

Whatcom County Council Committee of the Whole

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



Committee Minutes - Draft Minutes

Wednesday, November 5, 2025

1 PM

Hybrid Meeting - Council Chambers

**HYBRID MEETING - ADJOURNS BY 4:30 P.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
Ben Elenbaas
Kaylee Galloway
Jon Scanlon
Mark Stremler

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Cathy Halka, AICP, CMC

Call To Order

Council Chair Kaylee Galloway called the meeting to order at 1:03 p.m. in a hybrid meeting.

Roll Call

Present: 7 - Barry Buchanan, Tyler Byrd, Todd Donovan, Ben Elenbaas, Kaylee Galloway, Jon Scanlon, and Mark Stremler

Announcements**Special Presentation**

1. [AB2025-778](#) Update from the Department of Health and Community Services on housing and homeless services programs

Ann Beck, Health and Community Services, introduced the presentation. She stated the new five-year plan will be coming before the Council at their next meeting and they wanted to talk today about where community voice is showing up in the work they are doing.

Chris D’Onofrio, Health and Community Services, read from a presentation (on file), and he and Beck spoke about measuring and communicating the impact of the program, and how they have incorporated voices of people with lived experience into that development.

Donovan stated he wanted to have this discussion to see what Council's interest would be in standing up another advisory committee that would try to incorporate people who are experiencing the implementation of these services and who are using these services, and who could give feedback on existing reports and how previous recommendations are being implemented.

Beck stated the capacity to staff it is not there, but maybe they can do more to get people with lived experience to attend an existing group. She stated she wants to make sure any group has clear goals.

D’Onofrio spoke about the capacity of the Whatcom County Coalition to end Homelessness (WCCEH) in this regard.

Donovan stated he is trying to get at something that brings in voices of those with lived experience, and that gives Council feedback (independent of the Health Department) on how those people are experiencing the recommendations of the plan. He and Buchanan can work on drafting something.

Kayla Schott-Bresler, Executive's Office, stated the County is not currently resourced for staff to attend another group, and would encourage people to attend the WCCEH meetings.

Beck answered if there are other ways to get the needed input.

This agenda item was PRESENTED.

Committee Discussion

1. [AB2025-754](#) Discussion of preliminary Planning Commission recommendations on Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan Chapter 12, Climate, associated with the 2025 Comprehensive Plan Update

Lauren Clemens, Climate Action Manager, read from a presentation (on file). She gave an overview of the initial Planning Commission Recommendations to Council (including the policies that the Planning Commission voted to amend, remove, or add), gave an overview of the best available science discussion provided in the staff memo, and answered questions.

She and councilmembers discussed the Commission's recommendation for Policy 12.1.5 regarding replacement of conventional refrigeration systems, their addition of a new policy (12.11.7) to support the creation of wetland mitigation banks, questions that came up in previous council meetings regarding the approach to meeting the climate planning requirements, adding a goal which addresses the water doctrine of "use-it-or lose-it" (that does not incentivize conservation) and which supports policies that would enable people to conserve water without losing the ability to put the waters of the state to beneficial use in the future, the recommended amendments regarding reduction in emissions, the specific figures used in the maps for levels of flood and sea level rise and what the best maps would be to overlay with the County's and Cities' UGA proposals, how much this chapter addresses rising energy costs and what they can do to help communities, a potential Council amendment around the electric vehicle network, and whether the Planning Commission's amendments regarding an EV network align with the vision that staff presented to the Council of Governments (COG).

This agenda item was DISCUSSED.

2. [AB2025-513](#) Presentation by the Whatcom County Planning and Development Services Director and discussion relating to preliminary preferred alternatives for the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) associated with the 2025 Comprehensive Plan Update
Galloway stated they need to clean up the record on some previous actions

they took when they were signaling their perspectives on some of the UGA proposals or forthcoming UGA proposals.

MOTION 1

Donovan moved to rescind the motion from the October 21, 2025 Committee of the Whole meeting, which was: A motion that Blaine's UGA proposals do not include expansions in Birch Point.

The motion was seconded by Byrd.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 6 - Byrd, Donovan, Elenbaas, Galloway, Scanlon, and Stremmer

Nay: 0

Out of the Meeting: 1 - Buchanan

MOTION 2

Donovan moved to confirm council support for Blaine's UGA not including expansions in Birch Point (specifically, study areas 3, 4, and 6 on the draft EIS maps).

The motion was seconded by Byrd.

Aly Pennucci, Executive's Office, and Councilmembers discussed the motion.

