

**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, March 24, 2026

11:15 AM

Hybrid Meeting - Council Chambers

**HYBRID MEETING - MAY BEGIN EARLY/LATE - ADJOURNS BY 12:00 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 Stremler

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Cathy Halka, AICP, CMC

Call To Order

Committee Chair Barry Buchanan called the meeting to order at 11:20 a.m. in a hybrid meeting.

Roll Call

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

Announcements

Committee Discussion

1. [AB2026-240](#) Update by the Executive's Office on Justice Project process, financial outlook, and timeline for delivery of additional reports

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

- Kayla Schott-Bresler, Executive's Office
- Jed Holmes, Executive's Office

They spoke about community engagement, a letter received by the city mayors (on file), discussions the Administration has had with the Sheriff's Office around project priorities and values, goals for and progress with the Behavioral Care Center (BCC), that the existing \$11.25 million State allocation has been made more flexible to accommodate the BCC, work on a behavioral health analysis report to help plan for design and operations of the BCC, that they now have a Jail Capacity Analysis in hand and how it will be used to help inform specialized housing needs in the jail, that clear budget feedback is the most critical piece for moving the different scenarios forward, and work being done on the scenarios for establishing a ceiling for capital spending.

Councilmembers and the speakers discussed the presentation and the additional following person spoke:

- Steve Oliver, County Treasurer

They discussed the allocation amount from the state and that there is also \$3 million of local funding that is contributed by Whatcom County and the City of Bellingham, that costs for medical services for the jail are being calculated on the current facility at this point until they get through the programming exercise, what contractor performed the behavioral health study, that \$225 million is the budget cap that they are testing out right now,

the additional revenue that would be provided if the cities are willing to go out to 2035, that they are at a point where they need to pick a number (in regards to the level of capital expenditures) that they think they can comfortably take on, that the Behavioral Health Analysis touches on how much they will need to operate the BCC, the differences between the BCC and the Anne Deacon Center For Hope, that of the \$225 million budget cap, \$205 million would be dedicated for the jail and \$20 million for the BCC, that the \$225 million is just the highest they could go (if the cities are agreeable to extending out) but they could always go lower, that the Administration is not ready to brief the Council on the Jail Capacity Analysis yet, what the charges in the jail might look like when the new facility is open compared to now, concern with how the current interlocal with the cities is written regarding if the jail reaches capacity for a period of time and whether there should be a limit to how much the cities can push the County to expand, a request that the revenue projections are conservative when setting a budget cap, seeing an alternative scenario that blends features from scenarios 2 and 3, leveraging local dollars and funds and understanding how those investments are fitting into the broader justice project, the Council being clear on what other information is needed to make their decisions so they can decide sooner than later, when the Council will have the information (the Behavioral Health Analysis, Jail Capacity Analysis, and an answer from the cities) so they can deliberate on it, that the working hypothesis is that the \$225 million is within the County's borrowing capacity, and that the jail and behavioral health are interconnected and neither is optional.

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 12:03 p.m.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Barry Buchanan-via email 4/6/2026

Cathy Halka, Council Clerk

Barry Buchanan, Committee Chair

Meeting Minutes prepared by Kristi Felbinger