

Whatcom County Council as the Health Board

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



Minutes - Draft Minutes

Tuesday, July 29, 2025

10:30 AM

Hybrid Meeting - Council Chambers

**JOINT HEALTH BOARD/PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY BOARD MEETING -
HYBRID MEETING - ADJOURNS BY 12:00 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
Kaylee Galloway
Jon Scanlon
Mark Stremmler

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Cathy Halka, AICP, CMC

Call To Order

Health Board Chair Jon Scanlon called the meeting to order at 10:32 a.m. in a hybrid meeting.

Roll Call - Health Board

Present: 7 - Barry Buchanan, Tyler Byrd, Todd Donovan, Ben Elenbaas, Kaylee Galloway, Jon Scanlon, and Mark Stremler

Roll Call - PHAB

Amy Harley, Chris Kobdish, Christine Espina, Guy Occhiogrosso, Joni Hensley, Kendra Cristelli, Lara Welker, Rachel McGarrity, Shannon Boustead, Shu-Ling Zhao, Sterling Chick, Sue Rodgers, Meg Lelonek, Leah Wainman, and Jon Scanlon

Announcements**Public Comment**

Scanlon opened the public comment period and hearing no one, closed the public comment period.

Clerk's note: This item was revisited later in the meeting.

Special Presentation

1. [AB2025-542](#) Update from the Health Director

Charlene Ramont, Interim Whatcom County Health and Community Services (WCHCS) Health Director, provided an update on the WCHCS department. Like other county departments, WCHCS is working to finalize its mid-biennium budget adjustments. The department currently has several open positions, including Department Director and Finance Manager. The department also underwent a minor restructuring recently, with some staff shifting from Community Health and Human Services into Communicable Disease and Epidemiology or into Community and Organizational Development.

Ramont also provided division-specific updates, including:
 - The Communicable Disease team led a county-wide response to a confirmed measles case in June 2025.
 - An RFP for severe winter weather shelter operations did not receive any responses, so the county is preparing for the likelihood that it will need to operate the shelter again this coming winter season.
 - Whatcom County's LEAD program secured ongoing funding.

Donovan asked about the lack of response to the severe winter shelter RFP.

Ann Beck, Whatcom County Health and Community Services, shared that the work of operating a severe winter shelter takes a toll on organizations. She added that WCHCS and the Executive's Office are looking at hiring outside staff to take on the operation of the shelter this winter rather than relying on WCHCS staff.

Kayla Schott-Bresler, Deputy Executive, stated that county staff cannot continue to operate the shelter while also working their regular full-time shifts. As such, a more expensive, outside staffing model will likely be needed this season. She added that a county-run, year-round shelter is not being considered and that the county is looking for an outside provider for future seasons.

Health Board and PHAB members asked questions and engaged in discussion around WCHCS' restructuring.

This agenda item was PRESENTED.

2. [AB2025-540](#) Update from the Health Officer

Amy Harley and Meg Lelonek, Co-Health Officers, shared a presentation (on file) regarding the county's response to measles.

Harley began the presentation by noting that the county recently experienced its first measles case in a decade. She provided background information on the positive impact of vaccines on public health. She then shared information on measles, which is characterized by high fever, rash, cough, runny nose, and conjunctivitis. She noted that complications often occur with measles, including pneumonia, severe diarrhea, brain infection, and ear infection. Harley stated that measles can be spread long before symptoms appear, and it is severely contagious and difficult to contain. She said the measles vaccine has been a widespread public health success, and she provided an overview of the vaccine's development process, which ensures its safety. Despite historical success against measles, cases have recently experienced a resurgence, with cases and outbreaks occurring throughout the nation, including 10 confirmed cases in Washington state.

Lelonek then provided information on measles specific to Whatcom County, highlighting the risk of a local measles outbreak, local vaccination rates, and the department's investigation and response to local measles cases. She also shared information regarding the cost of the measles vaccine compared to the cost of investigating a measles case.

Following the presentation, PHAB members discussed barriers to immunization, the importance of building community trust, and the need to ensure individuals' privacy.

This agenda item was PRESENTED.

Public Comment

The following individuals spoke:

- Sally Mickley

Hearing no one else, Scanlon closed the public comment session.

Discussion

1. [AB2025-541](#) Discussion and update from the Joint Public Health Advisory Board/Health Board Structure Working Group

Scanlon stated that he would like to get a recommendation from the Health Board regarding changes to Health Board composition, a topic which was discussed at the Committee of the Whole meeting on July 22, 2025. He presented three options for restructuring the Health Board, all of which expand the Board's membership to include representation from the City of Bellingham, the small cities, Lummi Nation and Nooksack Tribe, and various health experts. He added that another option would be to maintain the existing Health Board structure, which consists of the seven County Councilmembers. He concluded by sharing information regarding the powers and duties of the County Council as compared to the Board of Health.

Health Board and PHAB members asked questions and engaged in discussion regarding the potential restructuring of the Health Board.

Stremmler said he has not seen any desire or concern from the cities or public about the need to restructure the Health Board. He asked why a change is needed.

Donovan said Council commissioned a consultant to report on the county's response to COVID-19, which resulted in a recommendation that Council consider restructuring the Health Board to include more public health expertise. He added that there is an opportunity for Whatcom County to learn from other counties that have different Health Board compositions.

Galloway shared her hesitation with making an irreversible change to Health

Board membership, given the potential impacts. She said she is interested in learning more about the different models and their potential to expand capacity.

Buchanan said he is interested in learning more about how a ten-member board would function compared to the current model.

Scanlon said that the workgroup will continue to compile information to share with Health Board and PHAB members at the next joint meeting.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED.

Other Business

There was no other business.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 12:13 p.m.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Cathy Halka, Council Clerk

Jon Scanlon, Health Board Chair

Meeting Minutes prepared by Jenna Gernand