Scanlon stated in his conversations with people in Birch Bay, there has not been concern about stormwater from the area north of the Lincoln Road extended line (which traditionally had been agreed upon as the dividing point between Birch Bay and a Blaine expansion). He thinks it is premature to say no to that area without seeing what the City is going to come back with. He asked if Donovan would be open to amending his motion to add "south of Lincoln Road extended" which keeps north of Lincoln Road extended as an option.

Scanlon moved to amend Donovan's motion to add "south of Lincoln Road" to the end of the motion.

The motion was seconded by Elenbaas.

Donovan spoke about why he would keep his motion the way it is and councilmembers discussed the motion to amend.

Matt Aamot, Planning and Development Services Department, answered

whether Planning sent Blaine a letter about not having demonstrated a need for the UGAs, and stated they did send a letter. Blaine is taking a look at their land capacity analysis and they will be submitting a new proposal.

Councilmembers discussed keeping the motion broad since they have not seen a revised UGA proposal, and whether they could discuss Proposition 2025-07 (regarding de-annexing 573 acres of incorporated urban growth area (UGA) in east Blaine) since the election just took place.

The motion to amend Donovan's motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 4 - Elenbaas, Scanlon, Stremmler, and Byrd

Nay: 2 - Donovan and Buchanan

Abstain: 1 - Galloway

Donovan's motion (as amended) carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Byrd, Donovan, Elenbaas, Galloway, Scanlon, Stremmler, and Buchanan

Nay: 0

MOTION 3

Donovan moved to rescind the motion from the October 21, 2025

Committee of the Whole meeting, which was: A motion to accept the Bellingham UGA proposal.

The motion was seconded by Buchanan.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Elenbaas, Galloway, Scanlon, Stremmler, Buchanan, Donovan, and Byrd

Nay: 0

Clerk's note: Byrd voted Nay on the motion above and then changed his vote to Aye after the vote.

MOTION 4

Donovan moved to confirm council support for the Bellingham UGA proposal (as represented on the Map UGA-2 (page 9) of the Bellingham UGA Proposal (on file).

The motion was seconded by Byrd.

Byrd stated he thinks they should table this motion until it has been approved by the City and other groups.

Councilmembers discussed the motion, that these motions are to clarify that Council is not approving these UGA proposals but just signaling their support for them, that people are asking to bring in the South Yew Street area which the City of Bellingham does not want to do, and whether the Council can tell the City to do that.

The following people discussed the South Yew Street area with the councilmembers and whether councilmembers should signal their interest in it being designated as a UGA:

- Matt Aamot, Planning and Development Services Department
- Aly Pennucci, Executive's Office
- Chris Behee, City of Bellingham

No change was made to the motion.

The motion carried by the following vote:

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

Nay: 3 - Stremmler, Byrd, and Elenbaas

Galloway asked if there is something the Council can do to signal to the City to not take South Yew Street off the table yet.

Behee stated he does not want to speculate on what their Council might have questions about, but he can provide a level of confidence on the staff recommendation on the resource allocation. The analysis shows it is unlikely that they could serve both the north and south areas.

MOTION 5

Donovan moved to a rescind the motion from the October 21, 2025 Committee of the Whole meeting, which was: A motion to retain Ferndale's 2016 map as proposed (Map UGA-4) on page four of the Ferndale UGA Proposal.

The motion was seconded by Scanlon.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Scanlon, Stremmler, Buchanan, Byrd, Donovan, Elenbaas, and Galloway

Nay: 0

MOTION 6

Donovan moved to confirm council support for retaining Ferndale's 2016 map as proposed (Map UGA-4) on page four of the Ferndale UGA Proposal.

The motion was seconded by Scanlon.

Elenbaas discussed the motion.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Stremmler, Buchanan, Byrd, Donovan, Elenbaas, Galloway, and Scanlon

Nay: 0

MOTION 7

Donovan moved to rescind the motion from the October 21, 2025 Committee of the Whole meeting, which was: A Motion to accept Lynden's proposal as described on Map UGA-5.

The motion was seconded by Scanlon.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Buchanan, Byrd, Donovan, Elenbaas, Galloway, Scanlon, and Stremmler

Nay: 0

MOTION 8

Donovan moved to confirm council support for Lynden's UGA proposal as described on Map UGA-5.

The motion was seconded by Buchanan.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Byrd, Donovan, Elenbaas, Galloway, Scanlon, Stremmler, and Buchanan

Nay: 0

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

MOTION 1:

Motion approved to rescind the motion from the October 21, 2025 Committee of the Whole meeting, which was: A motion that Blaine's UGA proposals do not include expansions in Birch Point.

