

Whatcom County Council Committee of the Whole

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



Committee Minutes - Final

Wednesday, November 8, 2023

1:15 PM

Hybrid Meeting

**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)**

COUNCILMEMBERS

Barry Buchanan
Tyler Byrd
Todd Donovan
Ben Elenbaas
Carol Frazey
Kaylee Galloway
Kathy Kershner

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Dana Brown-Davis, C.M.C.

Call To Order

Council Chair Barry Buchanan called the meeting to order at 1:15 p.m. in a hybrid meeting.

Roll Call

Present: 6 - Barry Buchanan, Tyler Byrd, Todd Donovan, Ben Elenbaas, Carol Frazey, and Kaylee Galloway

Absent: 1 - Kathy Kershner

Announcements

Special Presentation

1. [AB2023-680](#) Update from Executive and Health & Community Services Staff regarding Healthy Childrens Fund

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

- Erika Lautenbach, Health and Community Services Director
- Ann Beck, Health and Community Services
- Kayla Schott-Bresler, Strategic Initiatives Special Programs Manager

They spoke about the tension they are facing between how they can support community projects and investments in the short term but also make broader long-term systemic changes, the progress they have made and challenges faced since the implementation plan was approved, two key Requests for Proposal (RFPs) that are currently in draft form and three to four more that will be in draft form in the next month or two, challenges with hiring implementation plan staff, work done to contract out the \$26 million of approved American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) for the Healthy Children's Fund priorities in two rounds of capital RFPs so far, the timing of funds for implementation plan strategies, and what role the Council and community will play in engaging with the strategies.

They answered why they have struggled with recruitment of staff to do the implementation plan work, what the second round of ARPA capital RFPs is for and how much money went out in the first round, the timing of getting the RFPs out, whether we are on track with the timelines in the implementation plan, determining where the "greatest bang for the buck" is in the priorities so the Council can make the best decisions about spending, whether this information will go to the Child and Family Well-Being Task

Force, and whether they could make sure people understand the tension between speed of implementation versus making larger system changes that will require more time.

This agenda item was PRESENTED.

Committee Discussion

1. [AB2023-711](#) Mid Biennium 2023-2024 Budget Review

Tyler Schroeder, Director of Administrative Services, read from a presentation (on file). He answered questions about the 2026 projected fund balance being about \$1 million below the balance allowed in the County's fund balance policies, how that might affect the County's bonding capacity, and whether bonding for the public safety facility bonds would be locked in before that time. He answered how we might bridge the over \$4 million of FTE requests from the Prosecutor, Public Defender, and Sheriff if those are deferred to the 2025-2026 biennial budget, and what could be approved in the interim. He stated he is not sure FTEs are what will solve the issues around case standards and caseloads and believes thorough conversation with those criminal justice partners is needed and that each group needs to "pull the lever" a little bit to help us out of a tough criminal justice situation. He answered how and when those conversations could take place and he stated the Administration met with the criminal justice group to talk about the ARPA positions and what the outcomes have been from that investment. The Administration is not discrediting the current asks, and he thinks the investment needs to happen, it is just how best to make that happen. They could have a conversation again, but policy conversation with the Council is important.

Fraze stated she does not know how they are going to decrease caseloads but it is not fair to the attorneys and everyone working in those departments.

Galloway stated she would like to get Council's guidance on a few budget requests that were not accepted, including the Prosecutor's (#4285) and Public Defender's (#4073) requests, the Sheriff's request for 2 FTS for the Drug Task Force (#4281), and Planning's request for an FTE for a natural resource planner (#4296). She also has a few of her own.

SHERIFF'S REQUEST FOR 2 FTEs FOR THE DRUG TASK FORCE

Doug Chadwick, Undersheriff, spoke about the drug task force request and answered whether they have considered doing a 50/50 match with Bellingham and/or the small cities where we take on the FTEs but it is co-funded with the cities. He stated multiple positions are funded by grant funds through Commerce and the higher number of agencies that are

involved, the higher percentage you get of the grant funding. We could probably get 100 percent of the Commerce grant funding if the City of Bellingham and the State Patrol were back in the task force.

Schroeder stated in the next two weeks he can work with Chadwick to develop a letter to the city administrations requesting funding support for those positions or for them to partner with the County in the drug task force, and ask them for a response in the next couple weeks or at least by the end of the year. He and Chadwick answered whether they should also reach out to the State Patrol and Schroeder stated the letter could go to them as well.

PLANNING'S REQUEST FOR AN FTE FOR A NATURAL RESOURCE PLANNER

Schroeder addressed the request from Planning for a natural resource planner and explained why the request was not approved. He had conversations with Mark Personius, Planning and Development Services Director, and they agreed to just add additional budget for the On-Call Consultant Fund (4438) for this next year and see how that goes. Then Council can consider hiring a natural resource planner later.

Buchanan summarized that so far, they need to get a meeting set with the criminal justice folks and get a letter prepared from the Administration to the cities and the State Patrol.

Galloway stated she had three additional topics not included in list of ASRs and Councilmembers discussed those one at a time.

