

Whatcom County Council Committee of the Whole

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



Committee Minutes - Final

Tuesday, April 28, 2026

2:25 PM

Hybrid Meeting - Council Chambers

HYBRID MEETING - MAY BEGIN EARLY/LATE - ADJOURNS BY 4:30 P.M.
(PARTICIPATE IN-PERSON, SEE REMOTE JOIN INSTRUCTIONS AT
www.whatcomcounty.us/joinvirtualcouncil, OR CALL 360.778.5010)

COUNCILMEMBERS

Elizabeth Boyle
Barry Buchanan
Ben Elenbaas
Kaylee Galloway
Jessica Rienstra
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 3:20 p.m. in a hybrid meeting.

Roll Call

Present: 7 - Elizabeth Boyle, Barry Buchanan, Ben Elenbaas, Kaylee Galloway, Jessica Rienstra, Jon Scanlon, and Mark Stremmer

Announcements**Special Presentation**

1. [AB2026-326](#) Update from Public Works River and Flood staff on Floodplain Integrated Planning (FLIP)

The following people gave updates on flood-related projects and an effort to organize an action plan to use available funding:

- Julie Anderson, Public Works Department
- Paula Harris, Public Works Department

They and councilmembers discussed the project to widen the river corridor, how much of the river they are planning to widen and what is giving reassurance to the communities in Everson, Nooksack, and Sumas that we are moving forward with projects to help them, if there is anything the County can do to help with an appeal by the governor regarding a federal decision that our state is currently not eligible for the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program funds for the December floods, that Public Works is looking at Federal funding opportunities as well, leaning on our congressional delegation for help, that the Sumas Resiliency Planning Study contract will be coming to Council in May, what is slowing down progress with projects and if there is anything the Council can do to help, whether they want to advocate for things such as a bill sponsored by Senator Patty Murray that is trying to streamline some of the regulatory review processes out of FEMA, how planning is going for homes that were lost on the North Fork, if there are any updates on potentially working with Washington State Department of Transportation around the bridge at Everson or on Slater Road, and that those projects are part of the action package through Public Works.

This agenda item was PRESENTED.

Committee Discussion

1. [AB2026-186](#) Discussion and preliminary Council direction on Whatcom County Comprehensive

Plan Chapter 2, Land Use

Galloway stated the outstanding amendments for this chapter are amendment numbers 129, and 135 through 162 in the chart of amendments for this date.

Scanlon moved to begin review of Chapter 2 using the Preliminary Council Draft dated 4/28/2026, which is the current version of the chapter with Planning Commission recommendations from January 2026 and additional edits proposed by councilmembers as listed in the Chart of Proposed Council Changes 4/28/2026.

The motion was seconded by Rienstra.

Councilmembers discussed which outstanding proposed amendments they would like to vote on separately. Elenbaas stated he would like to consider all the new proposed amendments separately and has concerns that they have missed a lot of opportunities for the public to comment on the new items. He would like to hear from the public before they debate them.

Councilmembers discussed that there will be a public hearing at a later date and they will consider each of the outstanding proposed amendments separately today.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Elenbaas, Galloway, Rienstra, Scanlon, Stremmer, Boyle, and Buchanan

Nay: 0

Amendment number 129 (new Policy 2H-4)

Elenbaas stated he proposed this language to keep farmland in production and to keep the intent of the agricultural zoning, which is a viable ag economy, and he spoke about the amendment.

Scanlon moved and Elenbaas seconded to include amendment number 129 to add new Policy 2H-4.

Councilmembers discussed if this would prevent UGA-related land swaps.

Matt Aamot, Planning and Development Services Department (PDS), stated staff has concerns with how this is written. He gave the example that Sumas, Everson, and Nooksack are all proposing to expand their urban growth areas into designated ag land and that would be annexed at some point.

Elenbaas stated the concerns are not his intent and Aamot stated staff can come back with some revised language.

Scanlon moved to hold on amendment number 129 until they hear back from PDS with suggested language.

The motion to hold carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Galloway, Rienstra, Scanlon, Stremmer, Boyle, Buchanan, and Elenbaas

Nay: 0

Amendment number 135 (amending Policy 2A-9)

Scanlon moved and Galloway seconded to include amendment number 135.

Scanlon asked the intent of this amendment since they would be changing some things they previously approved (amendment number 115), and Galloway stated she thinks it is just trying to make it cleaner and that it does a better job of honing in on the intent of minimizing exposure between heavy industry and adjacent neighborhoods.

Councilmembers discussed the language, whether it should be changed from what they previously voted on, and how it might be amended to meet in the middle.

Boyle moved and Scanlon seconded to amend the motion so that Policy 2A-9 would read:

Where heavy industrial zoning is located within urban growth areas adjacent to residential neighborhoods, the County shall identify and implement measures that minimize neighborhood exposure to industrial pollution and advance public health and environmental justice. These measures shall be developed with meaningful involvement of affected communities.

Elenbaas stated this language is going to be policy direction to a group of our employees and they have to think about their ability to implement it and what that would look like. He finds it more problematic to say “shall” and then list things that are hard to quantify and not really in their purview, than to say “consider measures that minimize...” which was in Galloway’s original proposed amendment.

Galloway suggested a friendly amendment to change "shall" to "should."

