

Whatcom County Council Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee

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



Committee Minutes - Final

Tuesday, September 23, 2025

10:35 AM

Hybrid Meeting - Council Chambers

**HYBRID MEETING - MAY BEGIN EARLY - ADJOURNS BY 12:00 P.M.
(PARTICIPATE IN-PERSON, SEE REMOTE JOIN INSTRUCTIONS AT
www.whatcomcounty.us/joinvirtualcouncil, OR CALL 360.778.5010)**

COUNCILMEMBERS

Barry Buchanan
Tyler Byrd
Jon Scanlon

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Cathy Halka, AICP, CMC

Call To Order

Committee Chair Barry Buchanan called the meeting to order at 10:32 a.m. in a hybrid meeting.

Roll Call

Present: 3 - Barry Buchanan, Tyler Byrd, and Jon Scanlon

Also Present: Todd Donovan, Ben Elenbaas, Kaylee Galloway, and Mark Stremmler

Announcements

Committee Discussion

1. [AB2025-619](#) Discussion of the Justice Center Project with the Executive's Office, Facilities Management Division, and the Justice Center Owner's Representative

Kayla Schott-Bresler, Executive's Office, introduced the presentation.

Adam Johnson, STV, read from a presentation (on file) and updated councilmembers on the project schedule and milestones.

Buchanan spoke about community engagement and stated the team from STV has been working with him and with the Incarceration Prevention and Reduction Task Force (IPRTF) leadership to develop the town halls' schedule, content, and logistics, and they are having another conversation about it this week.

Scanlon spoke about members of the Child and Family Well-Being Task Force who are experts in related fields (one is a child mental health expert), and asked where the best place is for them to weigh in on the design.

Schott-Bresler and Buchanan answered how they and all the advisory groups can weigh in, including participation in the town halls, and drafting a formal letter to the IPRTF, the Finance and Facility Advisory Board (FFAB), and the Council. Individual experts can meet with Health and Community Services' Hannah Fisk or attend IPRTF meetings.

Donovan asked about the three scenarios for the behavioral health treatment center and Johnson and Schott-Bresler spoke about slide five from the Presentation on 9.9.2025 (attached to this file). Johnson stated these are what they presented in the design builder RFQ as ideas of what the scenarios in the validation stage might look like for location and elements of a behavioral care center (BCC) and operational costs of the jail,

depending on number of beds.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED.

2. [AB2025-661](#) Discussion of concepts and visions for new behavioral care center with Whatcom County Health and Community Services

Kayla Schott-Bresler, Executive's Office, introduced the presentation. She stated the Justice Project Implementation Plan includes several initial facilities, a jail, a behavioral care center (BCC), and a 23-hour crisis relief center. The State has allocated approximately \$11 million toward the construction of the crisis relief center. The implementation plan also calls for additional research and analysis to determine the best model for the behavioral care center. So, Peter Frazier, co-chair of the IPRTF, convened a workgroup on the behavioral care center to figure out, with stakeholders, what model is going to work for Whatcom County. The workgroup has been meeting over the last several months to deliberate and discuss trade-offs of different models and those have been presented to the IPRTF and the Finance and Facility Advisory Board (FFAB). The crisis relief center and behavioral care center are going to need some immediate decision points in the next several months from the Council.

Hannah Fisk, Health and Community Services, read from a presentation (on file) about considerations for the new jail behavioral health elements and the behavioral care center, pros and cons for behavioral care center models for in- versus out-of-custody (in-custody being a person who is in a carceral setting) and on-site versus off-site from the new jail, and the 23-hour crisis center component for which the operational funding is currently unresolved.

Schott-Bresler stated there are no decisions that need to be made today, and in the meantime, they will be getting a consultant on board to cost out some of these options in finer detail while they simultaneously work on understanding population trends to determine facility sizes and bed types. They will need decisions in the next month or two around in- or out-of-custody and whether they want to ask the State legislature for more flexibility on the use of the existing crisis relief center dollars if they are thinking about combining that facility with a behavioral care center and co-locating.

Peter Frazier, IPRTF co-chair, spoke about what the BCC workgroup did and gave context to an email he sent to Council this morning about its process.

Councilmembers and the speakers discussed choosing a model that will give funding feasibility in the long run, getting more information about a hybrid model where you have half in-custody and an adjacent facility that is out-of-custody, when they will know about operations funding for the 23-hour crisis center and whether existing funds could be used for other things if the original concept around that facility is “dead on arrival,” that the only two locations for the behavioral care center are LaBounty (co-located with the jail) or Division Street (co-located with the Anne Deacon Center for Hope) and rules (having to build it to the code of a jail) around building a facility that can go in between a jail and an inpatient residential treatment center, getting recommendations on all the scenario options (custody and site location) and that more information is needed in order to do that, how work requirements related to Medicaid might come into play with someone who is in custody and how other changes to the program might affect these decisions that they need to make, who the stakeholders are that would drive the effectiveness of the prosecutorial diversion program, and choosing an option that the community will get behind and that is consistent with what was communicated to them in the past.

Caleb Erickson, Sheriff's Office, spoke about features that are meant to be specifically supportive to behavioral health while someone is in custody and are woven into the “fabric” of the building, and that the Sheriff's Office is very interested in that. He discussed with councilmembers that the behavioral care center model is specifically to address prosecutorial diversion and is not the only treatment option, and he answered questions.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED.

Special Presentation

1. [AB2025-660](#) Presentation from the Executive's Office, Whatcom County Sheriff's Office, Superior Court/Juvenile Detention, and Correctional Healthcare Partners, Inc. regarding the upcoming jail healthcare contract

The following people read from a presentation (on file) on the search for a vendor for a nursing contract, that they are in final negotiations now with one of the respondents to the request for proposal (RFP), and what this would do for Whatcom County:

- Jill Boudreau, Executive's Office
- Dr. Peter J. Freedland, CEO Correctional Healthcare Partners, Inc.

Boudreau answered whether the increase to costs for this service could

actually be a cost savings in the long run, and stated that would be fair to say.

Dr. Freedland spoke about his company's provider model and track record. He spoke about their goals of creating stability (and that they try to maintain current staff and typically expand on that) and increasing access to care. He spoke about the company's relationship with community providers and out-of-facility partners, and answered what their model is for competency restoration.

This agenda item was PRESENTED.

Items Added by Revision

There were no agenda items added by revision.

Other Business

There was no other business.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 12 p.m.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Barry Buchanan-via email 10/1/2025

Cathy Halka, Council Clerk

Barry Buchanan, Committee Chair

Meeting Minutes prepared by Kristi Felbinger

SIGNED COPY ON FILE