

Whatcom County Council Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee

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



Committee Minutes - Draft Minutes

Tuesday, December 9, 2025

12:45 PM

Hybrid Meeting - Council Chambers

**HYBRID MEETING - ADJOURNS BY 1:20 P.M. (PARTICIPATE IN-PERSON, SEE
REMOTE JOIN INSTRUCTIONS AT www.whatcomcounty.us/joinvirtualcouncil, OR
CALL 360.778.5010)**

COUNCILMEMBERS

Barry Buchanan
Tyler Byrd
Jon Scanlon

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Cathy Halka, AICP, CMC

Call To Order

Committee Chair Barry Buchanan called the meeting to order at 12:46 p.m. in a hybrid meeting.

Roll Call

Present: 3 - Barry Buchanan, Tyler Byrd, and Jon Scanlon

Also Present: Todd Donovan, Ben Elenbaas, Kaylee Galloway, and Mark Stremmler

Announcements

Special Presentation

1. [AB2025-643](#) Report from the Sheriff's Office

Steve Harris, Undersheriff, reported on challenges with staffing (with nine frozen positions), updates on the department's divisions and programs, and the future location of the Sheriff's Office. He answered questions about the number of criminal traffic citations (800) and how they feel since a lot of those get dismissed because the Prosecuting Attorney's Office does not staff the infraction desk.

This agenda item was REPORTED.

Committee Discussion

1. [AB2025-873](#) Discussion on Behavioral Care Center model

Adam Johnson, STV, stated they have a presentation that was previously given to the Justice Project Finance and Facility Advisory Board (FFAB) and wanted to make sure the Council had the information as well.

Kayla Schott-Bresler, Executive's Office, introduced the discussion. She stated the behavioral care work group gave a recommendation regarding an out-of-custody model, with the County's Division Street campus as the preferred location, and the Incarceration Prevention and Reduction Task Force (IPRTF) and FFAB have also been deliberating on these issues. The latter two groups have both recommended an out-of-custody model but have not yet made a recommendation on location. The Council will be hearing this presentation to bring them up to speed on the issue of location but there is no decision point for them today. They will need a Council decision by the second meeting in January, so they are asking that the Council let them know what other information they think they are going to need to make that decision. She answered whether there were comments collected at the November 20th Justice Project community engagement workshop,

and stated a summary of that feedback is included in the staff memo.

Adam Johnson, STV, read from a presentation (on file as the "Location Options Report") on location scenarios: the current Work Release Center, 2000 Division Street, and La Bounty Drive (with the jail).

Councilmembers and the speakers discussed parking for the 2000 Division Street site, that considerations on the La Bounty site have included stigma and proximity to other behavioral health units on that property, that they would allocate the cost savings achieved by being located at the work center to the rest of the project and likely to the construction side (though further discussion is needed), whether there is a way to get some answers on the structural engineering questions that would be needed for the work center before making a decision, having an initial policy discussion around whether the Council is entertaining the work center option before they do more investigation on engineering, that the numbers in the presentation reflect the almost two years of escalatory inflation at the work center versus the other options, the idea of selling the work center building, and whether they have thought about a fourth option of purchasing a whole different building.

Aly Pennucci, Executive's Office, stated that could be an option but it would require that the Council has decided that the work center is the best option, absent finding an alternative building, so all the scenarios will not still be up in the air.

Schott-Bresler stated the community goal has been to build out the Division Street campus as a true continuum of care, and there are other services that could be located in the work center in the future.

Rob Ney, Administrative Services Department Facilities, answered if the work center could be used as a different County facility if they do not use it for this purpose, and stated they have been talking about the campus for a long time but they are hamstrung until decisions are made. The County's only warehouse is in this building, and the value may be lower because there is a good chunk of the building that is undeveloped or not built out. He stated he thinks repurposing this building would be more expensive than it appears on paper.

Buchanan stated they are going to look at this at the second meeting in January to make a decision on the in-custody or out-of-custody question.

Schott Bresler stated they would also decide about location.

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 1:23 p.m.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Cathy Halka, Council Clerk

Barry Buchanan, Committee Chair

Meeting Minutes prepared by Kristi Felbinger