

Whatcom County Council (Special)

**COUNTY COURTHOUSE
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Bellingham, WA 98225-4038
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Minutes - Final

Thursday, November 17, 2022

1 PM

Hybrid Meeting

2023-2024 WHATCOM COUNTY BUDGET REVIEW WORK SESSION

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 Todd Donovan called the meeting to order at 1 p.m. in a hybrid meeting.

Roll Call

Present: 6 - Barry Buchanan, Todd Donovan, Ben Elenbaas, Carol Frazey, Kaylee Galloway, and Kathy Kershner

Absent: 1 - Tyler Byrd

Announcements

Committee Discussion

1. [AB2022-634](#) Discussion of the County Executive's recommended 2023-2024 Biennium Budget

Approximate Timestamp: 00:00:25

Tyler Schroeder, Director of Administrative Services answered the time frame for when they need everything finalized for this budget, whether they have added any other FTEs to the General Fund besides the Sheriff's deputies, and whether there is a public hearing scheduled for the budget Ordinance. There is a public hearing on November 22nd and there have not been other FTEs added to the General Fund by Council.

Donovan spoke about the fund balance reserve being below the recommended fifteen percent (15%) threshold if they add the proposed Sheriff deputy FTEs and being even lower if they add the new jail beds that they have directed the Sheriff to find.

Schroeder answered how they incorporate technical corrections and Council changes into the budget.

Kershner suggested they talk about some ideas for finding revenue to pay for the Sheriff positions and then move on to other changes proposed by herself and by Galloway.

Councilmembers and the following people discussed whether reducing the budget for the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) program, reducing the levy rate (and levy collection), then taking the difference from the levy rate that was passed and increasing the General Fund collection by utilizing banked capacity is something they can do.

- Tyler Schroeder, Executive's Office
- Satpal Sidhu, County Executive

Donovan stated his discomfort with that is that voters passed a tax to fund EMS and not to fund law enforcement.

Kershner stated it could be explained that the reduction to a \$.22 rate will give the EMS program the base revenue plus the \$2.5 million for the fifth medic unit, plus \$1.5 million for the Basic Life Support (BLS) program, as well as about \$2 million to continue operating, which should be more than adequate considering they still have a \$15 million fund balance after giving BLS \$5 million and buying the gurneys for \$1.4 million.

Sidhu discussed whether the idea should be brought to the EMS Oversight Board (EOB) and how that would affect the timing of budget adoption, whether having more deputies would solve the increase in crime, and making investments in our alternative response team which will ultimately reduce deputy workload.

Councilmembers discussed seeing the need for ten deputies after the recent Justice Project town hall meeting, whether higher assessed property values would allow for a lower levy rate, the need for law enforcement partners in some EMS response, whether this would be seen as a bait and switch to the voters, whether the discussion they need to be having is what FTEs should be cut from the budget, an email in the summer in which the Executive recommended the Council look at a \$.26 levy rate, whether they need legal advice, whether this is being reactionary because there is a lot of crime but not looking at the longer term effects, the fact that the Sheriff has been coming to the Council for at least a decade asking for a new jail and more deputies, and prioritizing the many needs in the county.

Approximate Timestamp: 00:21:59

Galloway asked about funding five FTEs in 2023 and holding off on funding an additional five FTEs in 2024 and coming back with an assessment after the first year.

Donovan asked how much banked capacity they would use under Kershner's proposal and how much of that banked capacity they would have been able to use for the construction of a jail.

Sidhu stated the Administration will be sharing different options for the capital project soon. He stated his suggestion for the Sheriff's Office is to find some middle ground. We will know more about whether we will get money for the alternate response team from the State which would free us to put more money into the Sheriff's deputies. He stated he read that if we

have more deputies on the street we have more arrests. We have no jail space, so we come into that cycle again.

