

Whatcom County Council Special Committee of the Whole

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



Committee Minutes - Final

**Tuesday, May 5, 2026
10:15 AM**

Hybrid Meeting - Council Chambers

**HYBRID MEETING - LUNCH BREAK FROM 12:00 P.M. TO 1:00 P.M. -
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 Stremler

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Cathy Halka, AICP, CMC

Call To Order

Council Chair Kaylee Galloway called the meeting to order at 10:28 a.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**Public Comment (Comprehensive Plan)**

1. [AB2026-304](#) Public comments on the draft Preface to the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan

The following people spoke:

- Irene Morgan
- Lyle Sorensen
- Ryan Bowman
- Perry Eskridge

Hearing no one else, Galloway closed public comment.

This agenda item was RECEIVED.

Committee Discussion (Comprehensive Plan)

1. [AB2026-273](#) Discussion and preliminary Council direction on the Preface to the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan

Galloway introduced discussion of the Preface of the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan.

Galloway moved to include the land acknowledgement as reflected in Item 1 in the amendment table (Revised Chart of Proposed Council Changes for 5.5.2026).

Rienstra seconded the motion.

Galloway moved to amend the first sentence (of Item 1 in the Revised Chart of Proposed Council Changes for 5.5.2026) to read as follows:

Whatcom County Government acknowledges that present day
Whatcom County is located on the traditional and ancestral
homelands of the Lummi Nation and Nooksack Indian Tribe, as well

as other Coast Salish peoples who have lived in and stewarded this land since time immemorial.

Boyle seconded the motion.

Councilmembers discussed the motion.

The motion to amend carried by the following vote:

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

Nay: 0

The motion carried by the following vote:

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

Nay: 2 - Elenbaas and Stremler

Galloway moved to include the labor acknowledgement (Item 2 in the Revised Chart of Proposed Council Changes for 5.5.2026).

Boyle seconded the motion.

Stremler moved to amend the labor acknowledgement to include the language from Item 3 (recognizing the Dutch community).

Scanlon seconded the motion.

Councilmembers discussed the motion.

Buchanan moved to amend to include the Norwegian community, so that the labor acknowledgement includes the following sentence:

We recognize the Dutch and Norwegian communities with their wisdom and skills to develop agriculture lands which remains a vital part of Whatcom County's economy.

Scanlon seconded the motion.

Elenbaas stated he would prefer to move away from specific language to be more inclusive.

Buchanan moved to amend the labor acknowledgement (Item 2 in the Revised Chart of Proposed Council Changes for 5.5.2026) so that it includes the following:

We recognize immigrant communities with their wisdom and skills to develop agriculture lands which remains a vital part of Whatcom County's economy.

Scanlon seconded the motion.

The motion to amend carried by the following vote:

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

Nay: 0

Scanlon moved to hold (AB2026-273) until May 19.

Boyle seconded the motion.

The motion to hold carried by the following vote:

Aye: 6 - Boyle, Buchanan, Galloway, Rienstra, Scanlon, and Elenbaas

Nay: 1 - Stremmler

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

MOTION 1:

Motion approved to amend the first sentence of the land acknowledgement statement (Item 1 in the Revised Chart of Proposed Council Changes for 5.5.2026) to read as follows:

Whatcom County Government acknowledges that present day Whatcom County is located on the traditional and ancestral homelands of the Lummi Nation and Nooksack Indian Tribe, as well as other Coast Salish peoples who have lived in and stewarded this land since time immemorial.

MOTION 2:

Motion approved to include the land acknowledgement statement as amended.

MOTION 3:

Motion approved to amend the labor acknowledgement (Item 2 in the Revised Chart of Proposed Council Changes for 5.5.2026) so that it includes the following:

We recognize immigrant communities with their wisdom and skills to develop agriculture lands which remains a vital part of Whatcom County's economy.

MOTION 4:

Motion approved to hold until May 19 (Special Committee of the Whole).

2. [AB2026-249](#) Discussion regarding schedule for Council review of the comprehensive plan update
- Galloway stated that there is not enough time remaining to discuss the

Comprehensive Plan review schedule. Council will discuss Comprehensive Plan Chapters 2, 8, 10, and the Appendices, in addition to the Preface, at future meetings.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED.

Committee Discussion (Other)

3. [AB2026-314](#) Council Operational Planning with the Health and Community Services Department

Charlene Ramont, Whatcom County Health and Community Services (WCHCS), led councilmembers through a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) exercise to help gauge priorities for the upcoming budget process.

Councilmembers listed perceived strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the department.

Clerk's Note: Buchanan left the meeting at 11:36 a.m.

Ramont asked councilmembers to complete an affinity diagram to cluster themes and prioritize topics to focus on when developing the department budget. She stated that multiple councilmembers identified the following topics: strong, skilled team; slow internal processes; collaborative, informed efforts; building and strengthening community; and costs of delivering outcomes increasing.

Councilmembers discussed the exercise.

Ramont stated that the exercise, which was also completed by department staff, will be used to help guide the department's planning for the biennial budget.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED.

4. [AB2026-316](#) Facilitated discussion regarding 2026 Council strategic planning

Clerk's Note: Buchanan returned to the meeting after the lunch break.

Eric Johnson, Columbia Policy Advisors, provided an overview of the plan for the afternoon's work session. He reviewed the strategic themes and focuses that councilmembers identified at their last work session in February:

Values:

- Engaged community

- Effective and efficient county government: measuring performance

Policy Priorities:

- Housing
- Water resources
- Economic development
- Community health and wellness

Ongoing Focus:

- Biennial budget
- Comprehensive Plan and development regulation updates

Johnson stated that the goal of the work session would be to develop SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic/relevant, and timebound) key actions and objectives for each identified value, priority, and focus.

Galloway asked if public safety and behavioral health could be discussed separately from community health and wellness as a policy priority.

Elenbaas stated that delivering on basic core functions of county government should be discussed as a strategic theme.

Johnson led councilmembers in a discussion to develop SMART key actions and objectives for each strategic theme and focus.

Councilmembers discussed the following goals with Johnson:

- Setting up a meeting between water adjudication stakeholders
- Increasing community engagement around the biennial budget
- Increasing shelter capacity
- Holding a community meeting on the Community Health Assessment
- Developing a community outreach strategy
- Closing gaps in access to behavioral health services
- Supporting senior centers in Whatcom County
- Increasing economic development
- Improving workforce development
- Making decisions regarding criminal justice facilities

Johnson stated that he would use the information collected during the work session to finalize a set of SMART goals that would be distributed to councilmembers at a later date.

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 4:28 p.m.

The County Council approved these minutes on May 26, 2026.

ATTEST:



Cathy Halka, Council Clerk

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Kaylee Galloway, Council Chair

Meeting Minutes prepared by Jenna Gernand