

Whatcom County Council Committee of the Whole

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



Committee Minutes - Final

Tuesday, February 11, 2025

1:10 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 1:11 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. AB2025-106 Presentation by the Health and Community Services Department on the Lake Whatcom Residential and Treatment Center

Hannah Fisk, Health and Community Services, introduced the presentation.

Jenny Billings, Lake Whatcom Center Executive Director, read from a presentation (on file) about the center's services. She answered questions about vacancy rates, discussed that funding is needed for the Birchwood facility, and stated the services there would not be duplicative with the Anne Deacon Center for Hope.

This agenda item was PRESENTED.
2. AB2025-118 Update from County Executive's Office on 2025 state legislative session

Jed Holmes, Executive's Office, read from the Legislative Report for 2.11.2025 (on file) and spoke about County priorities. He answered what House Bill (HB)1054 is, concerning county ferry maintenance and repair contracts, whether there has been movement on trying to figure out how the State can help the County incentivize annexations by finding capital funding, and what the county's involvement has been this legislative session.

Councilmembers discussed the work of Holmes and the county's lobbyist, the importance of tracking what the Association of Counties is working on and how that might support and overlap with our county priorities, and whether Whatcom County should partner with King County regarding childcare subsidies.

This agenda item was REPORTED.
3. AB2025-154 Presentation from PFM Advisors on Justice Project funding model

Duncan Brown, Director, PFM Financial Advisors LLC, read from a presentation (on file), giving an update on the Justice Facility project and the funding for that project. He stated three things have changed since they

first started looking at a funding plan. The estimated cost of the project had been increased, the sales tax base contracted by 2.5 percent (instead of growing by 5 percent as assumed in 2024 versus 2023) which provides a lower starting point for future-year sales tax collections, and interest rates for the County's bonds would be slightly higher.

Donovan spoke about how the project costs seem to keep changing and will likely be higher than the stated \$170 million.

Kayla Schott-Bresler, Executive's Office, stated they have not finalized or asked Council for a decision on a budget for this project yet. They have asked PFM to use \$170 million as a working number for their model which is supposed to illustrate what happens when you pull the different policy levers and choices. It is not supposed to present a final plan or decision point related to project cost or the funding plan to achieve that cost. STV, the County's project management consultant, will be walking the Executive branch and Council through that exercise over the course of this summer to develop that preliminary budget, and then there will be refinements from there.

The following people answered questions:

- Kayla Schott-Bresler
- Satpal Sidhu, County Executive
- Duncan Brown

They discussed why there are still uncertainties on the project costs since the specifics of the facility variables were already communicated to the voters, that the cost estimate is still based on a facility of a certain size but with inflationary adjustments and updated cost estimates, why the first bond issuance date is being pushed to 2026 (according to the presentation) and whether there is best practice regarding that timing, and that projections for the public safety sales tax growth rate may change as they go along.

Brown presented three preliminary financing scenarios and spoke about different "levers" that can be pulled in order to meet the various goals. He and the following people answered questions about those scenarios:

- Kayla Schott-Bresler
- Matt Schoenfeld, Senior Managing Consultant, PFM Financial Advisors LLC
- Satpal Sidhu

- Aly Pennucci, Executive's Office

They discussed the cities' input on the three presented scenarios, the difference in the scenarios regarding the funding that is available for behavioral health and whether that funding could be accelerated as a potential measure to reduce the size of the jail, doing what they can to make sure the tax is paying for what the voters were promised it would pay for and letting them know if they cannot fulfill that promise, scheduling a follow-up conversation about possible contributions from the other small cities and what funding is currently available in dedicated revenue sources that might be used to supplement the years where the contributions of this funding source might be delayed so that they could meet the goals of the implementation plan on time, how they can get this project prioritized so it is one of the main projects they are working to achieve, that PFM has advised the County some on other big bonding projects but that those have different revenue streams, hearing from the County Treasurer in future discussions, and whether County interest could be used toward a project.

This agenda item was PRESENTED.

Committee Discussion

1. AB2025-081 Discussion relating to population and employment projections for the County as a whole, Urban Growth Areas, and the Rural & Resource Lands associated with the 2025 Comprehensive Plan Update

Matt Aamot, Planning and Development Services Department, introduced the item and the following city representatives spoke:

City of Blaine

Approximate Timestamp: 1:23:09

Alex Wenger, City of Blaine, read from a presentation (on file) on their growth allocation request and answered questions about what they are thinking about for west Blaine. He stated they would figure that out through a comprehensive public process, but they would be looking to add residential density similar to existing levels in Semiahmoo. They would also like to see more services for people that live out there.

City of Everson

Approximate Timestamp: 1:37:00

Alex Putnam, City of Everson, read from a presentation (on file). She stated the city is looking to move more to the southwest to get out of the floodplains and she spoke about their growth allocation proposal.

Rollin Harper, Sehome Planning and Development Services, spoke about the multi-jurisdictional resolution and stated they do not necessarily need that, but they need to keep the process of getting onto the same page and they need to keep progress moving forward. He spoke about expansion of city UGAs into agricultural land under certain conditions and bringing money into the county system to help retire development rights.