MOTION 2:

Motion approved to confirm council support for Blaine's UGA not including expansions in Birch Point (areas 3, 4, and 6 on the draft EIS maps) south of Lincoln Road.

MOTION 3:

Motion approved to rescind the motion from the October 21, 2025 Committee of the Whole meeting, which was: A motion to accept the Bellingham UGA proposal.

MOTION 4:

Motion approved to confirm council support for the Bellingham UGA proposal (as represented on the Map UGA-2 (page 9) of the Bellingham UGA Proposal (on file).

MOTION 5:

Motion approved to rescind the motion from the October 21, 2025 Committee of the Whole meeting, which was: A motion to retain Ferndale's 2016 map as proposed (Map UGA-4) on page four of the Ferndale UGA Proposal.

MOTION 6:

Motion approved to confirm council support for retaining Ferndale's 2016 map as proposed (Map UGA-4) on page four of the Ferndale UGA Proposal.

MOTION 7:

Motion approved to rescind the motion from the October 21, 2025 Committee of the Whole meeting, which was a Motion to accept Lynden's proposal as described on Map UGA-5.

MOTION 8:

Motion approved to confirm council support for Lynden's UGA proposal as described on Map UGA-5.

3. [AB2025-706](#) Discussion of a resolution amending Resolution 2025-027 to docket an additional Comprehensive Plan and zoning amendment related to Whatcom County Code 20.51 to strengthen protection of the Lake Whatcom Watershed

Galloway briefed the councilmembers on the resolution and referred to the memo (on file).

Councilmembers discussed how this changes the existing Lake Whatcom overlay, a concern that if it is more restrictive it will likely add cost to housing, that one of the outcomes of this code would be broader alignment with that of the City, that these codes would make it so that development would be (hopefully) phosphorus neutral, that aligning the codes will be a long process which is why they should docket it now, that it might put more burdens on how some development is done but would be consistent with the way that these codes are being applied in the city, whether the proposed code is also looking at other parcels and other land uses (such as private timberland) in the watershed besides just housing to address impacts, whether the cost of regulating people is worth it in the long run if you cannot reduce phosphorus levels because of what is in natural run off, and

looking to see if there is a nexus to forestry that needs to be looped into this.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED.

Committee Discussion About Levy and Budget Items

This discussion included the following agenda bill numbers as part of the mid-biennium budget:

AB2025-785

AB2025-786

AB2025-789

AB2025-707

Donovan spoke about **AB2025-785**, **AB2025-786**, and **AB2025-789** and their related agenda bills (**AB2025-784**, **AB2025-783**, and **AB2025-788**), which are alternate versions of **AB2025-709**, **AB2025-721**, and **AB2025-725** respectively. He spoke about concerns about how the flood funds are being spent and stated he wanted to have an alternative resolution.

The following people discussed the items with councilmembers:

- Aly Pennucci, Executive's Office
- Kimberly Thulin, Prosecuting Attorney's Office
- Cathy Halka, Clerk of the Council

They discussed the process for considering these and their counterparts, having both versions of the levies back for a public hearing and potential action at their December 2nd meeting, what the difference would be between a one percent increase and no increase to the fund and to the community, that the Council should give direction on ways to balance the budget if they go with the no-increase options, the Council's statutory and Charter obligations for approving a balanced budget, why the deadlines for approving levies are different this year than last year, the Council's authority to make changes to the proposed budget, that Council's task would be to find about \$700,000 worth of cuts if they go with these alternate (no-increase) levies, that these are all funds with fund balances and that one default (not necessarily recommended) is to burn down into fund balances, that Council will have the opportunity to say yes or no on each individual levy, that they need to make sure that, once they have approved the levy ordinances (and resolution), they are approving the version of the budget that is balanced with those assumed revenues, and making a decision sooner than later on which levies to adopt so a budget can be reintroduced if necessary and then acted upon on December 2nd.

Clerk's note: The remainder of this discussion is under the continuation of **AB2025-707** under the "More Detailed Discussion on AB2025-707" header below.

4. [AB2025-785](#) Discussion of a resolution authorizing the levy of taxes for the Whatcom County Flood Control Zone District for 2026 (Council acting as the Flood Control Zone District Board of Supervisors)

This item was discussed in a combined discussion on the following agenda bill numbers:

AB2025-785

AB2025-786

AB2025-789

AB2025-707

See minutes for this discussion under the "Committee Discussion About Levy and Budget Items" header.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED (see discussion under item header).

