

Whatcom County Council as the Health Board

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



Minutes - Final

Tuesday, August 1, 2023

10 AM

Civic Center Building Conference Room / Hybrid Meeting

**JOINT HEALTH BOARD/PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY BOARD MEETING -
HYBRID MEETING (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

Health Board Chair Barry Buchanan called the meeting to order at 10:08 am. in a hybrid meeting.

Roll Call

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

Absent: 1 - Ben Elenbaas

Also Present

Public Health Advisory Board Members Present:

- Steve Bennett
- Teri Bryant
- Sterling Chick
- Lindsey Karas
- (Kathy Kershner)
- Guy Occhiogrosso
- Emily O'Connor
- Adrienne Renz
- Greg Thompson

Announcements**Meeting Materials**

[AB2023-489](#) Meeting Materials for the Health Board August 1, 2023

Meeting Materials were RECEIVED.

Public comment

The following people spoke:

- Natalie Chavez
- Name not stated
- Misty Flowers

Hearing no one else, Buchanan closed the public comment period.

Clerk's note: Buchanan called for the Public Health Advisory Board Roll Call and that was taken (see above).

Public Health Advisory Board (PHAB) update

There was no update.

Health Officer update

Greg Thompson, Co-Health Officer, stated there was no update.

Behavioral Health Fund – opportunities and recommendations

Erika Lautenbach, Health and Community Services Director, submitted and briefed the Health Board on three handouts and information from the July 10, 2023 joint Public Health Advisory Board (PHAB) and Behavioral Health Advisory Committee (BHAC) Meeting (on file under Meeting Materials as **AB2023-489**). Handouts two and three are the fund balance projection worksheets and have one significant difference between them, and that is under School Expenses. One (page 1), captures three years of expenses which was the PHAB's recommendation to the Health Board, and the other (page 2) captures two years of expenses, which is the BHAC's recommendation. She spoke about the historic and projected budget lapse of the fund and assumptions for Justice Project Investments projections (which includes, among other projects, the 23-hour facility for which they received \$9 million from the State) as noted on the handouts. She pointed out that the ending fund balance in 2028 is projected to be \$2,387,174 in the two-year scenario and \$1,437,674 in the three-year scenario. She spoke about the other handout (handout 1) with the school expenses and stated they do not know what all the expenses will be yet and had to just budget for the ones they did not know based on what they think.

Buchanan asked what the difference is programmatically of adding the third year or whether it is just expanding the programs for another year, and Lautenbach stated the only difference is it expands the programs one more year and gives school districts a bit more time to identify other sources to carry the work through.

Emily O'Connor clarified that what she thinks the BHAC said was, let's commit to two [years], but it is not that it would for sure end at that point.

Buchanan asked whether they are looking to have a recommendation from the Health Board in the form of a motion on one of the two plans and Lautenbach stated that is correct.

Frazezy stated the information presented today was not in the agenda packet for this meeting and Donovan stated Health Board members that are remote cannot see the handouts.

Frazezy asked whether the programs are already in place and Lautenbach

stated this is an expansion.

Galloway asked how the three handouts fit together and whether they could accomplish the entire list (school expenses) over a two to three-year period of time.

Buchanan asked whether there are time constraints on this should the Council want to spend some time reviewing it before making a motion and Lautenbach stated they can take more time if they need it but the school year starts in September.

O'Connor stated the list of work in the handout is very aligned with what both the PHAB and the BHAC want to see happen. The question came to them whether the work (in handout 1) is a good use of the Behavioral Health Fund reserve balances and there was resounding support from both groups. Then the question was whether they wanted to recommend that to the Council as the Health Board, and both groups did. But one recommended to commit two years and then reassess for maybe a third, and one voted to commit to three years in the interest of stability for the schools.

Lautenbach stated she, the Co-Health Officer (Amy Harley), and Kayla Schott-Bresler met with the superintendents and looked at how they can support prevention efforts in the schools, and most of the superintendents requested three years of funding, recognizing this is a one-time expense. Then she spoke about the requests.

Buchanan stated he was leaning toward three years but would like to hear from the PHAB.

Bennett spoke about discussions that took place in the joint PHAB/BHAC meeting and why the PHAB landed on three years.

Councilmembers discussed whether this is something they could decide at their August 8 regular Council meeting since not every Councilmember was present at the PHAB/BHAC meeting or can see the documents today.

Kershner asked whether delaying a decision would be putting Meridian School District in a difficult position with some of the other funding mechanisms they are trying to put together for capital funding and Lautenbach stated it would not. Kershner stated the concern she brought up during the joint meeting was that we have a lot of people that are experiencing mental health crises and she wants to make sure that what they spend the surplus on is reaching some of them, but in this plan, it seems like

most of this money is slated for prevention in our school system.

