not best suited for them. He stated they can add additional general population space in the future, but core spaces should be built out up front. He spoke about the importance of people coming into the jail going through orientation in order to understand their needs, treat them, and ultimately get them to a general population. He answered questions about the special housing, having a model that works for our community, and why they projected slower growth between 2040 and 2050 than between 2030 and 2040, and stated the County should always consider building the right types of beds.

Scanlon stated he wonders if the Executive or any of the advisory bodies are looking at the factors (as noted on page 57 of the "Draft Report" on file) that influence average daily population (ADP) and whether it would make sense to do anything that can influence ADP and average length of stay as they are making fiscal decisions this fall. He gave an example of advocating with the Legislature for another judge. He asked when this decision needs to be made.

Schott-Bresler stated there is no decision before them today. This jail capacity analysis will be shared with the design builder who they will bring on in August, and the design builder will develop a few scenarios that have different capital and operational projections (including size and configuration of the facility). Those options will be presented to the Council and they will see the tradeoffs of each decision point.

Adam Johnson, STV, stated that is correct as far as their work goes with this study itself.

Schott-Bresler answered whether that presentation will look at investments the County can make now to reduce population.

Scanlon asked if the IPRTF could look at some of these factors and make recommendations to the Council.

Buchanan stated the design of the IPRTF is to look for opportunities that can reduce the amount of people going through the incarceration system. It is certainly on the task force's radar. He stated he thinks they need to understand how the diversion programs work to try to quantify how they affect the needs assessment and bed reduction.

Donovan stated this will come down to how much money they have and prioritizing their resources.

Ratts spoke about the purpose of special housing units and how they affect the cost.

Stremmler stated he would like to hear from the Sheriff's Office and others about policies and procedures that drive the design.

This agenda item was PRESENTED.

Items Added by Revision

There were no agenda items added by revision.

Other Business

There was no other business.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 12:04 p.m.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Barry Buchanan-via email 6/5/2025

Cathy Halka, Council Clerk

Barry Buchanan, Committee Chair

Meeting Minutes prepared by Kristi Felbinger

SIGNED COPY ON FILE