

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, July 8, 2025

2:25 PM

Hybrid Meeting - Council Chambers

HYBRID MEETING - ADJOURNS BY 4:30 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 Stremmer

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Cathy Halka, AICP, CMC

Call To Order

Council Chair Kaylee Galloway called the meeting to order at 2:30 p.m. in a hybrid meeting.

Roll Call

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

Announcements

Committee Discussion

1. [AB2025-484](#) Discussion of an ordinance granting Percie Road Water Association a franchise for the provision of water services in Whatcom County

Andrew Hester, Public Works Department, briefed the councilmembers and stated this will be an agreement to allow this water association to use county rights of way in their particular area for the provision of water services. He stated the public hearing will be on the first August meeting. He answered whether this is just a right of way agreement and stated it is.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED.
2. [AB2025-486](#) Discussion of an ordinance granting Point Roberts Water District #4 a franchise for the provision of water services in Whatcom County

Andrew Hester, Public Works Department, stated this is for a different area than the previous agenda item (**AB2025-484**) but is the same basic agreement. He answered questions about the 25-year duration of the agreement and stated the Council at that time will potentially see this again.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED.
3. [AB2025-509](#) 2025-2026 Mid-Biennium Budget Review

Aly Pennucci, Executive's Office, read from a presentation (on file) and the following additional people also spoke and answered questions:
 - Kayla Schott-Bresler, Executive's Office
 - Satpal Sidhu, County Executive
Pennucci spoke about the guiding principles of the budget, the short- and long-term priorities in the goal of moving toward a budget that is not structurally out of balance, trying to stay within the framework of the 2026 budget and incorporating cost increases in a way that does not increase the overall expense budget, work the Administration and departments have done to date for the mid-biennium review and that the budget exercise has taken longer than expected, how the compiled information will be summarized

and shared with the Council, the low and high reduction scenarios that were distributed to each department for the budget exercise, and the estimated reductions (to date) that would be needed in various funds in order to stay within the 2026 framework if Council said yes to all requested 2026 cost increases.

Pennucci, the speakers, and councilmembers discussed the reduction estimate for the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Fund and whether it is optimistic given the uncertainty around Ground Emergency Medical Transportation (GEMT) Program funds. They discussed Donovan's frustration around not being able to get a clear view of that fund, that revenue assumptions for EMS are conservative but that the Council should indicate if they would like them to be more conservative than they are, how much the Administration knows about State and Federal revenues since the end of the legislative session and whether they are expecting to have more certainty around that when they discuss the budget in the fall, whether any of the reduction scenarios they are considering might put the County in a better position in 2027 and 2028 and beyond, that the longer they avoid dipping into the reserve balance the more flexibility they will have in future years, that Whatcom County is in a stagnant state of revenue and that there is no revenue growth happening this year, that the first aim for the next biennium is to stay steady in the budget since there is uncertainty around revenue, that Council should talk about the EMS and public safety budgets to see how they can improve on those and try to find some savings, giving Council a breakdown of the reduction scenario assumptions and inventory of services, that the budget process is dictated by State law, and that the biggest decisions for Council are the policy decisions as opposed to each line item or service.

Donovan stated he thinks this is the most transparent budget process since he has been on Council and Buchanan stated he too appreciates the process and how the Administration is approaching it.

Pennucci spoke about next steps for the mid-biennium review.

Councilmembers and the speakers discussed that they need to allow for more work sessions since this will not be like a normal budget cycle, what it would take to be able to utilize technology resources to display the budget information like they have started to do with the Healthy Children's Fund, that the preliminary 2026 adjustment estimates noted in the presentation represent reductions that would need to be made to offset new costs in 2026 in order to not decrease the reserve, that potential budget impacts of Charter Review Commission amendments are not factored in

yet, communicating impacts to the public of potential Charter amendments such as modifying the budget process, that the Administration could put together a fiscal note or cost estimate for those proposed amendments, and coming back to this discussion on August 6 to do a preliminary review of the Council Office's Supplemental Budget Requests (SBRs) before they are due later in August.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED.

4. [AB2025-514](#) Discussion and work session regarding the housing program

Galloway introduced the presentation.

Janie Oliphant, Health and Community Services, read from a presentation (on file) on where they are at with the Whatcom County 5-Year Homeless Housing Plan, and she and the following answered questions:

- Chris D'Onofrio, Health and Community Services
- Ann Beck, Health and Community Services
- Kayla Schott-Bresler, Executive's Office

They discussed with councilmembers how much of the State funding has already been allocated and whether they will have funds for potential new programs, which of the new strategies the councilmembers would like to know more about (including future planning around tiny home villages, implementation of prioritization criteria for homeless housing capital projects, supporting developers with training and technical assistance to create ten-year capital needs assessments and preventative maintenance schedules, and convening workgroups to identify barriers to affordable housing), that it will be performance indicators that will help to determine if the \$18 million a year of contracted services is achieving a reduction in homelessness and its associated harms, that the point in time count for 2025 will likely not be that different from what it has been in the past, that they have seen a slight decrease overall but a slight increase in the proportion that are unsheltered, how they are also using performance indicators to measure success, whether the programs they are talking about are housing combined with treatment for addiction and what the flexibility is in the funding to be able to provide people what they need while providing housing, an idea of using VRBO properties as shelter in the winter months but that they do not want to put an unhoused person or family into housing with no supports in place, letting the Council know if there are barriers they can help to break down as it pertains to affordable housing or other things such as housing supply and what kinds of conversations could be had cross-departmentally on that front, whether there might be too many strategies for the plan and whether it would make sense to invest more in one thing over another, that the role of government is to sometimes do the

things that nobody else can do, that every element of this work is lifesaving, that they should work to understand the demand because it is key to having measurable and meaningful metrics, and what tools they do use to understand the needs.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED.

Items Added by Revision

There were no agenda items added by revision.

Other Business

Elenbaas stated he will not be able to attend the EMS interview tomorrow since he has to work and asked if someone would like to fill in for him.

Galloway stated she will be there.

Kayla Schott-Bresler, Executive's Office, stated they will have a second round of interviews and are also happy to do something like a councilmember open reception or whatever else they can do to support councilmember participation in the process.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 4:29 p.m.

The County Council approved these minutes on August 6, 2025.

ATTEST:



Cathy Halka, Council Clerk

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA



Kaylee Galloway, Council Chair

Meeting Minutes prepared by Kristi Felbinger