Councilmembers and Lautenbach discussed what would happen after three years, whether it is equitable among the school districts, whether there are other ideas for how to spend the money, whether they should refer this to the Public Works and Health Committee and then Council, whether this would be backfilling funding for districts whose taxpayers are not paying for these things because maybe they voted down levies that could be funding them, and whether these funds are going to those districts rather than other behavioral health needs.

The group discussed that the funds on the handout are not the totality of the overage and that there is other money to look at for other interventions, what the total of the overage is, the fact that schools have been overwhelmed with a tsunami of needs in the last three years, the time it takes to start programs, the value of prevention efforts, partnering with the school districts to help them leverage funds, having a plan for the years beyond the three and a plan for State advocacy in the near term, and what the Health Board should do today.

Byrd moved to hold this until the next meeting on August 8 and stated he would be ok with holding it longer.

Kershner recommended they refer it to the Public Works and Health Committee for discussion on August 8.

The motion was seconded by Buchanan.

Councilmembers discussed whether it should just be a discussion or whether it should also be a recommendation to the full Council.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 6 - Buchanan, Byrd, Donovan, Frazey, Galloway, and Kershner

Nay: 0

Absent: 1 - Elenbaas

Kayla Schott-Bresler, Strategic Initiatives Special Programs Manager, stated (speaking on behalf of the Executive's Office) the Behavioral Health fund is weighted very heavily toward crisis response and we see this as a unique opportunity to focus on prevention. We believe this is the most immediate way to get services to these kids and there is the fund balance to support this endeavor. She stated she is available in the interim to speak with Councilmembers about what they would like to see out of the

conversation.

Kershner requested that the Administration or Health and Community Services bring more information about the Behavioral Health Fund, where the majority of the money is being spent, and on what kind of programs so Council can understand what they are funding.

Resolution affirming that affordable housing and homelessness are a public health crisis and requesting updates on county actions (AB2023-485)

[AB2023-485](#) Resolution affirming that affordable housing and homelessness are a public health crisis and requesting updates on county actions (Council acting as the Health Board)

Buchanan and Galloway briefed the group on the resolution.

Donovan and Frazey thanked them for putting the resolution together and bringing it forward.

Kershner asked whether they could add a Whereas statement recognizing concerns of the Business and Commerce Advisory Committee (BCAC) with the housing issue in Whatcom County.

Occhiogrosso stated he would love for Council to add a statement about the housing availability component. Our community is in a housing crisis period and those experiencing homelessness are hurt even more, but it is important to understand the full spectrum and that we just do not have enough.

Donovan stated the Council will get proposals from the BCAC and the Planning Department on August 8th on what some of their recommendations might be and what can be implemented so this dovetails nicely to that.

Buchanan asked whether they should incorporate these thoughts and bring the resolution back next week and Councilmembers concurred.

O'Connor spoke about the Whereas statement in lines 34-37 on page two of the resolution which reads:

WHEREAS, Whatcom County works with community partners to address homelessness, and in 2019 the County's share was approximately 26% with additional community investments from the City of Bellingham (26%), Housing Authority and other federal funding (21%), and private contributions (26%); and

She stated she is wondering what they are hoping that information would convey and whether they could be specific with funding sources, whether they could add context about whether the amount is a lot or a little, and add language that encourages where we are trying to get to.

Councilmembers discussed where the resolution should be scheduled if they are going to go back and make changes after today, and discussed scheduling it in the Public Works and Health Committee and then Council on August 8th.

Lautenbach stated the Now Therefore Be It Resolved is a very broad request and she is not clear what it is the Council wants from them.

Ann Beck, Health and Community Services, stated she would also like to know what they are asking and that there are Federal lifts as well that should be recognized.

Buchanan stated the two elements he sees are that they want the status of the Homeless Strategies Workgroup (HSW) recommendations and other ideas from the Administration beyond those of the HSW.

Galloway answered how those elements align with it being a crisis and stated that affirming it as a public health crisis signals to the community that we recognize the severity and urgency of this issue and it gives the Council blessing to say this is a priority and to urge the County to take additional leadership. She wants this to be a starting point of a collaborative process and it does not fall completely on Health and Community Services.

They discussed that this resolution sets the foundation for future work and initiatives, whether they could add language that this is County-Government-wide, what is being done regarding the HSW's recommendations, bringing the resolution back to the Public Works and Health Committee and Council, looking at the housing crisis and homelessness as a county-wide issue, and shifting our thinking so that we are not making it more difficult for people to find a place to live but are making it easier.

This agenda item was REFERRED TO COMMITTEE.

Enactment No: RES 2023-020

Meeting evaluation

The group did not discuss this item.

Other Business

There was no other business.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 11:28 a.m.

The County Council approved these minutes on September 12, 2023.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Dana Brown-Davis, Council Clerk

Barry Buchanan, Health Board Chair

Kristi Felbinger, Minutes Transcription

SIGNED COPY ON FILE