

# **Whatcom County Council as the Health Board (Special)**

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



## **Minutes - Final**

AGENDA REVISED 3.5.2020 (SEE REVISION NOTICE IN MEETING DETAILS)

**Tuesday, March 10, 2020**

**2:15 PM**

**Council Chambers**

### **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

Health Board Chair Barry Buchanan called the meeting to order at 2:18 p.m. in the Council Chambers, 311 Grand Avenue, Bellingham, Washington.

## Roll Call

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

**Absent:** None

## Special Presentation

2. [AB2020-116](#) Update on COVID-19

Tyler Schroeder, Executive's Office, requested that this item, AB2020-116, be discussed first.

Satpal Sidhu, County Executive, read into the record a Whatcom County Proclamation of Emergency and stated that Skagit County has also declared a state of emergency.

The following people updated the Councilmembers and answered questions:

Cindy Hollinsworth, Health Department  
John Wolpers, Health Department  
Anne Deacon, Health Department  
Bill Newbold, City of Bellingham Fire Chief

Health Department staff briefed the Council on the following:

- Guidance for the State issued by the Governor for long term care facilities, and a recommendation that you avoid visiting these facilities even if you feel well.
- Commercial labs are picking up the ability to process specimens but are not collecting them. Collection is still being done by community clinical agencies.
- New non-pharmaceutical interventions announced by the Health Officer including non-essential or large group gatherings of 10-50 or larger.
- The use of Department of Health and Whatcom County Health Department websites as a source for up to date information.
- An email address for questions for the Health Department: [covid@co.whatcom.wa.us](mailto:covid@co.whatcom.wa.us) <<mailto:covid@co.whatcom.wa.us>>.
- Whatcom County has received its first confirmed case of COVID-19 within the last hour.

They answered questions about how the first confirmed case contacted the virus, the recommendation for churches and schools at this time, what the Health Department is recommending for homeless populations, whether the confirmed case was released from the hospital before the test results came in, whether the current 15 pending cases are at home, how the department is following up with those individuals to see if they are getting better or worse and how often they are checking in, what is being done to make sure sick people do not go out into the public, why commercial labs are not required to report test results to the Health Department, why we are just using the Public Health lab and not transferring tests to the University of Washington lab, how many samples the State testing facility can process per day, under what circumstances the Health Officer can require people to be quarantined, whether a private health facility has to report to the Health Department, the difference between isolation and quarantine and whether it is required, how many hospital beds are currently available for COVID-19 patients and how many people can the hospital handle, whether St. Luke's or other vacant spaces could potentially be used as a quarantine facility and whether other providers can help, whether someone who has recovered from the virus could then help others who get sick, involving elected officials in the decision-making process, what the specific plans and thresholds are going forward, whether we have a plan for acquiring personal protection devices and other supplies.

Staff, Councilmembers and Sidhu discussed measures the County is taking to plan, encouraging the public to look to the CDC and Health Department websites for recommended actions, the role of the Health Board, and demonstrating to the community that we are aware of the worst-case scenarios and that we are prepared, and the need for calm discussion.

**This agenda item was DISCUSSED.**

1. [AB2020-126](#) Presentation on FEMA Incident Command System

Karen Frakes, Prosecuting Attorney's Office, spoke about the role of the Health Board and answered questions about how they can be collaborative. Board members discussed a need for communication, what the Health Board should be doing, the extent of its authority, putting concrete plans and thresholds in place that are based on metrics, and establishing more communication with the public.

Byrd asked Executive Sidhu whether we are moving to the Emergency Management Center and whether the Sheriff's Office will be taking over planning and operations. He also asked staff how many supplies we have, how we will work to get more, how we are planning for taking care of sick

people, and getting real-time metrics.

Browne stated that the difference between this situation and other disaster events is that this is a global event and that effects the supply chain because everyone is in the same situation. The antidote to panic is visible preparation. He suggested things that departments could be doing to be prepared.

Board members discussed putting limits on how much of needed items people can purchase.

John Gargett, Division of Emergency Management, submitted and gave a presentation (on file) about the Incident Command System (ICS). The County has been operating on a Single Incident Command run through the Health Department. He explained the Unified Command structure and stated that going to that structure means the situation has grown beyond the capacity of any single organization to manage. There was a meeting over the weekend to discuss a potential transition to the Unified Command. The Unified Command needs to run based on good policy and that's where the Health Board comes in.

***Byrd moved*** that the County transition to the Unified Command structure immediately.

Board members, Gargett, Sidhu, and Schroeder discussed the motion and whether it is premature, what the Cities are doing and whether their work is duplicative with the County, how the declaration of emergency establishes the framework under which they can operate countywide since the Sheriff represents every jurisdiction with the exception of the City of Bellingham which has its own emergency management program, and whether it would be helpful for the Health Board to recommend to transition to a Unified command.

***Byrd amended*** his motion and ***moved*** to recommend that the Administration direct the Health Department to transition to the Unified Command immediately. The motion was seconded.

The motion carried by the following vote:

**Aye:** 7 - Browne, Buchanan, Byrd, Donovan, Elenbaas, Frazey, and Kershner

**Nay:** 0

Sidhu requested that the Health Board can be helpful by making policy decisions and recommendations.

**Buchanan** stated the Health Board should meet aggressively. He *moved* to compile a list through the Council Office’s Legislative Analyst and meet often starting on Thursday, March 12, 2020 at 12 p.m.

Byrd stated he would like to get advice from legal about what authority they have to go outside of the rules such as time limits for noticing a meeting or sharing information in a quorum not in a public meeting.

They discussed coming up with a plan for bed availability, and having meetings via Go-To Meetings.

Bill Elfo, Sheriff, answered a question about requiring all first responders to take protection masks with them on calls.

Tyler Schroeder, Executive's Office, answered a question about the comprehensive list of nursing facilities.

The motion carried by the following vote:

**Aye:** 7 - Browne, Buchanan, Byrd, Donovan, Elenbaas, Frazey, and Kershner

**Nay:** 0

**This agenda item was PRESENTED AND DISCUSSED.**

**Other Business**

There was no other business.

**Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 4:54 p.m.

The County Council approved these minutes on June 16, 2020.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL  
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dana Brown-Davis, Council Clerk

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Barry Buchanan, Health Board Chair

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Kristi Felbinger, Minutes Transcription

SIGNED COPY ON FILE