GALLOWAY REQUEST 1 - FUNDING ADDITIONAL COMMUNITY PARAMEDICS

Galloway stated she talked to Bellingham Fire Department Chief, Bill Hewett, and he clarified that there were two additional community paramedics that had been included in the levy plan, but the plan did not include a funding source for them. We would not only need an Additional Service Request (ASR), but would also need to amend the levy ordinance, scheduled for introduction tonight, to take some banked capacity (probably about a penny per \$1,000 of assessed value) on the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) levy to cover the expenses of the community paramedics.

Schroeder spoke about the Advanced Life Support (ALS) contracts which will be coming to Council soon and will include community paramedics for Bellingham and Fire District 7. In that conversation is a discussion of the ALS Fund and fund balance for five or six years out. He also spoke about

project six of the Justice Project Needs Assessment Implementation Plan to increase the capacity of effective existing programs to divert people from incarceration, and one of the key steps in that project was to expand the Community Paramedics program. He thinks there could be some support to accomplish that work but he does not have an answer today for the best way to fund it.

Frazezy spoke about the importance of the program.

Schroeder answered whether the data positions talked about in the implementation plan are in the mid-biennium adjustments and stated there is one position in Information Technology.

GALLOWAY REQUEST 2 - FUNDING EITHER STAFF OR CONSULTANT CAPACITY TO HELP STAND UP AND ADMINISTER THE FOREST RESILIENCE TASK FORCE

Galloway stated her ideas are to develop a budget line item (around \$75,000) in our Council Office for facilitative services which could look like contracting out with someone who would be able to provide additional support systems for our advisory bodies, or hiring either a temporary or permanent full time special projects Council Office staff member to not only support this task force but to also support other projects or staff members as needed, in order to build capacity and be someone who is cross-trained in the ways of the office.

Councilmembers and Schroeder discussed whether this is a priority for next year, that the Forest Resilience Task Force needs support and cannot wait until the next biennium, whether Galloway has a written description of what the position would do so the Councilmembers can digest that, whether Chris Elder, Public Works Department, has bandwidth to take on those tasks, figuring out funding for the task force and that consultant staffing may be the most appropriate since it is time limited, and then having further discussion about a boards and commissions position in the biennium.

GALLOWAY REQUEST 3 - PLEDGE ABOUT \$25,000 FOR A REQUEST FROM KITTITAS COUNTY COMMISSIONER CORY WRIGHT TO HELP HIRE A CONSULTANT THROUGH WASHINGTON STATE ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES (WSAC) TO HELP COUNTIES WITH COORDINATION AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR BROADBAND

Galloway suggested, if Councilmembers were willing to entertain the request, that they invite Commissioner Wright to come talk to them and share more information on the request.

Kayla Schott-Bresler, Strategic Initiatives Special Programs Manager, asked whether this would be supporting a state-wide effort and whether we would be supporting other counties with this need as opposed to something that would specifically benefit Whatcom County.

Councilmembers discussed whether this person would just be coordinating with counties or with the Public Utility District (PUD) and the Port of Bellingham too, whether the coordinator would be a lobbyist or whether they would coordinate how to get broadband everywhere, what the desired outcome is, whether it is a state effort, and hearing from Commissioner Wright at a future meeting.

As a re-cap, Galloway stated she will work with the Clerk of the Council on getting Commissioner Wright here and on trying to map out what support for the Forest Resilience Task Force might look like, and Schroeder stated he will get additional information on the Community Paramedic program for Council discussion.

REQUEST FOR HELP FOR THE BOARD OF EQUALIZATION (BOE)

Dana Brown-Davis, Clerk of the Council, asked whether she has Council support to submit an ASR to the Administration for an increase in BOE staff. She stated Council had already approved \$50,000 in additional funding for that and she is asking for another \$30,000 for a total of \$80,000 (see discussion in the Committee Reports, Other Items, And Councilmember Updates section of the September 26, 2023 Council meeting). She answered whether it will be enough assistance and stated we could start with this, and it will be good enough for now, but we can address it later in the year or for 2025 if we need more assistance.

MEDICAL EXAMINER SERVICES

Schroeder spoke about the medical examiner ASR and stated the idea would be to employ the medical examiner and the medical examiner's Office in 2024 instead of a contract for service, and he spoke about that change.

Councilmembers and staff spoke about next steps, whether they will be ready to introduce this ordinance tonight, whether they will talk about these requests on November 21st and get Council confirmation prior to adoption that night, when the budget would then be approved, how the timing might affect the other budget-related ordinances on for introduction tonight, whether the number of ASRs for this mid-biennium is normal, the possibility of taking banked capacity on the Ordinance Authorizing the Levy of Taxes for Conservation Futures Purposes for 2024 and the EMS levy and how that should be proposed, and scheduling this discussion again in two

weeks.

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 2:58 p.m.

The County Council approved these minutes on November 21, 2023.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Dana Brown-Davis, Council Clerk

Barry Buchanan, Council Chair

Kristi Felbinger, Minutes Transcription

SIGNED COPY ON FILE