

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, March 24, 2026
1 PM
Hybrid Meeting - Council Chambers**

**HYBRID MEETING - ADJOURNS BY 4:30 P.M. (PARTICIPATE IN-PERSON, SEE
REMOTE JOIN INSTRUCTIONS AT www.whatcomcounty.us/joinvirtualcouncil, OR
CALL 360.778.5010)**

COUNCILMEMBERS

Elizabeth Boyle
Barry Buchanan
Ben Elenbaas
Kaylee Galloway
Jessica Rienstra
Jon Scanlon
Mark Stremmler

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Cathy Halka, AICP, CMC

Call To Order

Council Chair Kaylee Galloway called the meeting to order at 1:05 p.m. in a hybrid meeting.

Roll Call

Present: 7 - Elizabeth Boyle, Barry Buchanan, Ben Elenbaas, Kaylee Galloway, Jessica Rienstra, Jon Scanlon, and Mark Stremler

Announcements**Committee Discussion**

1. [AB2026-037](#) Update on 2026 State Legislative Session

Jed Holmes, Executive's Office, read from a presentation (on file) and updated councilmembers on the following outcomes of the legislative session:

Operating Budget

- Whatcom County received the money they were looking for (\$2.1 million) for adjudication costs
- \$600 was cut from the Working Connections Child Care Program over the next four years, which will have impacts to families but not necessarily to Whatcom County government
- Foundational public health services were under threat but ended up not being reduced (see further discussion on this below)
- \$100,000 was provided to the healthcare authority to look into funding models for crisis relief centers and stabilization units and to report back to the State Legislature
- The Whatcom County Behavioral Health Co-Response Team (ART) and Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion funding were both reduced by 30 percent
- The Recovery Navigator Program was reduced by 10% (\$6 million).
- \$200 million is planned for distribution to cities and counties to mitigate some of the reduced sales tax collections as a result of the millionaire's tax bill

Capital and Transportation Budgets

- The County's request to have the Crisis Stabilization Center renamed to provide extra flexibility was granted and we were granted an appropriation of \$11.2 million

- Several flood-related provisions were made, including \$13 million for our flood response
- Ferry district legislation passed that allows for countywide ferry districts to fund vehicle ferry systems (which was previously reserved for passenger-only ferries), and councilmanic adoption of a levy for up to \$.10 per \$1000 of assessed value or public vote for higher amounts

He stated they are waiting for the final legislative session report and expect to present that to Council on May 24th.

Holmes and Kayla Schott-Bresler, Executive's Office, answered questions about how Whatcom County will be affected by the funding cuts and whether foundational public health services were indeed reduced.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED.

2. [AB2026-218](#) Discussion and preliminary Council direction on Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan Chapter 6, Transportation

Galloway stated this is a continuation of their discussion from March 17.

Boyle moved to continue review of Chapter 6 (Transportation) using the preliminary Council draft for March 24th, 2026, which is the current version of the chapter with Planning Commission recommendations from January 2026 and additional edits proposed and motions passed by councilmembers as listed in the chart of proposed Council changes dated for March 24th, 2026.

The motion was seconded by Scanlon.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Boyle, Buchanan, Elenbaas, Galloway, Rienstra, Scanlon, and Stremmler

Nay: 0

Galloway stated the version they are reviewing already includes the proposed amendments from the table so they would just be amending those.

Scanlon moved to amend amendment number 28 in the "Chapter 6 - Chart of Proposed Council Changes for 3.24.2026," (which is policy 6F-3 on page 6-14) to change Coast Millennium Trail to Salish Coast Trail.

He spoke to his motion and stated the trail has a new name.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Buchanan, Elenbaas, Galloway, Rienstra, Scanlon, Stremmer, and Boyle

Nay: 0

Scanlon spoke about amendment number 29 on the table of amendments which reminds them to fund the work if they update the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan.

