

Whatcom County Council Public Works & Health Committee

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



Committee Minutes - Final

**Tuesday, May 7, 2024
12:45 PM
Hybrid Meeting**

**HYBRID MEETING - ADJOURNS BY 1:25 P.M. (PARTICIPATE IN-PERSON, SEE
REMOTE JOIN INSTRUCTIONS AT www.whatcomcounty.us/joinvirtualcouncil, OR
CALL 360.778.5010)**

COUNCILMEMBERS

Kaylee Galloway
Jon Scanlon
Mark Stremmer

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Dana Brown-Davis, C.M.C.

Call To Order

Committee Chair Jon Scanlon called the meeting to order at 12:45 p.m. in a hybrid meeting.

Roll Call

Present: 3 - Kaylee Galloway, Jon Scanlon, and Mark Stremmler

Also Present: Barry Buchanan, Tyler Byrd, Todd Donovan, and Ben Elenbaas

Announcements

Special Presentation

1. [AB2024-292](#) Presentation of the Child and Family Well-Being Task Force Healthy Children's Fund Report Card

Scanlon stated they would discuss the Healthy Children's Fund twice today (see **AB2024-251** in Committee of the Whole). This item will be the report from the Task Force and this afternoon Council will hear an update about the fund. He stated he is a big supporter of this program and one reason is that he is the product of government-funded and supported early learning and childcare.

Erika Lautenbach, Health and Community Services Director, stated there may be some questions for the Health and Community Services Department after this presentation today. Some things have moved slower than what they would like, but the report is limited in scope and they would like to share a more panoramic view this afternoon of what the Healthy Children's Fund is doing and what investments have been made.

The following people reported:

- Colton Kaltenfeldt, Child and Family Well-Being Task Force Co-Chair
- Ray Deck III, Child and Family Well-Being Task Force Co-Chair

Kaltenfeldt spoke about what the Healthy Children's Fund is and how their presentation fits in to the bigger accountability structure. He stated it is not the intention of the funds to be used by the County to provide services directly, but that the County would give that money to programs and organizations in the community that are doing really good work and let them leverage it. He stated there are two misconceptions that he has heard about what the fund does. It is not to be used to provide government-run childcare and does not automatically go to school districts. He spoke about two

accountability mechanisms in the ordinance to ensure that the funds are being spent in a way that is fiscally responsive and progress is made where they want it to be. This report is one of those and is supposed to be a summary of what they have observed as they have worked with the Health Department to oversee the Healthy Children's Fund and an opportunity to compare what is actually happening with the ideals set out in the ordinance that created the fund. The second report (once every two years) is done by an external evaluator and looks at both quantitative and qualitative data to show if we are making meaningful progress.

Deck spoke about recommendations that the task force believes Council can implement to start to address some of the road blocks that they are seeing. He stated that to accomplish the goals of the Healthy Children's Fund, there is some additional expertise that is required. The fund administration is under resourced and they hope that communications and public relations expertise is added in the Health Department so they can talk more about the mission and the accomplishments of the fund. He stated they hope capacity is added to address bottlenecks to Request for Proposal (RFP) development in County Administration. They have not heard from anyone that is happy with the speed at which this system moves and the task force is unclear why it is that way or who will step into the role of leadership to make the system more efficient. The task force is hoping the Council will join them in calling for the existing processes to be made transparent so they can all understand what the issues are.

Donovan spoke about the role of advisory bodies and why they would have joint meetings with the Council as is stated in the recommendations of the report. He also does not understand why the task force is suggesting they create a department and go around the staff the Council is asking them to collaborate with.

Deck stated the three joint-presentation report recommendations are all things they have attempted to get and then have either gotten an answer that was unsatisfactory to the task force or been told they were not allowed to have.

Donovan stated if they are not getting the information, Council can work on that. But this is part of a bigger conversation about how the Council works with advisory bodies and what the expectation of those bodies might be.

Deck spoke about the issues they have been having which prompted the recommendations and stated they are hoping the Council could join them in

finding a different approach to resolving them. He answered why the task force says in the report that “virtually all of the administrative money remains unspent and WCHCS lacks the necessary capacity and expertise to fulfill its fund administration duties,” and stated that is in reference to communications and community engagement capability.

Lautenbach spoke about what the admin fund pays for and how they have leveraged American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars for staff expenses.

Deck answered whether forming a department was written into the proposition and whether the task force has examples of what that might look like. He stated the note about creating an office of child and family well-being came from the Child and Family Well-Being Action Plan which was a work product of the Public Health Advisory Board. The notion is then repeated in the ordinance that created the task force. Their recommendation is a call-back to that and it would be a new cabinet-level department of two or three people who would only be responsible for Healthy Children’s Fund administration. He described examples in Washington D.C. and Denver for fund administration as other ways the infrastructure could be structured.

Councilmembers and Deck discussed that these are broader issues in the County and not attributable to just one department, whether they could bring this back to committee to hear more about what the task force has to say, the fact that the Planning Commission has had legal counsel in the past so it is not unprecedented for County legal to advise Council’s advisory groups, whether it is responsible to get the government involved again in childcare when five years ago the State government got involved and came out with the early achievers program which wiped out a large number of daycares in Whatcom County, building trust with the public not by hiding our mistakes but by talking about them in public, how having a separate department would get information to flow better or change the bottlenecks that exist right now, and whether the task force can be ready to deliver the next report by September 30th.

This agenda item was REPORTED.

Committee Discussion

1. [AB2024-263](#) Ordinance amending Whatcom County Code 2.85, Developmental Disabilities Department

Amanda Burnett, Health and Community Services, briefed the Councilmembers and stated they have never had more than ten members on the board and the average has been seven, so they are asking to update the

Code to have nine members. She answered whether the applicant tonight would bring the membership to nine and stated that will bring them to eight members plus Councilmember Donovan who serves on the board. She answered what the barriers have been to filling the seats, and stated the work is maybe not as glamorous as some of the other boards and has a surprising amount of technical jargon. She answered whether the group will be affective as a nine-member board and be able to provide the advice that is needed and stated the people who stay on the board will stay for their full term and do really great work for the community.

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 1:31 p.m.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Jon Scanlon-via email 5/14/2024

Dana Brown-Davis, Council Clerk

Jon Scanlon, Committee Chair

Kristi Felbinger, Minutes Transcription

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