

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, November 19, 2019

1:30 PM

Council Chambers

COUNCILMEMBERS

Barbara Brenner
Rud Browne
Barry Buchanan
Tyler Byrd
Todd Donovan
Carol Frazey
Satpal Sidhu

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Dana Brown-Davis, C.M.C.

Call To Order

Council Chair Rud Browne called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. in the Council Chambers, 311 Grand Avenue, Bellingham, Washington.

Roll Call

Present: 7 - Barbara Brenner, Rud Browne, Barry Buchanan, Tyler Byrd, Todd Donovan, Carol Frazey and Satpal Sidhu

Absent: None

Committee Discussion

1. [AB2019-575](#) Winter weather shelter updates from the Health Department and other providers
Buchanan gave an update and the following people presented (on file) and/or answered questions:

Ann Beck, Health Department
Tara Sundin, City of Bellingham
Mike Parker, Opportunity Council
Emerson McCuin, Northwest Youth Services
Jack Louws, County Executive
Tyler Schroeder, Executive's Office

Presenters spoke and answered questions about the various shelter options and partner organizations for different cold weather conditions, guiding assumptions established to determine whether severe weather shelters need to be opened and how that information should be made public, training and coordination of volunteers, whether County personnel or law enforcement officers need to be onsite at the shelters, strategies for getting information out to those who need to know when and where shelters are open, the City of Bellingham's role in winter shelters, coordination between the Opportunity Council winter shelter and other shelters and services using an intake system, statistics of housing challenges in Whatcom County, Northwest Youth Service's Ground Floor day program and other services, the ages of the youth they generally have in the program, expanding the hours of the program, and resources and funding needs for the youth shelter operations and programs.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED.

2. [AB2019-596](#) Discussion regarding a proposed ordinance amending the 2020 Whatcom County Budget, Request No. 1, in the amount of \$18,918,279

Buchanan moved to recommend to the full Council to appropriate \$125,000 in General Fund dollars to Northwest Youth Services for expanding the hours for the Ground Floor Program for 2020. The motion was seconded.

Brenner stated she would like to see the funding connected to specific purposes and that money would be allocated from other sources besides the General Fund.

Donovan suggested a friendly amendment to impose a one percent property tax increase to help fund the appropriation.

The friendly amendment was **not accepted**.

The following people answered questions:

Tyler Schroeder, Executive's Office

Jack Louws, County Executive

They discussed using money appropriated in the General Fund and other restricted funds for the project to install storage lockers, whether the 2020 ending fund balance would stay within the 15 percent minimum threshold of expenses if General Funds are used for the \$125,000, whether other funds that are general fund-based dollars can be transferred back into the general fund, the County not wanting to spend the excess fund balance because of the concern of the "structural gap" of General Fund revenue not keeping up with inflation and population growth, and whether the last two jail proposals included using the County's banked capacity.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Brenner, Browne, Buchanan, Byrd, Donovan, Frazey, and Sidhu

Nay: 0

Buchanan moved to recommend to the full Council to appropriate \$15,000 to Northwest Youth Services for the services and supplies needed to operate the youth winter shelter. The motion was seconded.

Councilmembers discussed possible sources of funds to cover the appropriation.

Buchanan amended his motion to recommend to the full Council to appropriate an amount not to exceed \$30,000 to Northwest Youth Services for the services and supplies needed to operate the youth winter shelter. The motion was seconded.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Brenner, Browne, Buchanan, Byrd, Donovan, Frazey, and Sidhu

Nay: 0

The discussion continued with the following people:

Regina Delahunt, Health Department Director

Jack Louws, County Executive

Tyler Schroeder, Executive's Office
Marianne Caldwell, Administrative Services Department

Councilmembers and staff discussed the origin of the millage fund dollars for developmental disabilities and mental health and why they are proposed to be moved from Health back to the General Fund instead of staying as a special, dedicated fund, why the two respective amounts were created and moved separately into the General Fund, whether all the special taxes included on the property tax bill are in their own individual funds, how the public can discern what property tax money is dedicated for, what percentage of the developmental disabilities fund is already contracted out, and how much time it takes from an accounting perspective to keep the funds separate.

Donovan moved to recommend to the full Council to keep the developmental disabilities and mental health millage budgets in their respective dedicated funds. The motion was seconded.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Brenner, Browne, Buchanan, Byrd, Donovan, Frazey, and Sidhu

Nay: 0

Discussion continued about budgeting decisions for the Behavioral Health Fund to reduce some contracts in the community, how to get those contracts funded again, and how it gets communicated to the Council when budget items and contractual services get limited or cut from the budget.

Donovan moved to recommend to the full Council to approve a one percent property tax increase to be added to the General Fund. The motion was seconded.

The discussion continued with the following people:

Tyler Schroeder, Executive's Office
Keith Wilnauer, County Assessor

Councilmembers and staff discussed and answered questions about increases in living and housing expenses, how to fund FTE increases, the impact of a one percent property tax increase to a property owner's property tax bill and how much revenue that would generate, what the average tax increase was to individual property owners over the last three years, upcoming increases to tax payers as a result of the McCleary decision and an increased State education levy, and how much the average tax bill will go up next year.

Donovan withdrew his motion.

Donovan moved to recommend to the full Council to hold **AB2019-546 Ordinance limiting the 2020 General Fund property tax levy**. The motion was seconded.

Councilmembers discussed whether holding it until December third would be too late, and why this ordinance is titled the way it is.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: - Donovan, Frazey, Sidhu, Browne

Nay: - Brenner, Byrd

Out of the Room: 1 - Buchanan

The discussion continued with the following people:

Wendy Jones, Sheriff's Office

Keith Wilnauer, County Assessor

Jack Louws, County Executive

Councilmembers and staff discussed the proposed funding for the Crisis Negotiating Team training, how difficult it is for deputies to get that training now and how much difference it would make if there was one more FTE; the supplemental budget request on packet page 188 regarding High Value Appeal Defense - Professional Services, why the requested amount of \$60,000 is for 2020 and not for 2019, and the reason for the Petrogas appeal; and whether the budget item for a contract for a needs assessment for the jail would be under this biennium update.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED.

Other Business

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 4:57 p.m.

The County Council approved these minutes on January 14, 2020.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Dana Brown-Davis, Council Clerk

Rud Browne, Council Chair

Kristi Felbinger, Minutes Transcription

SIGNED COPY ON FILE

