

Whatcom County Council Special Committee of the Whole

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



Action Summary

Tuesday, March 17, 2026

9:30 AM

Hybrid Meeting - Council Chambers

HYBRID MEETING - MAY BEGIN EARLY/LATE - RECESS FOR LUNCH FROM 12:00 P.M. TO 1:00 P.M. - ADJOURNS BY 4:30 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

Roll Call

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

Announcements

Public Comment

1. [AB2026-219](#) Public comments on the draft Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan Chapter 2 (Land Use), Chapter 4 (Capital Facilities), Chapter 5 (Utilities), Chapter 6 (Transportation), and Chapter 7 (Economic Development)

RECEIVED

Committee Discussion

1. [AB2026-218](#) Discussion and preliminary Council direction on Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan Chapter 6, Transportation

DISCUSSED AND MOTION(S) APPROVED

MOTION 1:

Motion approved to begin review of Chapter 6 using the Preliminary Council Draft dated 3.17.2026, which is the current version of the chapter with Planning Commission recommendations from January 2026 and additional edits proposed by councilmembers as listed in the Chart of Proposed Council Changes.

MOTION 2:

Motion approved to preliminarily approve Policy 6A-7 and Policy 6A-8 as amended so that they read: Incorporate these standards into long-range capital planning and Six-Year TIP programming to achieve network completion over time subject to funding availability...

MOTION 3:

Motion approved to preliminarily approve number 23 (new proposed Policy 6L-7) as amended so that it reads: Allocate at least 5% of funding in the County's Six-Year Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)...

MOTION 4:

Motion approved to preliminarily accept Policy 6D-6 as amended so that it retains the language recommended by Planning Commission and reads: "Prioritize transportation investments and encourage new housing developments to be located in urban growth areas to help provide a sense of community and safe, active transportation to community facilities and public transit nodes."

2. [AB2026-216](#) Discussion and preliminary Council direction on Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan Chapter 4, Capital Facilities

DISCUSSED AND MOTION(S) APPROVED

MOTION 1:

Motion approved to begin review of Chapter 4 using the Preliminary Council Draft dated 3.17.2026, which is the current version of the chapter with Planning Commission recommendations from January 2026 and additional edits proposed by councilmembers as listed in the Chart of Proposed Council Changes.

MOTION 2:

Motion approved to amend Goal 4D as presented so that it reads: "Consistent with the Justice Project Implementation Plan, develop and implement a coordinated program of facility improvements and/or expansion for the departments and agencies which together carry out the county's law enforcement and corrections functions. Plan correctional facilities as part of a comprehensive justice system that prioritizes diversion, treatment, and behavioral health services, so that the facilities reflect community needs and align with Whatcom County's long-term financial capacity."

MOTION 3:

Motion approved to amend Policy 4D-2 as presented so that it reads:

“Maintain Sheriff's Office adult corrections facilities and headquarters to provide a safe environment for the community, staff, and inmates. The number of jail beds in adult corrections facilities will be determined after a comprehensive review and analysis of multiple factors, including projected population growth, local criminal justice policies and State sentencing laws, alternative response programs, preventions, treatment, behavioral health, diversion programs, early release programs, re-entry support, the need to separate violent incarcerated individuals, the need to separate inmates by gender, the need to separate inmates by other classification considerations.”

MOTION 4:

Motion approved to preliminarily approve the proposed amendment to Policy 4J-2 (Item 12 in the Chart of Proposed Council Changes for 3.17.2026) so that it reads: ...Where feasible, develop a strategy to mitigate harmful impacts and aim to achieve net ecological gain of salmon and other aquatic species habitat for all public projects and a voluntary incentive driven strategy for private projects.

MOTION 5:

Motion approved to preliminarily approve adding Policy 4J-4.

MOTION 6:

Motion approved to preliminarily approve Policy 4M-5 as presented so that it reads: Consider vulnerability of existing and new County facilities to climate and natural hazards including but not limited to: Avoid siting critical facilities in high-risk flood areas where feasible. Account for future floodplain conditions and sea level rise. Design facilities for continuity during extreme weather, smoke, heat, and outages.

