

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, July 12, 2022
2:50 PM
Hybrid Meeting

HYBRID MEETING - ADJOURNS BY 4:45 P.M.; 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
Carol Frazey
Kaylee Galloway
Kathy Kershner

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Dana Brown-Davis, C.M.C.

Call To Order

Council Vice Chair Barry Buchanan called the meeting to order at 3 p.m. in a hybrid meeting.

Roll Call

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

Absent: None

Announcements

Special Presentation

1. [AB2022-398](#) Presentation regarding the proposed 2023-2028 EMS Levy Plan

Mike Hilley, Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Manager, presented and answered how passing a levy at \$.199 now would put the 5th medic unit in Lynden at risk if it was already planned for and promised at the last levy, whether the Ground Emergency Medical Transportation (GEMT) money mentioned in the slides will continue, whether the \$.295 rate maintains the scope of work or whether there is a bigger ambition for it doing more, and whether we are going to be generating more money with the levy going forward at \$.295 *with* the GEMT than we were generating from 2016 to now at \$.295.

Tyler Schroeder, Executive's Office, answered whether they are saying property taxes will not go up fifty percent if this levy rate passes at \$.295 in 2023, what it means that collection of the property tax will not increase from what the current rate is this year, what is in the plan that requires that increased amount, what the reserve is right now of the EMS fund balance and how they got that, whether the EMS fund balance is 70% of the current year's operating expenses and whether it includes the GEMT, and whether we are maintaining a reserve for money that we expect to come in anyway whether or not the levy passes.

Councilmembers and Schroeder discussed that this is a huge ask considering what Whatcom County taxpayers are looking forward to in the next several years; whether they are shooting for the moon instead of asking for what they need; asking for something realistic and having it pass rather than shooting for the moon and having it not pass; whether the rate will go down over the six years; whether it is accurate that we had a rate of \$.295 in 2016 and we brought in so much money and now we are going to keep that rate and bring in more money than we did with the initial rate but we are going to provide more services; and incorporating Frazey's diversity, equity,

and inclusion language into the levy plan.

Cathy Halka, Council Legislative Analyst, clarified that Frazey's proposed language changes are represented in turquoise on document page five (pdf page six) and document page 47 (pdf page 48) of the document on file titled "Substitute Levy Plan (Frazey) for July 12" as follows:

On document page five (pdf page six):

In order to achieve marked improvements in diversity, equity, and inclusion, the EMS Levy Committee identified the following recommendations:

- Track data, set targets, and regularly review progress towards targets
- Improve outreach and recruitment efforts
- Discuss and identify opportunities for standardized hiring practices
- Create a culture of inclusion in the workplace and in the training room
- Improve diversity on the EMS Levy Committee and establish a subcommittee on diversity, equity, and inclusion

More information and recommendations on these efforts is included on page 47 of this plan.

On document page 47 (pdf page 48):

3. Standardized hiring practices

- Standardized hiring practices are more inclusive and prevent recruitment bias. Discuss with private ambulance companies, fire departments, and other EMS agencies, and unions where common elements of to ensure a standard hiring process exist now and identify opportunities to create more standardized hiring practices in the future.
- Identify barriers in hiring and strategies to address challenges
- Review regularly for opportunities for improvement
- identify barriers in hiring and strategies to address challenges

Councilmembers discussed the language.

Bill Hewitt, Fire Chief for Bellingham Fire Department and Whatcom County Fire District Eight, spoke about the proposed language and answered why the language was there and then taken out at some point.

Councilmembers and Dana Brown-Davis, Clerk of the Council, discussed when a motion can be made on this and whether they need to choose which levy plan should be part of the ordinance. The turquoise language is an amendment to the plan which was previously approved.

Hilly and Schroeder answered how much it costs us to train a paramedic, whether we ask for a commitment to the program from the trainees, incorporating language into all the agreements that if we are spending \$160,000 to train somebody to be a paramedic that we would expect them to provide services for a minimum of five years for the County before they leave, whether total Advanced Life Support (ALS) expenses are projected to go up from \$13,382,308 in 2021 to \$24,640,353 for 2022 as referenced on page 46 of the levy plan, what the labor cost increases are, and why current labor costs were left out of the projections.

This agenda item was PRESENTED.

Committee Discussion and Recommendation to Council

1. [AB2022-365](#) Ordinance providing for submission to the qualified voters of Whatcom County a proposition renewing the levy of a regular property tax at a rate of \$.199 or less per \$1000 assessed valuation (amended from original request of \$.295) to continue to provide emergency medical services

Galloway introduced her proposed amendments to the Ordinance and spoke about whether adopting those amendments would automatically codify the "Substitute Levy Plan (Frazey) for July 12."

Galloway moved to approve the amended substitute version of the 2023-2028 levy plan as presented by Councilmember Frazey. The motion was seconded by Donovan.

Galloway clarified that this motion would be trying to approve the updated diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) substitute language that is shown in the "Substitute Levy Plan (Frazey) for July 12." The proposed language is highlighted in blue with the updated amendments to the levy plan that differ from the version that we had approved at the previous meeting (see proposed language in AB2022-398 above).

Galloway clarified the motion and stated it is to update the substitute language of the diversity, equity, and inclusion section in the levy plan. This would not be approving the whole levy plan, this would be approving just the updated DEI language.

