

Whatcom County Council Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee

**COUNTY COURTHOUSE
311 Grand Avenue, Ste #105
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Committee Minutes - Final

Tuesday, June 23, 2026

1 PM

Hybrid Meeting - Council Chambers

**HYBRID MEETING - ADJOURNS BY 2:00 P.M. (PARTICIPATE IN-PERSON, SEE
REMOTE JOIN INSTRUCTIONS AT www.whatcomcounty.us/joinvirtualcouncil, OR
CALL 360.778.5010)**

COUNCILMEMBERS

Elizabeth Boyle
Barry Buchanan
Ben Elenbaas
Kaylee Galloway
Jessica Rienstra
Jon Scanlon
Mark Stremmler

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Cathy Halka, AICP, CMC

Call To Order

Committee Chair Barry Buchanan called the meeting to order at 1:05 p.m. in a hybrid meeting.

Roll Call

Present: 7 - Elizabeth Boyle, Barry Buchanan, Ben Elenbaas, Kaylee Galloway, Jessica Rienstra, Jon Scanlon, and Mark Stremmler

Announcements

Special Presentation

1. [AB2026-486](#) Presentation by STV on Justice Project programming results

Kayla Schott-Bresler, Executive's Office, introduced the presentation. She stated they are going to be talking today about the jail facility and that the programming work for the Behavioral Care Center (BCC) is ongoing and will be forthcoming after this work concludes and they get through the next steps.

Adam Johnson, STV Project Manager, read from a presentation (on file). He reviewed the programming process timeline and stated August is when they will have the final report for the validation period. He presented the program which started with an initial base of 227,000 square feet, and then was realigned to the budget (\$205 million) and reduced down to 150,000 square feet. He spoke about the reduced scope and how it compares to the current facilities (the downtown jail and the work center), that the operating capacity should be greater in the new facility because of more flexibility with the spaces, features of the facility and rationale behind how it was designed, and that programming numbers and design may change as they start to put things on paper.

Hannah Fisk, Health and Community Services Special Projects Manager, spoke about the behavioral health design and features they were able to retain through the programming process.

Johnson spoke about how needs were reduced from every aspect of the base program in order to align with the budget cap, the features that were not retained (including the reentry/Rapid Resource Center and some of the warehouse/commissary space), and what they will do as they finish the validation phase.

Schott-Bresler stated the recommendation coming out of the Finance and

Facilities Advisory Board was to accept the program as presented by the project team. They are looking for Council review and acceptance by the August recess.

Councilmembers discussed the presentation with the presenters and other speakers.

Buchanan stated the Rapid Resource Center is a disappointment and the second courtroom is a big disappointment. When he was working with stakeholders, that was a through-line with all the stakeholders because it does not just help one component of the system, it helps the entire system. He is hoping they can figure out how they can get things onto the buyback list.

Satpal Sidhu, County Executive, stated the Rapid Resource facility is not part of the jail but is actually a separate place. The footprint at the Hannegan site is much bigger so a lot of things are possible. One thought is that it can be added any time. The courtroom is different, however, because it is part of the jail. They are aware of these needs being very important and will keep the Council informed as things develop by August or September.

Schott-Bresler answered what the current thinking is about the jail work center and if that building could be used for something out-of-custody like the reentry program or other services. She stated they have not concluded discussions about what will happen to the work center in the future. She spoke about prioritizing buy-backs and that some, such as a second courtroom, are more difficult and expensive to achieve than others.

Scanlon stated Judge Freeman brought up the second courtroom as a concern, but he would also like to hear from the criminal justice side about how it might impact their operations. He asked if there is any potential for state funding for that courtroom space.

Schott-Bresler stated they have not been overly optimistic about state funding for parts of the facility that would be the jail facility and have tended to focus their state legislative asks on things connected to behavioral health services.

Caleb Erickson, Sheriff's Office, answered if the detox medical unit includes DUI, and stated it is intended to give medical care for people who are detoxing and other critical medical needs and is not purpose-built for DUI, although some people who are in custody for DUI may have a

crossover and may have a need that could be met in that space.

Johnson answered when they will start to see the programming and design for the Behavioral Care Center (since the decisions that will be made about debt authorization include both facilities), and stated they will be at the same point they will be with the jail in July or August by November or December for the BCC.

Erickson answered if specialized units (beyond just male and female) are still in the conversation, and stated they tried to make the space as flexible as possible.

Fisk answered if a sobering unit would be included in the 23-hour crisis facility and she spoke about reclining sobering beds and stated it is not out of the realm of options.

Councilmembers and the speakers discussed sharing the list of potential buy-backs with Council, if the Rapid Resource Center will continue to be planned and designed so that it would be shovel-ready if a state legislative appropriation is approved, the lack of the second courtroom in this programming and that they are prioritizing some of the life safety and behavioral health beds over that, if the design of the building would allow them to add another courtroom somewhere adjacent where it would flow, what space or allocation of resources might be available in the absence of the reentry piece and where reentry support might happen within the jail while someone is in custody, if concerns about space for victims and people impacted by crime are being considered in the design of the court facilities in the jail, if there is a path (with compromises) for having two courtrooms, the process for Council to reach a consensus between now and August, that the team is planning to get the operational cost information to Council in July and to deliver the prosecutorial diversion addendum with some analysis soon, and that the program they saw today is very unlikely to significantly change between now and August.

Schott-Bresler stated they would be looking for a motion to accept the project team's recommendation and program before the August recess to keep the timeline moving forward.

Buchanan stated he is interested in seeing the operational cost data before he moves ahead because he thinks it is so important for this whole program.

This agenda item was PRESENTED AND DISCUSSED.

Items Added by Revision

There were no agenda items added by revision.

Other Business

There was no other business.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 1:50 p.m.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Barry Buchanan-via email 6/29/2026

Cathy Halka, Council Clerk

Barry Buchanan, Committee Chair

Meeting Minutes prepared by Kristi Felbinger

SIGNED COPY ON FILE