Putnam answered whether this map is the current map and not the one they are waiting for FEMA to approve and that might have more areas in the floodplain, and stated it is the current map. She and Harper answered questions about areas in the floodway and what they are planning for those in the city limits that live in vulnerable areas, and where they think job growth will occur.

City of Ferndale

Approximate Timestamp: 1:51:13

Michael Cerbone, City of Ferndale, read from a presentation (on file) on preparation the city has taken for growth, their requested growth projections, and policy requests of the County.

Donovan stated he is hoping they can schedule some time to discuss policies for un-annexed areas and the process of annexation.

Cerbone answered why they would consider removing the industrial area marked in green on page six of the presentation. He spoke about past and future plans for annexation.

City of Lynden

Approximate Timestamp: 2:01:55

Dave Timmer, City of Lynden, read from a presentation (on file) on the City's proposals for growth and policy changes to allow for higher density in a few locations in town to accommodate some of the lower income housing bracket.

City of Nooksack

Approximate Timestamp: 2:09:16

Holly Hamilton, City of Nooksack, read from a presentation (on file) on past population growth and what has been allocated and proposed for the forecast period.

Rollin Harper stated that by allowing growth in the small cities it helps population from spilling out into the rural and resource land.

They answered questions about the shaded areas of the map in the presentation, what the city is doing for people who are currently within city limits and are vulnerable to flood, and an area of partial development that is currently shut down pending the Comprehensive Plan update and review of densities.

City of Sumas

Approximate Timestamp: 2:21:21

Carson Cortez, City of Sumas, read from a presentation (on file) on projected growth, their lack of land capacity, the flood resilient UGA expansion plan for Sumas, and a potential solution through the retirement of development rights in agricultural or rural study areas.

Rollin Harper answered whether the Growth Management Act (GMA) and State law require that Sumas has to expand, and stated his understanding is that the GMA does not require every jurisdiction to have to expand.

Cortez answered questions about the agricultural land in the UGA suitability analysis study areas on the presentation map.

Councilmembers discussed the County having conversations with Sumas to see how the County might be able to help, setting up another half hour to one-hour discussion at the next Committee of the Whole meeting, considering that the 100-year flood map may no longer be current, and discussing the February 4, 2025 memo and whether they are being realistic about land capacity.

Aly Pennucci, Executive's Office, requested that Council staff send the administration a list of topics they would like staff to cover next, and asked Council to consider if they are okay with the direction these numbers are going.

Donovan stated he would like to know why the projections are so drastically above OFM medium since that number has been spot on in the past.

This agenda item was PRESENTED AND DISCUSSED.

2. AB2025-165 Discussion of an ordinance amending Whatcom County Code Chapter 2.123 Forestry Advisory Committee

Galloway introduced the discussion and spoke about expanding code

language regarding purpose, function, and membership of the Forest Advisory Committee to make sure there is smooth transition between the Forest Resilience Task Force's body of work (when that task force ends) and a body that could oversee the implementation of that work. They want to make sure this body maintains its strong commitment to advising Council on forestry industry efforts, but also take into account that there are a host of land managers in this county.

The following Forestry Advisory Committee members spoke:

- John Gold spoke about concerns regarding members terming out at the same time.
- Tracy Petroske clarified that members would serve their full term if terms are staggered. Some people's terms would be extended with a partial term in order to stagger.
- Holly Koon spoke about the purpose for the committee and that she supports the revision of the ordinance as written because it moves the focus from managing the flow of forest products to managing forest lands in Whatcom County.

Councilmembers and the speakers discussed having land managers in the same room, concerns about the number of members, whether the proposed ex-officio members have been looped in, where the idea of adding more members started, whether the proposed members meet the qualification of having a solid background of technical knowledge and professional experience in the practice of forestry (as stated in a FAC resolution), and thinking about what kind of advice the Council wants from this body.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED.

Committee Discussion and Recommendation to Council

1. AB2025-059 Ordinance adopting amendments to Whatcom County Code Titles 20 & 22 to enact SSB 5290 regarding local project review

Mark Personius, Planning and Development Services Department Director, briefed the Councilmembers and stated they have a revised ordinance up for introduction tonight.

Councilmembers discussed concerns about the process for stakeholder engagement and gratitude for the work of staff.

Scanlon moved to recommend the "Revised Ordinance and Ex A for 2.11.2025" to Council (for introduction).

The motion was seconded by Donovan.

The motion carried by the following vote:

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

Nay: 0

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

Motion approved to recommend the “Revised Ordinance and Ex A for 2.11.2025” to Council (for introduction).

Items Added by Revision

There were no agenda items added by revision.

Other Business

There was no other business.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 4:29 p.m.

The County Council approved these minutes on March 11, 2025.

ATTEST:



Cathy Halka, Council Clerk

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA



Kaylee Galloway, Council Chair

Meeting Minutes prepared by Kristi Felbinger