

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, September 12, 2023

2:40 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

Barry Buchanan
Tyler Byrd
Todd Donovan
Ben Elenbaas
Carol Frazey
Kaylee Galloway
Kathy Kershner

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Dana Brown-Davis, C.M.C.

Call To Order

Council Chair Barry Buchanan called the meeting to order at 2:54 p.m. in a hybrid meeting.

Roll Call

Present: 7 - Barry Buchanan, Tyler Byrd, Todd Donovan, Ben Elenbaas, Carol Frazey, Kaylee Galloway, and Kathy Kershner

Announcements

Special Presentation

1. [AB2023-565](#) Update on Maintenance and Operations' storm response

Elizabeth Kosa, Public Works Department Director, stated her update today was about the 2022 storm and flood season and the response of the following two Public Works employees in the wake of that storm:

- Assistant Superintendent Gina Miller and
- Assistant Superintendent Michael Koenen

She read some excerpts from Public Works' submission of nomination of the two employees to the County Road Administration Board (CRAB) for outstanding program and project managers of the year for 2022.

The following people presented the awards to Miller and Koenen:

- Jane Wall, County Road Administration Board
- Drew Woods, County Road Administration Board

Satpal Sidhu, County Executive, spoke about \$10 million accepted today via an agreement with CRAB for the ferry (**AB2023-545**) and thanked the County Road Administration Board.

Kosa spoke about an award (submitted by the Council) for county engineer of the year and the CRAB members presented the award to Jim Karcher, former County Engineer.

Karcher accepted the award.

This agenda item was PRESENTED.

2. [AB2023-515](#) Report from the Assessor's Office

Rebecca Xczar, County Assessor, reported on the Property Tax Exemption

for Senior Citizens and People with Disabilities and corrections and land valuation methodology changes that will affect some properties in the Open Space Programs, and she read from a presentation (on file). She answered questions about the approximately 600 properties whose values will be affected because of the methodology changes and whether increases in values could be done incrementally.

Byrd stated he would like to get at least one more update before the bills go out, when a majority of the data is finalized, and before the information is certified to the Board of Equalization, in regard to the number of people who are going to see an increase, and what the valuation and subsequent property tax increases might be (understanding the tax information will not be available until February).

This agenda item was REPORTED.

Committee Discussion and Recommendation to Council

1. [AB2023-529](#) Discussion and approval of a joint Council/Executive letter to the Port of Bellingham regarding broadband investments

Kayla Schott-Bresler, Strategic Initiatives Special Programs Manager, stated the Administration is looking for Council guidance on whether the source of a potential contribution to the Port of Bellingham (Port) should be American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) or Economic Development Investment (EDI) funds, whether a match should be required, and any recommendations in terms of an investment into a potential broadband project with the Port.

She and the following additional people discussed the item with Councilmembers:

- Tyler Schroeder, Director of Administrative Services
- Satpal Sidhu, County Executive
- Gina Stark, Port of Bellingham Economic Development Project Manager

They discussed that the Executive recommendation is to use EDI funds as the source of any contribution to the Port's broadband project, the available balance in the EDI fund, whether to keep the match component, whether this is a good use of EDI funds, why the Port was not awarded its requested grant from the Washington State Broadband Office and whether an approved contribution would be a loan or a grant, whether some of the money the Port would get back each month could be used to pay back the EDI fund, what the project would be with \$4 million as opposed to \$16 million now

that the Port did not get the requested \$12 million from the Broadband Office, and options going forward including the Administration taking the letter to the EDI Board and coming back with a recommendation.

Galloway moved to recommend the letter to the full Council. The motion was seconded by Donovan.

Frazey moved to amend the letter to add the following to the end of the 3rd paragraph:

The Council also requests that the EDI Board requires information on the Port's financing of the projects and ongoing use of any revenue be included with their funding application and as part of the information submitted to Council before approval.

Galloway seconded the motion to amend.

Sidhu spoke about the expense of a fiber project versus a hybrid system.

Galloway withdrew her second of Frazey's motion and took it as a friendly amendment to her main motion so that *her motion* would be to recommend the letter as amended.

Councilmembers and the speakers discussed the motion and whether the \$4 million would be used for a project or toward a match.

The motion to recommend the letter as amended carried by the following vote:

Aye: 4 - Buchanan, Donovan, Frazey, and Galloway

Nay: 2 - Byrd and Elenbaas

Out of the Meeting: 1 - Kershner

This agenda item was FORWARDED TO COUNCIL WITH RECOMMENDED MOTION(S).

Motion approved to recommend the letter to the full Council with the addition of the following at the end of the 3rd paragraph of the letter: "The Council also requests that the EDI Board requires information on the Port's financing of the projects and ongoing use of any revenue be included with their funding application and as part of the information submitted to Council before approval."

Committee Discussion

Buchanan stated that, because of time constraints, they are going to move the next two agenda items (**AB2023-582** and **AB2023-583**) to the next meeting date and the third remaining agenda item (**AB2023-569**) to Council

tonight. No action was taken on those items in this meeting.

- 1. [AB2023-582](#) Discussion of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding allocation

This agenda item was NOT ACTED UPON.

- 2. [AB2023-583](#) Discussion of a resolution supporting the use of Economic Development Investment (EDI) funds for affordable housing

This agenda item was NOT ACTED UPON.

- 3. [AB2023-569](#) Discussion of councilmember proposed mid-biennium modifications to the 2023-2024 Whatcom County Budget (modifications approved by council will be submitted to the Administration per budget instructions)

This agenda item was NOT ACTED UPON.

Items Added by Revision

There were no agenda items added by revision.

Other Business

There was no other business.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 4:29 p.m.

The County Council approved these minutes on September 26, 2023.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Dana Brown-Davis, Council Clerk

Barry Buchanan, Council Chair

Kristi Felbinger, Minutes Transcription

SIGNED COPY ON FILE