Kimberly Thulin, Prosecuting Attorney's Office, answered if the omission of the word "to" after "fund an update" in the table of amendments would be considered a scrivener's error and stated she believes it would be.

Rienstra moved to request staff prepare the Chapter 6 - Preliminary Council Draft as amended on March 24, 2026 for inclusion in a future agenda bill file for Council Introduction and public hearing.

The motion was seconded by Scanlon.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 5 - Galloway, Rienstra, Scanlon, Boyle, and Buchanan

Nay: 2 - Elenbaas and Stremmer

This agenda item was DISCUSSED AND MOTION(S) APPROVED.

MOTION 1

Motion approved to continue review of Chapter 6(Transportation) using the preliminary Council draft for March 24th, 2026, which is the current version of the chapter with Planning Commission recommendations from January 2026 and additional edits proposed and motions passed by councilmembers as listed in the chart of proposed Council changes dated for March 24th, 2026.

MOTION 2

Motion approved to amend amendment number 28 in the "Chapter 6 - Chart of Proposed Council Changes for 3.24.2026," (which is policy 6F-3 on page 6-14) to change Coast Millennium Trail to Salish Coast Trail.

MOTION 3

Motion approved to request staff prepare the Chapter 6 - Preliminary Council Draft as amended on March 24, 2026 for inclusion in a future agenda bill file for Council Introduction and public hearing.

3. [AB2026-216](#) Discussion and preliminary Council direction on Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan Chapter 4, Capital Facilities

Rienstra moved to continue review of Chapter 4 (Capital Facilities) using the preliminary Council draft for March 24th, 2026, which is the current version of the chapter with Planning Commission recommendations from January 2026 and additional edits proposed and motions passed by

councilmembers as listed in the chart of proposed Council changes dated March 24th, 2026.

The motion was seconded by Scanlon.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Galloway, Rienstra, Scanlon, Stremmer, Boyle, Buchanan, and Elenbaas

Nay: 0

Clerk's note: amendments in the chart of amendments for this date were already incorporated into the draft for review so Council would just be amending those amendments.

Galloway stated the only new amendment since the last meeting on this chapter was one she put forward and it would add new policy 4M-7 (amendment number 17 on the chart of amendments for this date and noted in yellow in today's draft). She spoke about the idea of off-grid housing, which she has also proposed amendments for in other chapters. She answered if this model would still use on-site septic and stated she believes it would, and they have also talked about composting toilets.

Matt Aamot, Planning and Development Services Department, spoke about whether this would be more appropriate in Chapter 12 (Climate) and councilmembers discussed that.

Gary Stoyka, Public Works Department, answered whether state law now allows collecting rainwater, and stated you can do rainwater catchment as long as it is from a roof that is not designed for catchment.

It was noted that the word "alterative" in the text should read "alternative."

Galloway stated they should decide whether they move this amendment to a different chapter or adapt it to pertain to public facilities.

Galloway moved to amend the new Policy 4M-7 (of Chapter 4) to strike "low impact rural residential," insert "public facilities," and add the word "existing" before "public infrastructure," so that the policy would read:

Explore opportunities to support alternative infrastructure models and off-grid and distributed renewable energy systems serving public facilities development, where such systems reduce reliance on existing public infrastructure and advance the County's climate

resilience goals.

The motion was seconded by Boyle.

Councilmembers discussed the motion and the policy was *further amended* to strike the word “public” in the phrase “existing public infrastructure,” so that it would read:

Explore opportunities to support alternative infrastructure models and off-grid and distributed renewable energy systems serving public facilities development, where such systems reduce reliance on existing infrastructure and advance the County's climate resilience goals.

Hayli Hruza, Health and Community Services, clarified the information about rainwater catchment and spoke about composting toilets (which they permit already).

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Rienstra, Scanlon, Stremmler, Boyle, Buchanan, Elenbaas, and Galloway

Nay: 0

Rienstra moved to request staff prepare the Chapter 4 (Capital Facilities) preliminary Council draft as amended March 24th, 2026 for inclusion in a future agenda bill file for Council introduction and public hearing.