5. [AB2025-786](#) Discussion of an ordinance authorizing the levy of taxes for County Road purposes for 2026

This item was discussed in a combined discussion on the following agenda bill numbers:

AB2025-785

AB2025-786

AB2025-789

AB2025-707

See minutes for this discussion under the "Committee Discussion About Levy and Budget Items" header.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED (see discussion under item header).

6. [AB2025-789](#) Discussion of an ordinance authorizing the levy of taxes for County and State purposes in Whatcom County, Washington, for the year of 2026

This item was discussed in a combined discussion on the following agenda bill numbers:

AB2025-785

AB2025-786

AB2025-789

AB2025-707

See minutes for this discussion under the "Committee Discussion About Levy and Budget Items" header.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED (see discussion under item header).

7. [AB2025-707](#) Ordinance amending the 2026 Whatcom County Budget, request no. 1, in the amount of \$20,970,606

This item was discussed in a combined discussion on the following agenda bill numbers:

AB2025-785

AB2025-786

AB2025-789

AB2025-707

See minutes for this discussion under the "Committee Discussion About Levy and Budget Items" header.

See discussion under item header and below.

THIS ITEM WAS ALSO DISCUSSED IN MORE DETAIL BELOW

More Detailed Discussion on AB2025-707

7. [AB2025-707](#) Ordinance amending the 2026 Whatcom County Budget, request no. 1, in the amount of \$20,970,606

Aly Pennucci, Executive's Office, gave an overview of the proposed amendments submitted by the Executive (on file in **AB2025-707** as "Executive Requested Changes for 11.5.25") and answered when the best time would be for Council to address those.

Kimberly Thulin, Prosecuting Attorney's Office, stated that December 2nd is the deadline for final action and Pennucci stated they are still legally balanced if they are assuming use of fund balance.

Donovan stated all of this is contingent on whether they get the public safety tax passed and that should probably be discussed as part of this budget.

Pennucci stated she hopes the transmittal and the discussions that started in September have been clear that the executive's intent is to propose using the new sales tax authority, and that, if the Council chooses not to do that, they would be looking at \$7+ million of cuts that would likely have to come from the public safety part of the General Fund. The sales tax alone is also not enough to get them back on a sustainable path, so Council can expect the next biennium to include proposals for both new revenues as well as reductions.

Councilmembers spoke about motions they might want to make to amend the budget.

Scanlon stated he would like to add funds to create a strategic plan and metrics for the county, per Charter 1.51: The executive and legislative branches shall engage in long-term strategic planning to establish organizational structure, priorities, and performance measurements. He stated the work with a consultant to put together a strategic plan for the county, that would include performance measurements and metrics, would cost about \$200,000, and one potential option is using part of the \$500,000 going to the risk reserve from the Community Priorities Fund.

Stremmer stated he would like to cut \$244,000 from the Parks and Recreation Department budget, currently allocated for extra help for parks facilities and Lake Whatcom forest lands, and add \$244,000 for the Whatcom County Food Bank Network.

Donovan stated he would like to move the \$500,000 from the Community Priorities Fund which is allocated to the capital facilities reserve to the Whatcom County Food Bank Network.

Elenbaas stated he would like to take all of the funding for this budget cycle that they use for third party facilitation for boards and commissions and move it to other areas in order to not have to raise taxes. Then they would have those commissions or boards operate with a volunteer facilitator from the group.

Kayla Schott-Bresler, Executive's Office, answered how many committees the County funds facilitators for and stated she is aware (off the top of her head) of at least three.

Scanlon stated the Council acting as the Health Board passed a motion last year requesting that Health and Community Services provide the funding and staffing levels necessary to complete the Community Health Assessment within this current biennium, but that work has not started yet. He would like to put a note in the budget regarding that, just as a reminder to make sure they get that work started.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED.

COMMITTEE DISCUSSION CONTINUED

8. [AB2025-656](#) Discussion with County Executive's Office and Columbia Policy Advisors on 2026 State Legislative Session

The following people read from a presentation (on file) and answered questions:

- Jed Holmes, Executive's Office
- Kayla Schott-Bresler, Executive's Office
- Josh Weiss, Columbia Policy Advisors

Councilmembers discussed with the speakers the conversations they have been having with the governor's staff regarding the State's responsibility in the adjudication process, that the executive's office will put together a list for a Council motion on November 18, and separating Whatcom County issues from how they can provide ally-ship to Washington State Association of Counties (WSAC) on their priorities.

This agenda item was 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 4:30 p.m.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Cathy Halka, Council Clerk

Kaylee Galloway, Council Chair

Meeting Minutes prepared by Kristi Felbinger