

Whatcom County Council Water Work Session

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



Minutes - Draft Minutes

Tuesday, April 18, 2023

10:30 AM

Civic Center Building Conference Room / Hybrid Meeting

HYBRID MEETING - (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
Carol Frazey
Kaylee Galloway
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 10:31 a.m. in a hybrid meeting.

Roll Call

Present: 6 - Tyler Byrd, Barry Buchanan, Ben Elenbaas, Carol Frazey, Kathy Kershner, and Todd Donovan

Absent: 1 - Kaylee Galloway

Announcements

Watershed Planning Update

Gary Stoyka, Public Works Department, gave the following updates:

The Department of Ecology (DOE) has a request in both the state House and Senate legislative budgets for \$2.7 million to fund the Nooksack River general stream adjudication. They have said that if they get that funding they anticipate filing that in late summer or early fall. There is also a companion request for funding for around \$750,000 by the County and other partners for activities related to trying to find a solutions table or settlement process, conducting technical studies, and technical outreach to water users. The Senate had the full amount in their budget but the House only had half of the requested amount so the Executive's Office has been working to try to see if we can get the House to meet the Senate request.

Donovan asked what the \$2.7 million would pay for and Stoyka stated he thinks it would mostly pay for DOE's staffing and is not entirely for the Nooksack adjudication.

Stoyka stated they are still working on the Groundwater Model and hope to have that substantially completed this year. Phase one of the Groundwater/Surface-Water Interaction Study should be done this year and they are looking for funding for the subsequent phases. If they get money from the Legislature, they will be able to finish that study. They have a water storage study under way and are looking at flood control, instream flow augmentation, and water supply to see if they can find storage options. They are also doing flow studies for fish habitat which is following up on work done 15 or so years ago.

Kershner asked what they are hoping to get out of the Groundwater Model and Stoyka stated they are hoping to be able to determine what impacts groundwater pumping has on surface water flows.

Stoyka stated they are still working on some Southfork property acquisition (the Acme floodplain property) and have applied for funding for a majority, if not all, of that purchase. The funding request is in both the House and Senate budgets through the Puget Sound Acquisition and Recovery Program. They are still looking for additional funding for Stewart Mountain Community Forest Phase one.

Donovan asked whether those two properties are adjacent and Chris Elder, Public Works Department, stated they are, and that allowed them to apply for them as a single grant application.

Stoyka spoke about another property (the Black Slough) the County purchased about a year ago and stated they got some funding to work with the Washington State Conservation Corps to re-vegetate more than 33 acres of riparian habitat. Most of that work is done but they are in the process of doing a land division so they can sell part of the property that had a house and a barn. He stated they are still working on a watershed viewer data hub. It is up and running but they are working on getting a public interface for it and hope to have it live sometime in May. He spoke about the upcoming Watershed Management Board (WMB) meeting on June 8th and stated they will be working on the current and next-year five-year work plans. They are also going to re-start the Local Government Caucus of the WMB.

Donovan asked whether the Council will get a brief report on the current five-year work plan and Stoyka stated they could do a re-cap of the last five years when they bring the new plan forward to the Council.

The new Climate Action Manager is looking at a number of initiatives to determine which ones are going to be a priority. She is looking at all things electrification, including electrifying the ferry and our fleet, installing public charging stations, and working with Facilities on complying with the new Clean Buildings Act. They are doing a lot of talking about incorporating climate change into the next Comprehensive Plan. He thinks it passed the Legislature that that is going to be required now which means there will be some money available and some guidance as well. He stated Chris Elder will be talking later in this meeting about the impact of sea level rise on shorelines through the compound flood study. They are also working on a wildfire, smoke, and heat mitigation project with the Health Department, a carbon credit program, non-motorized and alternative transportation, and developing a climate action dashboard that they can put on their website.

He then gave a river and flood update, and stated that division is nearly fully

staffed. There is a \$2 million request in the state House and Senate budgets to continue the Floodplain Integrated Planning process for the next two years and for the DOE to continue to facilitate and move forward on an international task force with Canada. There is also about \$738,000 of capacity funding for the DOE and Whatcom County for staffing or consultants. He spoke about capital projects and repairs underway or going out to bid. He answered whether the new flood zones are finalized yet and stated they are not.

Presentation from Marine Resources Committee

Austin Rose, Public Works Department, read from a presentation (on file). She spoke about the history of the Marine Resources Committee (MRC), contributions and membership of the committee, and projects conducted in 2022. She answered whether the Pacific oysters are doing okay and stated they are doing okay because they are not as sensitive as the Olympia oysters.

Clerk's note: there was a technical issue so the meeting was paused until that was resolved, then Rose continued her presentation

Donovan thanked her for giving the history of the MRC.

See attachment in the Meeting Details.

Whatcom County Coastal and Riverine Compound Flood Vulnerability & Risk Assessment - Project Update

Chris Elder, Public Works Department, read from a presentation (on file) and answered what area the “Exposure/Hazard mapping” scenarios (from the presentation) are showing, whether the fire station at Sandy Point suffered significant damage from the tides this winter, whether we have any data from prior years that showed any kind of significant sea level rise for this time, what probability of occurrence (level of risk) scenarios they should be planning for, and whether the models they are using to get the data for this are in the report.

See attachments in the Meeting Details.

Discussion with WRIA 1 Planning Unit

The following people spoke:

- Chris Elder, Public Works Department
- Alexander Harris, Land and Water Policy Manager at RE Sources and WRIA 1 Planning Unit

- Dan Eisses, Birch Bay Water and Sewer District and WRIA 1 Planning Unit

Harris gave an update on the Coordinated Water Supply Plan (CWSP) which is the County’s plan to ensure that there is adequate supply of water for different land uses and future growth. It is a way of looking at infrastructure and the demand and making sure that is all lining up. He read the summary statement of the comments received from the various caucuses.

Eisses spoke about what the different caucuses saw as some of the issues with the existing Coordinated Water System Plan that they think need a bit more work going into the Comprehensive Plan. One is an assumption used by the plan to say that Whatcom County has enough water, stating that you could basically aggregate everybody’s water rights and share them between places. The other assumption was that exempt wells would be there as a fallback position for rural development. And climate change resiliency is not mentioned at all in the 2016 plan. He answered whether it was the Coordinated Water System Plan that they were looking at to use it to try to get districts to be serving areas that they were not serving and whether this plan will go parallel with the Comprehensive Plan update. Eisses stated the document says that it should be updated prior to any future Comprehensive Plan update.

Elder spoke about the next Planning Unit meeting.

Other Business

There was no other business.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 11:50 a.m.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Dana Brown-Davis, Council Clerk

Barry Buchanan, Council Chair

Kristi Felbinger, Minutes Transcription