The motion was seconded by Boyle.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 5 - Scanlon, Boyle, Buchanan, Galloway, and Rienstra

Nay: 2 - Elenbaas and Stremmler

This agenda item was DISCUSSED AND MOTION(S) APPROVED.

MOTION 1

Motion approved to continue review of Chapter 4 (Capital Facilities) using the preliminary Council draft for March 24th, 2026, which is the current version of the chapter with Planning Commission recommendations from January 2026 and additional edits proposed and motions passed by councilmembers as listed in the chart of proposed Council changes dated March 24th, 2026.

MOTION 2

Motion approved to amend the new Policy 4M-7 (of Chapter 4) to strike “low impact rural residential,” insert “public facilities,” add the word “existing” before “public infrastructure,” but strike the word “public” there, so that the policy would read:

Explore opportunities to support alternative infrastructure models and off-grid and distributed renewable energy systems serving public facilities development, where such systems reduce reliance on existing infrastructure and advance the County's climate resilience goals.

MOTION 3

Motion approved to request staff prepare the Chapter 4 (Capital Facilities) preliminary Council draft as amended March 24th, 2026 for inclusion in a future agenda bill file for Council introduction and public hearing.

4. AB2026-217 Discussion and preliminary Council direction on Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan Chapter 5, Utilities

Boyle moved and Rienstra seconded to continue review of Chapter 5 (Utilities) using the preliminary Council draft for March 24th, 2026, which is the current version of the chapter with Planning Commission recommendations from January 2026 and additional edits proposed and motions passed by Council members as listed in the chart of proposed Council changes dated March 24th, 2026.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Stremmler, Boyle, Buchanan, Elenbaas, Galloway, Rienstra, and Scanlon

Nay: 0

Councilmembers started their discussion with amendment number 15, from the chart of amendments for this date, which proposed amendments to Policy 5H-2 and which was held from the previous meeting.

Galloway stated she invited Eddy Ury, Public Utility District (PUD) Commissioner, to speak about questions they had around fusion versus nuclear fission and how that may or may not interact with existing code, and the difference between fusion and hydrogen and some of the discussions that are happening in the PUD space. Then Council could discuss amendment numbers 29 and 30 which would add two new policies.

Ury spoke about a new generation of both nuclear fission and nuclear fusion (fusion energy) technologies and whether they should decide about addressing them in the Code.

Kimberly Thulin, Prosecuting Attorney's Office, answered questions about

Whatcom County Code Chapter 1.24 (Nuclear Free Zone) and whether it would need to be amended, and stated while she thinks the intention behind that chapter is with respect to nuclear weapons, she does believe it would need to be amended to include either fusion or nuclear in the Comprehensive Plan since it references commercial operations.

Galloway stated that new policy 5H-2 (which would shift the other policy numbers down) would support a process for them to update the code as needed.

Thulin answered whether there is a legal interpretation that could suggest that the current code was contemplating fission and not fusion (given there is a strong distinction between nuclear fission and nuclear fusion), and stated her initial review was that they would want to consider making a change with respect to the reference to commercial production. She spoke about how the language is quite broad, though the intent appears to be that it is saying we are a nuclear-free zone, meaning nuclear weapons.

Councilmembers and the speakers discussed amending the code and that this proposed added policy would be the first step toward enabling that process.

Councilmembers and the speakers discussed whether there are any other restrictions in County policy or code for energy sources the PUD is studying or would like to study, that they are due for a comprehensive code update, using the word “nuclear” if they are going to talk about it as an actual solution to affordable power, and the difference between fusion and fission.

Galloway spoke about the proposed language in Goal 5H and stated Policy 5H-4 would retain fusion, they would be adding the new 5H-2 (which would have to do with code modernization), 5H-3 (also new) is language that came from Lummi Nation around interest in engaging and coordination with treaty rights holders as it pertains to energy projects that might be resource land or water intensive, and they need to be consistent with the use of “fusion” or “nuclear.”

