

Whatcom County Council Committee of the Whole

**COUNTY COURTHOUSE
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Bellingham, WA 98225-4038
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Committee Minutes - Draft Minutes

VIRTUAL MEETING - BUDGET PRIORITIES FOR 2021-2022

Tuesday, May 26, 2020

1 PM

Virtual Meeting

COUNCILMEMBERS

Rud Browne
Barry Buchanan
Tyler Byrd
Todd Donovan
Ben Elenbaas
Carol Frazey
Kathy Kershner

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Dana Brown-Davis, C.M.C.

Call To Order

Council Chair Barry Buchanan called the meeting to order at 1 p.m. in a virtual meeting.

Roll Call

Present: 7 - Rud Browne, Barry Buchanan, Tyler Byrd, Todd Donovan, Carol Frazey, Ben Elenbaas and Kathy Kershner

Absent: None

Clerk's note: Kershner was not present at the time of Roll Call but joined the meeting at 1:18 p.m.

Announcement

County Executive's Report

There was no Executive Report.

Committee Discussion

1. [AB2020-227](#) Discussion regarding budget priorities for 2021 and 2022

Satpal Sidhu, County Executive, stated they will continue to get information regarding the budget and will continue to adjust targets as more information becomes available and as the second installment of property taxes becomes due in October.

Tyler Schroeder, Executive's Office, and Sidhu submitted and gave a presentation outlining recommended budget priorities (on file). Priorities fall into three focus areas:

- COVID-19 Response: Health, Economic and Social Crisis
- Continuity of County Government
- Long-term Public Priorities

Sidhu spoke about capital projects and being prepared for opportunities to use stimulus money, the possible adjudication process, coming up with a local agreement, and the role that the County may play. He proposed that the County create a position which would only deal with and be in charge of water issues.

Schroeder referenced and described the budget preparation timeline.

Councilmembers, Schroeder and Sidhu discussed the CARES Act funds and the amount that the County will receive, the current projected percentage of County revenue decline, actual sales tax revenue compared to what was

projected, doing two parallel projections based on different revenue reduction percentages, keeping services for children and families as a priority, looking at creative cost cutting measures such as people working from home and ways the County is booking people into the jail, the timeline of a budget supplemental coming before the Council for spending CARES Act dollars and how much detail they will need to have on what amount money will go to particular programs, whether they can use the federal money to backfill revenue shortfalls, a proposed \$2 million reserve which can be reallocated as needs arise by October, and what information the Administration is basing their economy projections on.

Brad Bennett, Administrative Services Department, answered questions about sales tax revenues and how they have been affected during the COVID-19 crisis.

Councilmembers and staff continued discussion about prioritizing children and families, doing what they can to help people provide for their families and get businesses going again, prioritizing capital expenditures over ongoing expenses with the CARES Act funds, focusing on things that will provide employment in the County, how Whatcom County compares economically to municipalities that rely on tourism and sales tax, when the Council will see proposals for spending the CARES Act money, the drop-in center currently located at Bellingham High School and the driver behind finding a different facility, prioritizing projects based on their impacts, getting meeting-related information to consider at least a day before a meeting as opposed to right before a meeting, how cuts in the budget can be made while maintaining a certain level of service, rules and restrictions for how the CARES Act money can be spent, and how the CARES Act money should be allocated.

Erika Lautenbach, Health Department Director, and Schroeder answered questions about whether it is appropriate for the County to be hiring a temporary Volunteer Program Coordinator, whether priority could be given to people already on staff, and what benefit is derived from intensive contact tracing going forward.

Councilmembers and staff discussed revenue drop forecasts, that every line item represents a human being and a family, being creative in finding ways to cut expenses related to personnel, looking at what resources are being invested in the response to the current crisis and including an anticipation of a second peak of COVID-19 in the projections.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED.

Other Business

Councilmembers discussed an upcoming meeting through Washington State Association of Counties (WSAC) about managing County revenues.

Dana Brown-Davis, Clerk of the Council, spoke about councilmembers participating in that call.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 2:55 p.m.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Dana Brown-Davis, Council Clerk

Barry Buchanan, Council Chair

Kristi Felbinger, Minutes Transcription