Boyle accepted the friendly amendment so the policy would read:

Where heavy industrial zoning is located within urban growth areas adjacent to residential neighborhoods, the County should identify and implement measures that minimize neighborhood exposure to industrial pollution and advance public health and environmental justice. These measures should be developed with meaningful involvement of affected communities.

Councilmembers discussed that involvement with affected communities already happens through the public participation process the county has in place (especially with permitting), that omitting "and long-term fiscal resilience" in Boyle's amendment was not intentional and a suggestion to change "fiscal resilience" to "economic resilience" to better support the intention to have these conversations with impacted communities, so that the policy would read:

Where heavy industrial zoning is located within urban growth areas adjacent to residential neighborhoods, the County should identify and implement measures that minimize neighborhood exposure to industrial pollution and advance public health, environmental justice, and long-term economic resilience. These measures should be developed with meaningful involvement of affected communities.

Councilmembers discussed concerns about putting the onus on industries to "advance" public health and environmental justice and what "advance" actually means, and potential alternative wording.

Boyle's motion to amend the motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 5 - Rienstra, Scanlon, Boyle, Buchanan, and Galloway

Nay: 2 - Stremmler and Elenbaas

The motion to include amendment 135 as amended carried by the following vote:

Aye: 5 - Scanlon, Boyle, Buchanan, Galloway, and Rienstra

Nay: 2 - Stremmler and Elenbaas

Amendment number 136 (amending Policy 2Q-5)

Scanlon moved and Boyle seconded to include amendment number 136 so that Policy 2Q-5 would read:

Encourage and assist the communities of Birch Bay and Columbia Valley Urban Growth Areas with incorporation when appropriate.

Councilmembers and Matt Aamot discussed the language and how it might be amended (regarding the words “when appropriate”) and then concurred to ***amend the motion*** to strike “Encourage and” so that it would read:

Assist the communities of Birch Bay and Columbia Valley Urban Growth Areas with incorporation when appropriate.

Danielle Gaughen, Birch Bay Community Advisory Committee, stated she thinks the change (removing “Encourage and”) will be acceptable. She stated the letter that was sent encapsulated all of their concerns, and that it is up to the communities of Birch Bay and Columbia Valley to decide when they should incorporate and is not a councilmanic decision, or up to the executive. It would also be up to those communities to decide what is eventually feasible.

Councilmembers discussed what “when appropriate” means and who makes that determination, that the county would assist when the communities determine that incorporation is appropriate, and the possibility of adding “when requested” before “Assist.”

The motion to include amendment 136 as amended by councilmembers carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Stremmler, Boyle, Buchanan, Elenbaas, Galloway, Rienstra, and Scanlon

Nay: 0

Galloway stated they will have to wait on the remaining amendments and that they also ran out of time to discuss the remaining Comprehensive Plan chapters. She read AB2026-250, AB2026-261, AB2026-262, and AB2026-263 into the record.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED AND MOTION(S) APPROVED.

MOTION 1

Motion approved to begin review of Chapter 2 using the Preliminary Council Draft dated 4/28/2026, which is the current version of the chapter with Planning Commission recommendations from January 2026 and additional edits proposed (and motions passed by) councilmembers as listed in the Chart of Proposed Council Changes 4/28/2026.

MOTION 2– Amendment #129

Motion approved to hold on amendment number 129 until they hear back from Planning and Development Services with suggested language.

MOTION 3– Amendment #135

Motion approved to include amendment number 135 as amended so that Policy 2A-9 would read:

Where heavy industrial zoning is located within urban growth areas adjacent to residential neighborhoods, the County should identify and implement measures that minimize neighborhood exposure to industrial pollution and advance public health, environmental justice, and long-term economic resilience. These measures should be developed with meaningful involvement of affected communities.

MOTION 4- Amendment # 136

Motion approved to include amendment number 136 as amended which amends Policy 2Q-5 so that it reads:

Assist the communities of Birch Bay and Columbia Valley Urban Growth Areas with incorporation when appropriate.

2. [AB2026-250](#) Discussion and preliminary Council direction on Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan Chapter 8, Resource Lands

This agenda item was NOT ACTED UPON.

3. [AB2026-261](#) Discussion and preliminary Council direction on Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan Chapter 10, Environment

This agenda item was NOT ACTED UPON.

4. [AB2026-262](#) Discussion and preliminary Council direction on Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan Chapter 12, Climate

This agenda item was NOT ACTED UPON.

5. [AB2026-263](#) Discussion and preliminary Council direction on Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan Appendices (Appendix A: Glossary, Appendix B: Acronyms, Appendix D: Bibliography, Appendix E: 20-Year Capital Facilities Plan, Appendix G: Airport Overlay Zones, Appendix H: Airport Imaginary Surfaces, Appendix I: Housing Needs Analysis, Appendix J: Subsidized Housing Needs and Funding) and Foothills Subarea Plan Amendments

This agenda item was NOT ACTED UPON.

6. [AB2026-249](#) Discussion regarding schedule for Council review of the comprehensive plan update
- Galloway spoke about adding another Special Committee of the Whole meeting on May 19th. She also stated that they got a request from the Climate Impact Advisory Committee to have Chapter 12 be scheduled for May 26 or later.

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 4:29 p.m.

The County Council approved these minutes on May 12, 2026.

ATTEST:



Cathy Halka, Council Clerk

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA



Kaylee Galloway, Council Chair

Meeting Minutes prepared by Kristi Felbinger