

Whatcom County Council Finance and Administrative Services Committee

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



Committee Minutes - Final

Tuesday, September 23, 2025

8:50 AM

Hybrid Meeting - Council Chambers

**HYBRID MEETING - MAY BEGIN LATE - ADJOURNS BY 9:50 A.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

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Cathy Halka, AICP, CMC

Call To Order

Committee Chair Todd Donovan called the meeting to order at 9:08 a.m. in a hybrid meeting.

Roll Call

Present: 3 - Tyler Byrd, Todd Donovan, and Barry Buchanan

Also Present: Ben Elenbaas, Kaylee Galloway, Jon Scanlon, and Mark Stremmler

Announcements

Council "Consent Agenda" Items

Buchanan moved to recommend approval of Consent Agenda items one through eleven.

Consent Agenda item #4 (AB2025-649)

Scanlon asked whether some of these funds could be used for doing cost estimates for hazard mitigation work for the future shorelines project.

Lauren Clemens, Climate Action Manager, stated they are on a short timeline for this particular grant. The initial approach is going to be to complete the climate element requirements and then they are looking to create some alignment with the climate vulnerability assessment for Lake Whatcom into 2026 if the grant allows that.

Aly Pennucci, Executive's Office, stated she and Public Works are looking into what Scanlon is asking about and will follow up.

Consent Agenda item #8 (AB2025-653)

Stremmler asked how useful and accurate the Nooksack River stream gages are during a flood event.

Gary Stoyka, Public Works Department, stated the gages provide the base information for flood response. They have some issues with the Cedarville gage because of its location in the river, but the others are useful and accurate.

Consent Agenda item #10 (AB2025-658)

Donovan stated he is having trouble understanding the memo and that the contract is for \$0.

Kayla Schott-Bresler, Executive's Office, stated this is a commissary services contract (for indigent hygiene items) as opposed to our whole food vendor contract (which they are expecting to significantly go up in cost.). She confirmed it is not costing us because it is a commission on sales sort of thing.

Consent Agenda item #5 (AB2025-650)

Byrd asked whether they are going to get a presentation on this. He is trying to figure out where they are today versus where they are going, and what the grant will look like in its entirety.

Gary Stoyka stated these funds are used to run a lot of their local process to coordinate activities under the Puget Sound Partnership, and he spoke about examples of what the funds go to.

Councilmembers voted on the Consent items (see votes on individual items below).

1. [AB2025-595](#) Request authorization for the County Executive to enter into a contract between Whatcom County and the City of Bellingham for the purpose of providing pass-through funding from the Washington State Military Department to the What-Comm 911 Communications Center, in the amount of \$74,045

Buchanan moved that the Interlocal be RECOMMENDED FOR AUTHORIZATION BY CONSENT. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 3 - Byrd, Donovan, and Buchanan

Nay: 0

2. [AB2025-647](#) Request authorization for the County Executive to enter into an interlocal agreement between Whatcom County and Washington State Department of Ecology to collect and properly manage household hazardous waste at the Disposal of Toxics Facility, in the amount of \$542,845

Buchanan moved that the Interlocal be RECOMMENDED FOR AUTHORIZATION BY CONSENT. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 3 - Byrd, Donovan, and Buchanan

Nay: 0

3. [AB2025-648](#) Request authorization for the County Executive to enter into an interlocal agreement

between Whatcom County and Washington State Department of Ecology to enforce solid waste codes and monitor solid waste handling facilities for compliance, in the amount of \$237,068

Buchanan moved that the Interlocal be RECOMMENDED FOR AUTHORIZATION BY CONSENT. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 3 - Byrd, Donovan, and Buchanan

Nay: 0

4. [AB2025-649](#) Request authorization for the County Executive to enter into a grant agreement between Whatcom County and the Washington State Department of Commerce for climate planning, in the amount of \$283,000

Buchanan moved that the Interlocal be RECOMMENDED FOR AUTHORIZATION BY CONSENT. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 3 - Byrd, Donovan, and Buchanan

