

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

**Tuesday, June 4, 2024
2:20 PM
Hybrid Meeting**

**HYBRID MEETING - ADJOURNS BY 4:30 PM - MAY BEGIN EARLY -
(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

Dana Brown-Davis, C.M.C.

Call To Order

Council Chair Barry Buchanan called the meeting to order at 2:21 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. [AB2024-371](#) Presentation from Whatcom Health and Community Services Department regarding the after-action report of the 2023-2024 winter shelter season

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

- Ann Beck, Health and Community Services
- Michaela Mandala, Health and Community Services
- Chris D’Onofrio, Health and Community Services

Beck presented on the after-action report.

Mandala presented on future sheltering options and costs and answered what made the difference in nightly single bed cost between Road2Home, the County’s severe weather shelter, and a County Operated Low Barrier Shelter. She stated the amount for the County severe weather shelter takes into account the start-up costs and also the surge, dissipation, and variety of wage scale in staffing. She answered whether an ongoing operation would not have the start-up costs and stated there would be some but not as much. She answered questions about the annual cost per bed of other interventions compared to a County low barrier shelter, how Washington Commerce arrived at its cost since it seems so low, and the fact that most of the “Potential Additional Operating Cost Considerations” listed on the 27th page of the presentation would be likely expenses.

D’Onofrio presented on the housing budget for 2024 by strategy, and funding sources. He answered how he feels about the stability of the Consolidated Homeless Grant from the Washington State Department of Commerce going forward and stated he likes it but that is coming from a speculative position. They give the County two-year grants and there are no promises or guarantees the County will get anything after that two-year period. Those funds have increased pretty steadily over the last four to five years but it can change.

Donovan asked whether American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars that were set aside for shelter/homeless services could potentially be used for a capital purchase of a permanent facility.

Kayla Schott-Bresler, Executive's Office, stated the Council parked some of the remaining ARPA dedicated housing and homeless services dollars and about \$600,000 of that was reserved for winter shelter operating costs over the next season or two. There was also \$780,000 for a Request for Proposal (RFP) for a family shelter recovery house. They did not get projects from that which were responsive to the Council's priorities. Health and Community Services Department, however, is working with some providers about possible new shelter additions in the community. She answered whether there is some remaining of the \$600,000 and stated there is.

Beck stated they were able to use emergency housing funds to cover their shelter costs from January through June so some of the ARPA money is still there and they are hoping to use it for creating a new shelter option in the community. She spoke about how this impacts the staff involved.

Scanlon thanked the staff for all the work they did this winter, Health Department staff for having a budget on this topic, and that the budget is a moral document and they can make choices on how to amend it. When they want money, they can find it.

Satpal Sidhu, County Executive, stated when budget amendments come, they are not coming from new money. They are shifting between the budgets.

This agenda item was PRESENTED.

Committee Discussion

1. [AB2024-379](#) Discussion of Whatcom County Budget Process

Buchanan switched the order of agenda items one and two under this header (Committee Discussion). See discussion on this item below after AB2024-326.

See discussion of this item below under AB2024-326.

2. [AB2024-326](#) Discussion of a draft resolution requesting the County Executive prepare a proposal for the expansion of year-round shelter capacity and establish a homelessness and shelter subcommittee of the Whatcom Housing Advisory Committee

Galloway briefed the Councilmembers and read from the draft resolution

on what it resolves to do.

Buchanan stated they put this on the agenda just for discussion and not for a vote. They want to have this discussion with Council today and then give time to engage all the stakeholders.

Scanlon stated they will be hearing from the Public Health Advisory Board (PHAB) and the Housing Advisory Committee of Whatcom County after those groups discuss the resolution. One thing he has heard from the Response Division teams is that they see a gap in access to housing and shelter and also a variety of those things.

Councilmembers discussed getting a sense of what functional zero homelessness means in practice so they know what the goal is, the common definition of that being when homelessness is brief and one-time, including in the resolution the problem of people not having housing when they are coming out of jail, a statistic from someone in the field that stated 70 percent of the overdoses in the county are not people on the street but are people who have been put in housing, building something into the resolution to address that fact and getting to the core of what it is that people need, the opinion that it is not scalable in the long run to just provide housing without expectations of individuals, and adding a component to programs that has goals for getting people back into a functional lifestyle.

Satpal Sidhu, County Executive, stated programs should not be the end of the pipeline but a piece of it, so that people move on to more permanent housing. However, that transition is not happening. Just sheltering itself does not solve the issue. It has to be more than that.

Elenbaas stated there needs to be a balance. He thinks they need to have some form of expectations or he does not see the program being successful or sustainable.

Erika Lautenbach, Health and Community Services Director, spoke about looking at the continuum of services. She stated one of her colleagues at the city of Bellingham said it best that shelter builds a bigger lobby, but it doesn't get people out of the lobby. She would love to have the conversation about what areas in the continuum they are missing and what the opportunity costs are.

Councilmembers discussed that there is data regarding rehoming rates from the tiny homes here (30 percent of those people were getting into other housing) and they could share that data to dispel any myths, a question about

whether moving forward with this would be sending out a message to people in other counties to just come to Whatcom County, not moving forward without getting some of the logistical questions addressed, the fact that the HomesNOW! program is structurally different than the tiny homes and other programs in that they have an expectation that individuals generate revenue and pay a small amount of rent, whether the thought is that we do not have enough housing for people to move into, and that that goes back to the discussion about population growth rates.