MOTION 7:

Motion approved to change "inmate" to "incarcerated individual" throughout the document.

3. [AB2026-217](#) Discussion and preliminary Council direction on Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan Chapter 5, Utilities

DISCUSSED AND MOTION(S) APPROVED

MOTION 1:

Motion approved to begin review of Chapter 5 using the Preliminary Council Draft dated 3.17.2026, which is the current version of the chapter with Planning Commission recommendations from January 2026 and additional edits proposed by councilmembers as listed in the Chart of Proposed Council Changes.

MOTION 2:

Motion approved to preliminarily approve Policy 5A-1 as presented so that it reads: Use existing permitting and environmental review processes to evaluate and determine the suitability of proposed locations for any new utility facilities not under exclusive Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council (EFSEC) jurisdiction or above the distribution level.

MOTION 3:

Motion approved to preliminarily approve Policy 5F-2 as presented so that it reads: Review and update Whatcom County Code to align with current state law.

MOTION 4:

Motion approved to hold Policy 5H-2 and associated amendments until the next Council meeting.

MOTION 5:

Motion approved to edit the last line of the first paragraph on page 5-15 as presented so that it reads: The CWSP was updated and adopted in 2025.

4. [AB2026-231](#) Discussion and preliminary Council direction on Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan Chapter 7, Economic Development

DISCUSSED AND MOTION(S) APPROVED

MOTION 1:

Motion approved to begin review of Chapter 7 using the Preliminary Council Draft dated 3.17.2026, which is the current version of the chapter with Planning Commission recommendations from January 2026 and additional edits proposed by councilmembers as listed in the Chart of Proposed Council Changes.

MOTION 2:

Motion approved to preliminarily approve Policy 7A-3 as presented so that it reads: Foster a diverse, private-sector job base including those that contract with government, as well as facilitate public sector jobs which will provide living-wage jobs—defined as jobs that offer compensation at or above the state median income, and include essential benefits such as health insurance and employer retirement contributions—to ensure long-term economic stability for workers and their families, and facilitate the retention and expansion of existing businesses.

MOTION 3:

Motion approved to amend Policy 7A-11 consistent with Councilmember Boyle's language in Item 13 with the inclusion of “establish a competitiveness review” so that the policy reads: Establish a competitiveness review of county policies, regulations, taxes/fees, and other processes to help promote affordable housing, child care that supports workforce participation, high-speed internet, modern infrastructure, and other influences that impact county businesses, and identify opportunities to improve efficiency, streamline processes, and reduce unnecessary barriers to economic development.

MOTION 4:

Motion approved to hold Items 15-20 (in the Chart of Proposed Council Changes for 3.17.2026) until April 7.

5. [AB2026-186](#) Discussion and preliminary Council direction on Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan Chapter 2, Land Use

DISCUSSED AND MOTION(S) APPROVED

MOTION 1:

Motion approved to continue the discussion and review of Chapter 2 (using the Preliminary Council Draft dated 3.17.2026, which is the current version of the chapter with Planning Commission recommendations from January 2026 and additional edits proposed by councilmembers as listed in the Chart of Proposed Council Changes).

MOTION 2:

Motion approved to strike the language of Policy 2A-9 and 2A-10 and retain the language in Policy 2A-11.

MOTION 3:

Motion approved to strike Policies 2N-8 through 2N-11 as presented.

MOTION 4:

Motion approved to approve new Policy 2U-10 with "retention" in place of "reaffirmation" and strike Policies 2U-11 through 2U-13.

MOTION 5:

Motion approved to preliminarily include Items 121, 122, and 123 (in the Chart of Proposed Council Changes for 3.17.2026) with Policy 2W-2 through 2W-4 (Everson), 2Z-2 through 2Z-4 (Nooksack), and 2AA-3 through 2AA-5 (Sumas) as presented with the addition of "Continue to" at the start of Policy 2W-3, 2Z-3, and 2AA-6.

MOTION 6:

Motion approved to hold discussion of Chapter 2 open to revisit again at a later date, potentially April 21, or another date as agreed upon by Council and properly noticed.

Items Added by Revision

Other Business

Adjournment