Nay: 0

5. [AB2025-650](#) Request authorization for the County Executive to enter into a grant agreement between Whatcom County and the Puget Sound Partnership for coordination of the Whatcom Local Integrating Organization, in the amount of \$443,750 (Council acting as the Whatcom County Flood Control Zone District Board of Supervisors)

Buchanan moved that the Contract (FCZDBS) be RECOMMENDED FOR AUTHORIZATION BY CONSENT. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 3 - Byrd, Donovan, and Buchanan

Nay: 0

6. [AB2025-651](#) Request authorization for the County Executive to enter into a joint funding agreement between Whatcom County and the United States Department of Interior Geological Survey for stream flow or water quality data collection at ten Nooksack watershed stream gages, in the amount of \$127,940 (Council acting as the Whatcom County Flood Control Zone District Board of Supervisors)

Buchanan moved that the Contract (FCZDBS) be RECOMMENDED FOR AUTHORIZATION BY CONSENT. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 3 - Byrd, Donovan, and Buchanan

Nay: 0

7. [AB2025-652](#) Request authorization for the County Executive to enter into a contract between Whatcom County and the Washington State Department of Ecology to perform vegetation maintenance at various riparian and wetland mitigation sites, in the amount of \$109,340

Buchanan moved that the Interlocal be RECOMMENDED FOR AUTHORIZATION BY CONSENT. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 3 - Byrd, Donovan, and Buchanan

Nay: 0

8. [AB2025-653](#) Request authorization for the County Executive to enter into an interlocal agreement between Whatcom County and United States Geological Survey (USGS) for the ongoing operation and maintenance of the County's 11 stream gages within the Nooksack River early warning system, Jones Creek, and the Sumas River, in the amount of \$176,455 (Council acting as the Whatcom County Flood Control Zone District Board of Supervisors)

Buchanan moved that the Contract (FCZDBS) be RECOMMENDED FOR AUTHORIZATION BY CONSENT. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 3 - Byrd, Donovan, and Buchanan

Nay: 0

9. [AB2025-655](#) Request authorization for the County Executive to enter into an interlocal agreement between Whatcom County and Administrative Office of the Courts to support the Interpreter Reimbursement Program, in the amount of \$102,171

Buchanan moved that the Interlocal be RECOMMENDED FOR AUTHORIZATION BY CONSENT. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 3 - Byrd, Donovan, and Buchanan

Nay: 0

10. [AB2025-658](#) Request authorization for the County Executive to enter into a contract between Whatcom County and Summit Food Service to provide commissary services in the Whatcom County Jail and Work Center, in the amount of \$0

Buchanan moved that the Contract be RECOMMENDED FOR AUTHORIZATION BY CONSENT. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 3 - Byrd, Donovan, and Buchanan

Nay: 0

11. [AB2025-662](#) Request authorization for the County Executive to enter into a contract between Whatcom County and Harris Engineers for the purpose of Clean Building Performance Assurance Services for Whatcom County Facilities, in the amount of \$449,882.29

Buchanan moved that the Contract be RECOMMENDED FOR AUTHORIZATION BY CONSENT. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 3 - Byrd, Donovan, and Buchanan

Nay: 0

Special Presentation

1. [AB2025-644](#) Report from the Human Resources Division of the Administrative Services Department
- Melissa Keeley, Administrative Services Department Human Resources, read from the "Complaint Policies and Procedures" (on file) which outlines steps HR has taken to address recommendations from the Matrix consultants (which Council will be hearing from this afternoon in Committee of the Whole). She answered how HR gets this information to employees who do not regularly get on a computer or check County email, and stated they are working with Public Works on that and will be offering the personnel policy update verbally through an all-hands format, which Public Works staff are familiar with. She answered questions about updates to the nepotism policy and whether it includes more than familial relationships, and stated it has a revised definition for relative that includes romantic relationships of employees within the same department. She answered whether the bystander training is a new topic, and stated it is, and she spoke about the difference between that and mandatory reporter policies.