Councilmembers concurred that they should send ideas for the resolution to Council staff.

Ann Beck, Health and Community Services, stated if Councilmembers have questions, they are happy to help them find information and connect them with the right sources.

Kayla Schott-Bresler, Executive's Office, stated she could provide some perspective on the county-operated shelter.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED.

1. [AB2024-379](#) Discussion of Whatcom County Budget Process

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

- Brad Bennett, Administrative Services Department Finance
- Andrew Tan, Administrative Services Department Finance

Bennett answered whether the Whatcom County Flood Control Zone District budget is an annual as opposed to a biennial budget like the County, and stated it is but that is actually another government; it just happens to have the same board but it is treated separately. He stated he does have ideas on how to make that work more efficiently and thinks it would be better to bring them into the fold and to do a biennial budget for that as well.

Donovan stated the amount of appropriations listed by department does not match the word cloud representation at the beginning of the presentation (for what the County is spending its local revenue on), in which the Executive is very small and the Council looks almost 10 times bigger. They discussed why it seems there is a discrepancy.

Andrew Tan presented about the biennial budget process and how it relates to the 2025-2026 biennium budget.

Bennett answered what the deadline in the Charter is for when the Council

is supposed to receive the budget from the Executive for review, and stated it is 75 days before year-end (prior to the end of each budget cycle).

Scanlon stated he is interested in looking into how much of our budget practice comes from the Charter compared to how much comes from practice they have developed over the years, and how other charter counties are doing their budgeting.

This agenda item was PRESENTED AND DISCUSSED.

3. [AB2024-364](#) Discussion regarding the Birch Bay Incorporation Association's interest in incorporating Birch Bay as a city

Matt Berry, Birch Bay Chamber of Commerce board member, Birch Bay Community Advisory Committee Formation Group member, and Birch Bay Incorporation Association (BBIA) Chair, read from a presentation. He described who BBIA is and how they got to this point, their statement of purpose, some historical context of what was approved by Council in the Birch Bay Community Plan in 2004, the changing demographics in Birch Bay, the proposed incorporation boundaries, the need and request for a feasibility study with a goal of a community vote, and a request for representation in the decision-making structure. He answered whether all of this needs to go through a State incorporation process and he described that process. He stated what they are looking for from the Council is the encouragement and assistance that is described in the Comprehensive Plan.

Jed Holmes, Executive's Office, stated the Executive is supportive of the effort but they would like to hear from the Council before they bring forward a supplemental budget request which would probably be for a consultant to pick up the old study and look at it or start again. They are looking for a head nod.

Councilmembers discussed support for a study and looking to see if there is State funding available.

This agenda item was PRESENTED AND DISCUSSED.

4. [AB2024-336](#) Update from the investigative committee assigned to review recent employment law decisions

This file was discussed in the Council meeting under COMMITTEE REPORTS, OTHER ITEMS, AND COUNCILMEMBER UPDATES.

This agenda item was NOT ACTED UPON.

5. [AB2024-341](#) Discussion and approval of Council Office budget items to include as Additional Services Requests (ASRs) with the department's proposed 2025-2026 biennial

budget

This file was discussed in the Council meeting under COMMITTEE REPORTS, OTHER ITEMS, AND COUNCILMEMBER UPDATES.

This agenda item was NOT ACTED UPON.

Committee Discussion and Recommendation to Council

1. [AB2024-329](#) Resolution supporting affordable energy choices

George Roche, Prosecuting Attorney's Office, stated he got a little concerned with this resolution because he thinks it parallels I-2066 which is currently in the signature-gathering phase. That initiative supports encouraging the Washington State Legislature to consider affordable energy choices and it actually proposes legislative amendments that the legislature could consider in the future. So, with that parallel in mind, he has some concerns about the discussion today. He thinks those concerns could be entirely alleviated by a method of noticing. If this resolution were noticed with reference to the existing initiative process by name and by title then it would be inherently appropriate to engage in discussion. Without that notice, he is concerned that if anyone but he starts talking about that initiative, they would potentially be running afoul of the Public Disclosure Commission (PDC) rules.

He answered how they should go about it correctly and stated he would like for the title of the agenda item to make a reference in some fashion to that initiative process and then for the item to be brought back in two weeks.

Donovan moved to table the item so the proponent has the opportunity to notice it per legal advice. The motion was seconded by Scanlon.

Councilmembers discussed the motion and whether it should be held as opposed to tabled.

Donovan amended his motion to table to a motion to hold.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 6 - Buchanan, Byrd, Donovan, Galloway, Scanlon, and Stremmler

Nay: 0

Temporarily Absent: 1 - Elenbaas

Roche stated if anyone wants to talk about this in an open session there is nothing that prevents the public from wanting to talk to the Council about it. It is the Council's internal dialogue that he is concerned about.

Dana Brown-Davis, Clerk of the Council, answered whether they would need to amend the introduction items tonight to reflect the proper notice and stated they would not.

This agenda item was RECOMMENDED TO HOLD IN COMMITTEE.

2. [AB2024-342](#) Request for motion to identify two councilmembers to participate on the selection committee to hire a Legislative Analyst for the Council Office

This file was discussed in the Council meeting under OTHER ITEMS.

This agenda item was NOT ACTED UPON.

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

Dana Brown-Davis, Council Clerk

Barry Buchanan, Council Chair

Kristi Felbinger, Minutes Transcription