

Whatcom County Council Planning and Development Committee

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



Committee Minutes - Final

Tuesday, January 10, 2023

3:30 PM

Hybrid Meeting

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

COUNCILMEMBERS

Tyler Byrd
Ben Elenbaas
Kaylee Galloway

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Dana Brown-Davis, C.M.C.

Call To Order

Committee Member Ben Elenbaas called the meeting to order at 3:52 p.m. in a hybrid meeting.

Roll Call

Present: 3 - Ben Elenbaas, Kaylee Galloway, and Tyler Byrd

Absent: None

Also Present: Barry Buchanan, Todd Donovan, Carol Frazey, and Kathy Kershner

Announcements

Special Order of Business

1. [AB2023-049](#) Nomination and appointment of Committee Chair

Galloway moved that Elenbaas be NOMINATED AND APPOINTED. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 3 - Elenbaas, Galloway, and Byrd

Nay: 0

Absent: 0

Elenbaas was appointed as Chair and continued the meeting.

Committee Discussion

1. [AB2022-597](#) Discussion of the Buildable Lands Report

Matt Aamot, Planning and Development Services Department, introduced the item.

Elenbaas stated he hoped the Buildable Lands Report would address the issue that the City of Bellingham always seems to underestimate what they are offering for growth which seems to necessitate the smaller cities growing at a pace that may not be sustainable for them. People are building in the floodplains because they cannot really afford to build anywhere else. He wants to look to the City of Bellingham and ask whether they are ever going to service the Urban Growth Areas (UGAs) they have so we can actually build what the market is looking for.

Perry Eskridge, Whatcom County Association of REALTORS, spoke about the contents of an email he recently sent to Councilmember Galloway. He

stated the two biggest issues people are talking about right now are homelessness and housing. He spoke about why and stated what is fundamentally required in the Buildable Lands Report is to look at all the zoning and neighborhoods comprehensively and ask what the development potential is under the zoning we have now and what the development potential should be in order to bring housing prices down. Bellingham at this point is saying they do not have a problem but in fact have a housing surplus so there is a disconnect.

Councilmembers discussed wanting the Buildable Lands Report to fix or work towards fixing the problem that we actually have, leaning on the City of Bellingham to help us make sure this document is going to help with a solution to affordability and supply problems instead of checking a box that the report is done, whether they really want so much growth going as far away from the city limits as possible in Birch Bay and Blaine, and planning growth where there is not infrastructure for it which then encourages more commutes.

Kershner noted that sixty two percent of the projected Whatcom County employment growth is allocated to Bellingham whereas only forty five percent of the population growth is allocated to Bellingham as referenced on page 19 of the report, and Aamot answered how those figures were determined. Kershner stated the disparity means people are living in areas around Lynden, Blaine, Sumas, and Everson but driving into Bellingham to work and the City of Bellingham does not want to annex those areas because it is expensive to provide urban-level services there and incur the cost. Bellingham needs to take sixty two percent of the population growth if they are going to take the business.

Chris Behee, City of Bellingham, stated the employment allocation to each of the UGAs is largely based on historic patterns.

Elenbaas stated we use historical data to justify future planning. We either need to have Bellingham take more of the housing or we need to start providing some zoning in places like Kendall for infrastructure like a Lowes or Home Depot or a grocery store and we probably need to do both.

Eskridge stated that Bellingham historically took well over sixty percent of the population and that it has only been since the Growth Management Act that Bellingham has consistently and by design taken thirty or so percent. To help with housing affordability, start with evaluating socioeconomic factors (where people live and work and how much they make), looking at zoning,

and asking about Bellingham's annexation plan.

Behee spoke about the proportion of growth that Bellingham is accommodating and that the annexation process is still petition driven and Bellingham is doing their best to provide newly developing areas on the margins of the city with urban services and keep pace with annexation as they come in.

Councilmembers and Aamot discussed what they can actually do as a Council with this report, a goal for this report being to reflect the reality of the average Bellingham resident who cannot afford their rent and to help solve that problem, and what they should do from here.

Byrd moved that the report come back to the committee for review.

Galloway moved to hold in committee but there was already that motion on the floor.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 3 - Byrd, Elenbaas, and Galloway

Nay: 0

This agenda item was HELD IN COMMITTEE.

Items Added by Revision

There were no agenda items added by revision.

Other Business

There was no other business.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 4:35 p.m.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Ben Elenbaas-via email 1/27/2023

Dana Brown-Davis, Council Clerk

Ben Elenbaas, Committee Chair

Kristi Felbinger, Minutes Transcription

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