Satpal Sidhu, County Executive, commended HR for taking consistent steps for revising and making new policies.

Keeley answered what her thoughts are on how they can have standard policies that apply across the different power centers, such as independently elected officers, and stated that is something she will be engaging with the Executive's Office on since HR does not have decision-making authority on that.

This agenda item was REPORTED.

Committee Discussion and Recommendation to Council

1. [AB2025-608](#) Resolution amending the 2025 Flood Control Zone District and Subzones Budget, Request no. 3, in the amount of \$105,000 (Council acting as the Whatcom County Flood Control Zone District Board of Supervisors)

Buchanan moved that the Resolution (FCZDBS) be RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 3 - Byrd, Donovan, and Buchanan

Nay: 0

2. [AB2025-614](#) Ordinance establishing a project-based budget for the Jail Reentry Improvements project

Byrd moved that the Ordinance be RECOMMENDED FOR ADOPTION. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 3 - Byrd, Donovan, and Buchanan

Nay: 0

3. [AB2025-628](#) Ordinance amending the 2025 Whatcom County Budget, request no. 10, in the amount of \$1,820,416

***Buchanan moved* that the Ordinance be RECOMMENDED FOR ADOPTION.**

Byrd asked about the request "to fund payout for retiring administrator" under the Countywide EMS Tax Fund and whether it is just buying out the remaining paid time off (PTO) time as per County policy.

Kayla Schott-Bresler, Executive's Office, stated, per policy, they have cash-out provisions when an employee retires. Typically, there is a contingency held through the General Fund and the Executive's Office pays those costs, but in this situation, they have an employee who is billed entirely to another funding source. Their recommendation would be that those costs be paid out of the EMS fund rather than the General Fund. Therefore, they need to budget in the EMS fund for those costs.

Buchanan's motion that the Ordinance be RECOMMENDED FOR ADOPTION carried by the following vote:

Aye: 3 - Byrd, Donovan, and Buchanan

Nay: 0

Items Added by Revision

There were no agenda items added by revision.

Other Business

Stremmler asked about the Search and Rescue (SAR) (relocation) project which is not moving forward, and where they are at with the money that Council had appropriated for that purpose. He would like to make sure that money is still going to be available for SAR at some point down the road.

Donovan clarified it was money that was in the Community Priorities Fund.

Kayla Schott-Bresler, Executive's Office, gave a history around SAR's relocation. She stated in September 2024 the executive and council sent SAR a letter pledging they would pay a lease at \$12,500 a month for a period of 120 months (adding up to \$1.5 million). In that letter there is no expiration date, but the particular facility that SAR was interested in leasing has fallen through. There is also no immediate relocation need because the Northwest Annex redevelopment is on pause. So, as of now, there is \$1.5 million in the Community Priorities Fund that the executive is leaving for this project and a potential lease for SAR. The money is not formally designated in the accounting system but the plan is to leave that money in place for when SAR needs to relocate.

The additional people discussed the topic with councilmembers:

- Satpal Sidhu, County Executive
- Aly Pennucci, Executive's Office
- Randy Rydel, Administrative Services Department Finance Director

They discussed that the Northwest Annex project is now delayed for several years and that Council should think about whether it wants that money sitting there forever, that there are differing opinions on why the relocation to Everson stopped, that the money cannot be spent without Council authorization, that it would be reassuring if the County could tell SAR how long they will be able to stay where they are, ways the Administration can designate intended use for funds and that they are tracking what monies are committed or not committed, that the Administration can communicate with SAR that they can stay in the current space until the County makes a decision on the Northwest Annex, and that Council should maybe consider putting a time limit on the assignment of funds.

Other Business was discussed.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:48 a.m.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Todd Donovan-via email 9/30/2025

Cathy Halka, Council Clerk

Todd Donovan, Committee Chair

Meeting Minutes prepared by Kristi Felbinger

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