Councilmembers discussed that hiring for the vacancies is just keeping the status quo and we have been hearing for decades that the Sheriff's Office is low, whether a year is long enough to hire and train deputies and then assess whether it made a difference and whether they should hire five more, the idea that when you hire and have more deputies on the ground you reduce crime because there is more of a presence of law enforcement, figuring out what the banked capacity amount would be and then seeing if there is support for that, and a proposal of getting rid of all the new FTE that are coming out of the General Fund and finding another position which would save them a million dollars.

Schroeder answered what the banked capacity would be and whether EMS could be fully funded the amount that is in the levy plan (\$13.235 million) and then extra money that comes in from valuations being higher than anticipated could be used elsewhere. He explained that the levy is a budget-based system so just because people's property tax valuations are going up, it does not mean it is collecting more money. Instead, the rate levied might be reduced. The way that taxes are allocated out to individual property owners may change based on valuations but not the amount that is being collected. The Ordinance that is being proposed for Council passage for EMS is that budget amount.

Councilmembers and the speakers discussed whether they could collect the full amount that the voters approved which was \$15.5 million, pay EMS what is in the levy plan and then use the extra revenue. They also discussed reducing the EMS budget, how much the EMS budget increased, and a middle ground of funding five FTEs in 2023 and holding off on funding any FTEs in 2024.

Schroeder stated he believes the Administration is of the opinion that five FTEs for the Sheriff's Office next year could be afforded with our General Fund balance without having to go into banked capacity. Then they can assess what is next in the next year through the mid-biennium process.

To propose this, the approved motion from the earlier meeting to fund five FTEs in 2023 and five in 2024 would need to be rescinded.

Approximate Timestamp: 00:40:03

Frazey moved to rescind the motion to hire five deputies in 2023 and five in 2024. The motion was seconded by Galloway.

The motion failed by the following vote:

Aye: 3 - Donovan, Frazey, and Galloway,

Nay: 3 - Buchanan, Elenbaas, and Kershner

Absent: 1 - Byrd

Approximate Timestamp: 00:42:07

Councilmembers and the speakers discussed ideas for using the \$4.1 million of banked capacity and for funding the deputies, whether FTEs should be cut, what amount of banked capacity they would need to make this work and bring our General Fund balance above the fifteen percent (15%) threshold, what the fund balance would be if they also include the \$4 million in jail beds they requested the Sheriff to find, whether taking banked capacity for deputies would be using capacity they could have used to help finance a jail facility, whether the Administration could look at the budget and come with ideas of what to cut after fully funding the deputies and the jail beds, whether using all the banked capacity might affect bonding, whether they could review the EMS budget next year, whether another work session could be scheduled, whether there might be ways Economic Development Investment (EDI) funds might relieve the General Fund, and whether increasing Sheriff's deputies would affect the city of Bellingham.

Approximate Timestamp: 01:05:14

Ann Beck, Health Department, answered whether there is County money that is currently going to 22 North and/or Northwest Youth Services and how much goes to Northwest Youth Services.

Kershner suggested they do a Request for Proposal (RFP) and get more vendors involved in providing those services. She also asked that the Health Department accelerate and wind down the COVID-19 response program for 2023 which is using American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, and that they use the ARPA dollars to support and stabilize our current workforce that is serving people with disabilities and/or our elderly population because that is a real crisis right now.

Erika Lautenbach, Health Department Director, stated she would be happy to look at that.

Donovan asked whether they had completed discussion about EMS.

Approximate Timestamp: 01:10:00

Kershner moved to reduce the EMS levy rate to \$.22. The motion was seconded by Elenbaas.

Councilmembers discussed the motion, how much that would yield, and why EMS has a reserve.

Kershner stated she would like to get a history of the EMS levy, how much the levy and the Ground Emergency Medical Transport (GEMT) has generated, the surplus amounts each year, and what the cost increases are actually buying us.

The motion failed by the following vote:

Aye: 2 - Elenbaas and Kershner

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

Absent: 1 - Byrd

Approximate Timestamp: 01:18:43

Galloway stated she would like to increase the climate action implementation to \$250,000 and give the Climate Action Manager an opportunity to use those funds as they see fit.

Galloway moved to increase ASR 6440 (Climate Action Plan Implementation) by \$100,000 from our General Fund to a total amount of \$250,000.

