

Whatcom County Council Climate Action and Natural Resources Committee

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



Committee Minutes - Draft Minutes

Tuesday, December 9, 2025

10:25 AM

Hybrid Meeting - Council Chambers

**HYBRID MEETING - MAY BEGIN EARLY - ADJOURNS BY 11:25 A.M.
(PARTICIPATE IN-PERSON, SEE REMOTE JOIN INSTRUCTIONS AT
www.whatcomcounty.us/joinvirtualcouncil, OR CALL 360.778.5010)**

COUNCILMEMBERS

Todd Donovan
Kaylee Galloway
Mark Stremmler

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Cathy Halka, AICP, CMC

Call To Order

Committee Chair Kaylee Galloway called the meeting to order at 10:25 a.m. in a hybrid meeting.

Roll Call

Present: 3 - Todd Donovan, Kaylee Galloway, and Mark Stremmler

Also Present: Barry Buchanan, Tyler Byrd, Ben Elenbaas, and Jon Scanlon

Announcements

Special Presentation

1. [AB2025-881](#) Presentation from Parks & Recreation regarding the Lake Whatcom Watershed Forest Management Plan

Bennett Knox, Parks and Recreation Department Director, introduced the presentation.

Matthew Schmidt, Northwest Natural Resource Group, read from a presentation (on file) and answered questions.

Knox answered whether the plan will pay for itself. He spoke about the things (silviculture recommendations and road maintenance) that will incur cost, and stated it will not fully pay for itself, but there are prescriptions in the plan that could generate revenue and be used to offset costs. He answered whether the Parks Department is prepared for the increased responsibility, and stated they now have a land management supervisor who will oversee the contracts associated with this work and they are looking to build capacity. He spoke about grant opportunities, and answered where they think the rest of the money will come from.

Aly Pennucci, Executive's Office, stated there is a staff team who is looking at a number of potential revenue options, and the other strategy will be a discussion with the Council about priorities. She answered whether fiscal notes could be added to the plan so Council will know the trajectory of where this is going, and stated they do not have a full financial analysis of the plan at this point and adopting the plan does not mean they are saying yes to every strategy in it.

This agenda item was PRESENTED.

Committee Discussion and Recommendation to Council

1. [AB2025-793](#) Resolution adopting the Lake Whatcom Invasive Freshwater Mussel Rapid and Extended Response Plan

Gary Stoyka, Public Works Department, briefed the councilmembers on the history of the program and spoke about mussel species that have been detected in nearby states. The discovery of those mussels prompted the City of Bellingham to look into putting together a rapid response plan in the event that they have a detection in Lake Whatcom and to prevent them from getting established in the lake (Washington and Oregon are the only two states in the lower 48 that do not have infestations of zebra and quagga mussels). He stated the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) has the ultimate authority for addressing such infestations and this plan was developed to be supportive of their plan. The City is the ultimate implementer of the aquatic invasive species program locally, so the County would also just be supporting them. He spoke about the County's responsibilities.

Galloway moved that the Resolution be RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 3 - Donovan, Galloway, and Stremmler

Nay: 0

2. [AB2025-871](#) Resolution authorizing the Whatcom County Conservation Easement Program staff and Whatcom County Executive to proceed with the acquisition of one agricultural conservation easement

Alexander Harris, Planning and Development Services Department, briefed the councilmembers on the easement for which they are seeking Council approval.

Paul Schissler, Conservation Easement Program Oversight Committee, spoke about responsibilities of that committee, current vacancies, that there is a shortage of local funding for conservation futures revenue, and that the committee was asked to do a report on other funding sources that could be used, both local and non-local.

Harris spoke about five easements they are working on that the oversight committee has already approved, and the one easement they are considering today. He answered if the property has water rights and what drove the Conservation Easement Program score up so high. He spoke about the scoring criteria and stated it got full points for soils (it is a great place to farm) and the water rights gave it extra points.

Elenbaas stated he is not a fan of conservation easements, especially on

agriculture land, because of unintended consequences which harm the ability to farm. He spoke about his concerns for a site like this one and asked if the conservation easement has its own setback which would chew up more of the farmland, and if it and its restrictions are mindful of the ability to farm the land.

Harris stated it is early in the process and they have not actually drafted the easement, but need Council approval to design this and make sure the County is getting the values that it needs to be protected in the easement. He continued his presentation.

Karen Steensma, property owner, spoke about how the conservation easement has been a fantastic opportunity, has allowed them to not feel so constrained by development pressure or land prices, and has afforded the opportunity to move forward with the next generation.

Stremmler stated the family is excited about this so he sees it as a good move.

Donovan moved that the Resolution be RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 3 - Donovan, Galloway, and Stremmler

Nay: 0

Items Added by Revision

There were no agenda items added by revision.

Other Business

There was no other business.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 11:21 a.m.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Cathy Halka, Council Clerk

Kaylee Galloway, Committee Chair

Meeting Minutes prepared by Kristi Felbinger