

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 - Final

Tuesday, June 24, 2025

11 AM

Hybrid Meeting - Council Chambers

**HYBRID MEETING - MAY BEGIN EARLY - ADJOURNS BY 12:00 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 11:13 a.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. [AB2025-469](#) Update on the Jail Capacity Analysis related to the new public health, safety, and justice facility

Kayla Schott-Bresler, Executive's Office, introduced the presentation.

Adam Johnson, STV, read from a presentation (on file as "Project Updates - Justice Facility and Behavioral Health Treatment Center") on an update on the Justice Facility and Behavioral Health Treatment Center project and procurement process, and the jail capacity analysis and work that has gone into it to date. He stated that the numbers they will be discussing today are preliminary. He spoke about the data that went into the projections, the projected number of rated beds needed in 2050 (a minimum of 570 with a 20 percent buffer, which makes a total of 684), that the goal is to have empty beds and not to fill the jail because of separation needs and for safety, types of beds and housing units for inmates, and that they do not need to build a building that large for 2030 but do need to plan for future infrastructure.

The following people answered questions:

- Donnell Tanksley, Sheriff,
- Kayla Schott-Bresler, Executive's Office
- Rob Ney, Administrative Services Department Facilities

They and Councilmembers discussed that the capacity analysis does not assume the County is keeping a jail work center at its current size and capacity but that the work center and current jail will be defunct, what policy levers they have considered as a county that can decrease incarceration as we go into the future, that they are considering the number of beds that the various diversion programs might take away from those needed in the jail, hearing more about what it would look like in 2030 and

what they are thinking about in terms of cells and not just beds, that a lot of those more immediate numbers will be dictated by budget and that they will look more at scenarios and cell types when the design builder is on board, that the intention is not to overbuild but to build to the capacity that we need to address the implementation plan and needs assessment and to end current and future booking restrictions, the intent to build the infrastructure in a way that allows for future expansion if it is needed, and that building for what we need now with foresight for what might be necessary in the future would save millions of dollars down the road.

Johnson and Ney spoke about wetland mitigation and that they are working to find answers to the mitigation they have to have so that, when they do go forward with a plan, it will be rock solid.

Buchanan stated this will be coming back to Council in July.

This agenda item was PRESENTED.

Committee Discussion and Recommendation to Council

1. [AB2025-479](#) Discussion and request for motion regarding draft Justice Project Stakeholder Group Charters

Ashley McClaran STV, read from a presentation (on file in **AB2025-469** as "Project Updates - Justice Facility and Behavioral Health Treatment Center" pages 6-10) on the communications plan and the proposed charters. She stated the communications plan and charters that support it are a mechanism to make all the decisions that need to be made as they move forward with the design process. She answered what their strategy is for engaging the Tribal councils and why the partner information at the end of the charters is blank for both of the Tribes. She stated they want to coordinate with the Tribes to determine the best mechanism of communication with them. She answered why there is nothing in the charters for the City of Ferndale, and stated they do not have a charter for them but know they will need to be in constant communication with them. She spoke about the intended use of the charters.

Donovan stated the way it is worded sounds like the executive is the final decision maker for project scope, spending decisions, and priorities and then the Council pays the bill. He asked if there could be more balance in the Executive's and Council's decision and legislative authority, and McClaran stated the way it is set up is a mechanism to collect information almost like a funnel as opposed to a flat hierarchy.

Buchanan stated this is not a legal document and does not change the relationship between the executive branch and the legislative branch, nor their functions as defined in the Whatcom County Charter.

Donovan stated it seems like they are going to pass this with a lot of unknowns.

Kayla Schott-Bresler, Executive's Office, stated this is a tool that the Council can hold the Administration accountable to as they are forced to make big decisions next year on the project budget. It is supposed to communicate how the Administration will provide information to them so they are comfortable making those big decisions, and the Council can share their expectation for how they would like information to be provided.

Byrd stated he is not ready for this and would like it to come back at a future meeting so the Council has more input into it. He spoke about his concern that the Council would be given the same information as the committees and the public with a lower level of detail.

Buchanan moved to hold until the next meeting.

He stated he would like a little more detailed presentation at that time so they can get answers to some of these questions.

Scanlon stated he thinks it would be helpful if a few of them spent some time on this in between meetings so they can get something that they could potentially vote on, and councilmembers discussed that suggestion.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 3 - Byrd, Scanlon, and Buchanan

Nay: 0

Satpal Sidhu, County Executive, stated he thinks the Council should point out what they would like to see rather than just saying it does not work.

Buchanan stated they need to come up with a list of their questions and those should go through the Clerk.

This agenda item was RECOMMENDED TO HOLD IN COMMITTEE.

Motion approved to hold until the next meeting.

Items Added by Revision

There were no agenda items added by revision.

Other Business

There was no other business.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 12:07 p.m.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Barry Buchanan-via email 7/24/2025

Cathy Halka, Council Clerk

Barry Buchanan, Committee Chair

Meeting Minutes prepared by Kristi Felbinger

SIGNED COPY ON FILE