The following people answered questions:

- Tyler Schroeder, Executive's Office
- Gary Stoyka, Public Works Department
- Erika Lautenbach, Health Department Director
- Satpal Sidhu, County Executive

They answered whether they anticipate any other funding sources for climate action and whether there are funds available for this request.

Frazey seconded the motion and Councilmembers continued to discuss the motion with staff.

Approximate Timestamp: 01:30:20

Kershner moved to table the motion until Tuesday after the revenue discussion. The motion was seconded by Buchanan.

Councilmembers discussed the motion to table and Kershner stated she would like to also discuss her idea on Tuesday about the community crisis communication and education outreach position that the Department of

Emergency Management has requested.

The motion to table carried by the following vote:

Aye: 6 - Donovan, Frazey, Galloway, Kershner, Buchanan, and Elenbaas

Nay: 0

Absent: 1 - Byrd

Approximate Timestamp: 01:32:24

Kershner asked whether there other funding sources (other than General Fund) for the community crisis communication education and outreach position.

The following people answered:

- Tyler Schroeder, Executive's Office
- Doug Chadwick, Undersheriff

Approximate Timestamp: 01:34:26

Galloway stated she would like to request \$100,000 of funding for forest management plans for Canyon Lake Community Forest, Lake Whatcom Park, and the forthcoming Stewart Mountain if she could find a funding source.

Schroeder stated one idea the Council could consider is to utilize the Parks Special Revenue Fund but he would have to confirm that they can use that fund.

Buchanan asked whether they could do some research on the availability of the funds Schroeder mentioned and consider it Tuesday.

Kershner stated she would support it and Donovan agreed.

Galloway moved to add \$100,000 for forest management plans to come from the Parks Special Revenue Fund. The motion was seconded by Kershner.

Schroeder answered what the balance is of that fund.

Bennett Knox, Parks and Recreation Department Director, stated he is supportive and could work to implement it. He and Schroeder answered whether Parks will have jurisdiction over Canyon Lake and Stewart Mountain.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 6 - Frazey, Galloway, Kershner, Buchanan, Donovan, and Elenbaas

Nay: 0

Absent: 1 - Byrd

Approximate Timestamp: 01:41:04

Galloway spoke about providing funding for Facilities to do a study and installation of electric vehicle (EV) charging stations at various County facilities. \$250,000 is her estimate for what could possibly fund around fifteen charging stations and she is hoping it does not have to come from the General Fund.

Councilmembers discussed with Schroeder whether this is a task the Climate Action Manager would take on, whether we have code or would need it to be written, the Facilities grant coordinator and the Climate Action Manager looking for grants to act as a baseline for funding, and what funds might be used as a grant match.

Galloway stated she would like to have a discussion today and maybe a budget supplemental in the future about Council's budget for Councilmember travel.

Brown-Davis (Clerk of the Council) answered what the current travel amounts are and how the Finance Department has suggested to handle it for next year by doing a budget supplemental if needed next year to increase the combined "Other Travel" account as opposed to the individual travel accounts.

Councilmembers voiced their support for the idea.

Galloway asked whether funding for Councilmember cell phones could be re-allocated if some decide they do not want one and Brown-Davis stated it could.

Kershner will work with Galloway and come with something for Tuesday.

Brown-Davis discussed with Councilmembers a starting time for another work session on Tuesday, November 22.

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

MOTION SUMMARY:

Motion approved 6-0 to table Galloway’s motion until Tuesday after the revenue discussion to increase ASR 6440 (Climate Action Plan Implementation) by \$100,000 from our General Fund to a total amount of \$250,000.

Motion approved 6-0 to add \$100,000 for forest management plans to come from the Parks Special Revenue Fund.

Items Added by Revision

There were no agenda items added by revision.

Other Business

There was no other business.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 2:56 p.m.

The County Council approved these minutes on December 6, 2022.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Dana Brown-Davis, Council Clerk

Todd Donovan, Council Chair

Kristi Felbinger, Minutes Transcription

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