

Whatcom County Council Special Committee of the Whole

**COUNTY COURTHOUSE
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Bellingham, WA 98225-4038
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Committee Minutes - Draft Minutes

Tuesday, July 29, 2025

9 AM

Hybrid Meeting - Council Chambers

**HYBRID MEETING - ADJOURNS BY 10:25 A.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
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 9:02 a.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. [AB2025-545](#) Discussion of Healthy Children's Fund implementation Plan

Jill Boudreau, Senior Policy and Project Manager for the Executive's Office, introduced a discussion regarding Healthy Children's Fund Implementation Plan strategies.

The following individuals also spoke:

- Sarah Simpson, Child & Family Programs Supervisor
- Ann Beck, Community Health & Human Services Manager

Boudreau stated that the purpose of the discussion is to provide Council with an opportunity to provide policy direction around funding allocations and specific initiatives that Council wants to see included in the Implementation Plan.

Simpson described the Healthy Children's Fund Implementation Team, which consists of Whatcom County Healthy Children's Fund leads, subject matter experts, and others selected through an application process.

Boudreau provided an overview of Ordinance 2022-045 and its prescriptions for spending. Per the ordinance, 20-36% of funds must go toward helping vulnerable children of all backgrounds, including homeless and at-risk children. 55-68% of funds must go toward increasing affordable, high-quality, professional and accessible early learning and child care opportunities. 9% of funds are able to go toward administration, of which 3% is allocated for evaluation.

Byrd asked for clarification regarding contracts with vendors.

Beck clarified that vendors are able to negotiate their rates, and she spoke about administration costs.

Donovan asked whether an independent audit has been conducted.

Boudreau stated that an RFP is currently open for an audit to be completed by the end of 2025. She then outlined current funding allocations for individual Implementation Plan strategies.

Elenbaas asked for clarification regarding Strategy 5, which is to create regional early learning and care hubs that include shared administrative services, co-located early learning and other services for children and families, and support for smaller providers in the county and Strategy 10, which is to integrate and co-locate services via coordinated access to resource navigation.

Simpson stated that Strategy 5 is focused on childcare, while Strategy 10 is more about services such as occupational therapy, speech therapy, mental and behavioral health services, etc.

Byrd asked whether funding is restricted to pre-kindergarten.

Boudreau clarified that the ordinance does not limit spending to children under the age of five.

Councilmembers discussed the program's target age group.

Boudreau continued, highlighting the fund's impacts on childcare expansion, behavioral health workforce and services, and basic needs. She also provided an overview of the Healthy Children's Fund timeline and current active contracts.

Scanlon asked whether there is an intended target fund balance.

Simpson clarified that the Implementation Team is primarily concerned with the quality of a proposed project and the availability of resources, rather than maintaining a specific fund balance.

Councilmembers discussed the fund balance and the potential for accelerating distribution of funds.

Boudreau stated that councilmembers will have an opportunity in 2026 to re-evaluate based on data and consider where resources can be allocated more quickly.

Councilmembers engaged in a prioritization exercise in which they were

asked to indicate their districts' strategy priorities by placing 10 stickers on posters listing the 10 strategies from the Implementation Plan.

The results of the prioritization exercise are as follows:

Strategy 1: Provide funds for small capital projects to expand, renovate or repurpose buildings to increase early learning and care slots in a mixed-delivery system. Galloway 2 stickers; Donovan 3 stickers; Stremmer 3 stickers; Elenbaas 2 stickers; Buchanan 2 stickers; Scanlon 2 stickers

Strategy 2: Coordinate current and develop additional pathways to ensure a stable early learning and care workforce that can deliver high-quality programs for children.

Strategy 3: Improve access to early learning and care through subsidies that reduce the cost of programs for children from families that are cost-burdened. Galloway 1 sticker; Donovan 2 stickers; Stremmer 1 sticker; Buchanan 2 stickers; Scanlon 2 stickers

Strategy 4: Ensure access to early learning and care by promoting the expansion and retention of the early learning and care workforce. Galloway 1 sticker; Donovan 1 sticker; Stremmer 1 sticker

Strategy 5: Create regional early learning and care hubs that include shared administrative services, co-located early learning and other services for children and families, and support for smaller providers in the county. Galloway 1 sticker; Stremmer 1 sticker; Elenbaas 2 stickers; Buchanan 2 stickers; Scanlon 2 stickers

Strategy 6: Support innovative approaches to meet various Healthy Children's Fund goals for early learning and care. Galloway 2 stickers; Elenbaas 1 sticker

Strategy 7: Recruit mental and behavioral health workforce to Whatcom County.

Strategy 8: Develop and/or expand resources and programs for families who disproportionately experience housing instability. Galloway 1 sticker; Donovan 3 stickers; Elenbaas 2 stickers; Buchanan 3 stickers; Scanlon, 2 stickers

Strategy 9: Expand and enhance early parenting support. Galloway 2 stickers; Buchanan 1 sticker; Scanlon 2 stickers

Strategy 10: Integrate and co-locate services via coordinated access to resource navigation. Donovan 1 sticker

Byrd stated that the only strategy that seems to increase childcare slots is Strategy 1, and increasing childcare slots is the most important priority.

Councilmembers discussed strategies to increase childcare slots. Boudreau said that they would take the Council's feedback and incorporate it into the Implementation Plan. She then transitioned into a discussion regarding proposed spending allocations for 2025-2026. One key proposal is to increase the percentage of funds going to early learning and care from 62% to 68% and slightly decrease the percentage going to support for vulnerable children from 29% and 23%.

Councilmembers discussed the strategies, the initial intent of the Healthy Children's Fund, and potential impacts of changing funding allocations.

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 10:25 a.m.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Cathy Halka, Council Clerk

Kaylee Galloway, Council Chair

Meeting Minutes prepared by Jenna Gernand