Councilmembers discussed the motion and Mike Hilley, Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Manager, answered questions about the language.

The motion carried by the following vote:

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

Nay: 0

Galloway moved to amend the Ordinance to include the rate of \$.295 or less per \$1000 of assessed valuation and it would include the four or five mentions of the levy rate. The motion was seconded by Donovan.

Councilmembers discussed the motion, whether people will vote no on it because they will see tax increase at a time the economy is struggling, and an opportunity the Council had in April to bring another amount forward.

Tyler Schroeder, Executive's Office, answered what the difference would be for the typical household between the \$.199 and \$.295 rates.

Councilmembers discussed whether they talked about this potential rate in April, and whether they should have had more time to have a robust discussion about what we would get for those different rates.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 4 - Donovan, Frazey, Galloway, and Buchanan

Nay: 3 - Byrd, Elenbaas, and Kershner

Dana Brown-Davis, Clerk of the Council, stated they would most likely have to re-introduce the Ordinance since it is amended.

Galloway briefed the Councilmembers on her other proposed amendments and read them into record (see document [on file] titled "Galloway amendment proposals for 7.12"). They were as follows and integrated into the Ordinance as in the document on file:

WHEREAS, the EMS system responds to a broad range of people who will benefit from responders reflecting the diverse communities of Whatcom County; and

WHEREAS, investing in programs and services to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace, including training and dedicated personnel to improve and track progress on recruitment and retention, hiring practices, and a workplace culture of inclusion will enhance EMS service delivery and better assist those in need; and

WHEREAS, supporting the EMS Levy, as a primary funding mechanism for countywide EMS, is key to advancing Whatcom County's diversity, equity, and inclusion priorities; and

Where permissible by law, personnel costs and training should also include essential diversity, equity and inclusion components of recruitment, hiring, retention, and training of personnel.

Elenbaas suggested they change the word “will” to “may” in the second proposed amendment so that it would read:

WHEREAS, investing in programs and services to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace, including training and dedicated personnel to improve and track progress on recruitment and retention, hiring practices, and a workplace culture of inclusion ~~will~~may enhance EMS service delivery and better assist those in need; and

Galloway stated she could accept that as a friendly amendment.

Galloway moved to amend the Ordinance to include the diversity, equity and inclusion language as outlined in the document “Galloway amendment proposals for 7.12” with the friendly amendment of “may enhance EMS service delivery” in the second of those Whereas clauses.

The motion was seconded by Frazey.

The motion carried by the following vote:

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

Nay: 0

Galloway moved to recommend to introduce the Ordinance as amended providing for submission to the qualified voters of Whatcom County a proposition renewing the levy of a regular property tax each year for six

years, collection beginning in 2023, at a rate of \$.295 or less per \$1000 of assessed valuation to continue to provide emergency medical services, in the general election to be held November 3, 2022.

The motion was seconded by Buchanan.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 4 - Frazey, Galloway, Buchanan, and Donovan

Nay: 3 - Elenbaas, Kershner, and Byrd

This agenda item was FORWARDED TO COUNCIL WITH RECOMMENDED MOTION(S).

Recommended for Introduction as Amended.

Committee Discussion

1. [AB2022-378](#) Discussion of an ordinance granting Cascade Natural Gas Corporation a franchise for the transportation of natural gas in Whatcom County

Andrew Hester, Public Works Department, answered whether the related Ordinance (AB2022-380) is scheduled for introduction tonight and briefed the Councilmembers. There were two versions of the Ordinance floating around, one of which was emailed to Councilmembers after the Ordinance was posted online. But the one posted online is the one that they would be presenting for the public hearing.

Galloway pointed out the difference between the two versions. In Section 12 “Coordination of Construction Activities,” of the draft version, the language was stronger than in this version.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED.

2. [AB2022-251](#) Discussion of proposed resolution establishing priorities for Whatcom County’s 2025 Comprehensive Plan update

Galloway briefed the Councilmembers and stated the “Substitute Resolution” (on file) includes updates reflecting feedback from constituents and organization representatives received during a six-week comment period.

Councilmembers discussed the goal for the re-format being to make clear that not every item in the Resolution will be mandated but it is rather that they have established a set of goals and a vision for the Comprehensive Plan and they are providing examples and opportunities for our county as they work towards the implementation of those values, whether the word “must” should be softened in the statement “coordination and collaboration *must*

occur” in the “Be it finally resolved” section, scheduling the item for a longer discussion to give opportunity for people to weigh in and to make amendments, whether the input received so far has been Bellingham-centric, what the process should be going forward considering all the discussion today, working with the Clerk of the Council to schedule some time (such as a special meeting or larger chunk of time in the next Committee of the Whole meeting) to have a collaborative or interactive work session, maybe having a public hearing on the Resolution, and continuing to move this forward and to gather and incorporate feedback or specific wording into the document.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED.

Items Added by Revision

There were no agenda items added by revision.

Other Business

There was no other business.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 4:47 p.m.

The County Council approved these minutes on July 26, 2022.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Dana Brown-Davis, Council Clerk

Todd Donovan, Council Chair

Kristi Felbinger, Minutes Transcription

SIGNED COPY ON FILE