Lucas Clark, Planning and Development Services Department, answered if there has been internal discussion about hydroelectric power since it is only mentioned once in this chapter and stated there has not.

Scanlon asked if the intent in Policy 5H-3 would set them up for any responsibility around any hydropower within our county and for doing something they have never done.

Thulin cautioned them about the use of the word “should” in the same policy and councilmembers discussed that.

Scanlon moved to amend new Policy 5H-3 to add language at the end of the policy after "tidal energy" that says "when the County has permitting responsibilities."

The motion was seconded by Boyle.

Ury gave his input on the proposed language.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Boyle, Buchanan, Elenbaas, Galloway, Rienstra, Scanlon, and Stremmler

Nay: 0

Councilmembers, Ury, and Clark discussed the use of the word fusion versus nuclear, that nuclear is more encompassing, and that Chapter 12 (the new climate chapter) just uses the word nuclear.

Elenbaas moved that wherever councilmember Galloway used the word fusion they substitute that with "nuclear" throughout the document.

The motion was seconded by Rienstra.

Councilmembers, Thulin and Ury discussed that Comprehensive Plan changes should come before changing the code, that nuclear is not renewable so including it here does not really fit or support the development of renewable energy, and using the same language (“low-carbon, renewable energy”) as in policy 5H-2 since nuclear would fall under low-carbon.

Elenbaas accepted amendments to the motion so that it would be to amend policies 5H-3 and 5H-4 so that wherever Councilmember Galloway used the word “fusion,” they substitute that with "nuclear," to add “low-carbon or” to Policy 5H-4 so that it starts with “Encourage and support the development of low-carbon or renewable energy projects...,” and to add the word “or” to 5H-2 after “low-carbon” so that both policies (5H-4 and 5H-2) say “low-carbon or renewable energy...” All three policies would read:

Policy 5H-2: Explore emerging low-carbon or renewable energy technologies, and when applicable, update Whatcom County Code as

needed to support renewable energy production, generation, transmission, and distribution.

Policy 5H-3: Whatcom County should engage and coordinate with Tribal treaty rights holders and other impacted communities before recommending resource, land, or water-intensive energy projects such as hydroelectricity, nuclear, and tidal energy when the County has permitting responsibilities.

Policy 5H-4: Encourage and support the development of low-carbon or renewable energy projects and technologies, such as anaerobic digesters, solar, battery energy storage systems, wind energy, geothermal, nuclear, wave, tidal, and green hydrogen where applicable

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Buchanan, Elenbaas, Galloway, Rienstra, Scanlon, Stremler, and Boyle

Nay: 0

Councilmembers briefly discussed amendment numbers 26-28 from the chart of amendments for today's date, whether they are in the right places given Planning staff's questions from the discussion on Chapter 4, their intent, and what adding the language does for the county.

Jennifer Hayden, Health and Community Services, answered a question about Policy 5V-2 regarding what source-separated recycling means and how it relates to single stream, and whether the policy is still consistent with current code. She stated it is.

Councilmembers and Matt Aamot, Planning and Development Services Department, discussed Goal 5-P. They discussed whether there is sufficient language in this chapter that would allow for water pipelines to move water throughout the county and connect water systems, and moving this chapter forward for when they come back to adjudication-related content in April.

Cathy Halka, Clerk of the Council, stated when they talk about the Comprehensive Plan schedule they can talk about where they want to add this for further review and edits.

Galloway stated they will keep this chapter open with the understanding that all the amendments that were included on the chart of amendments today have been included, and they will start from the version as amended today

when they discuss the water-related elements.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED AND MOTION(S) APPROVED.

MOTION 1

Motion approved to continue review of Chapter 5 (Utilities) using the preliminary Council draft for March 24th, 2026, which is the current version of the chapter with Planning Commission recommendations from January 2026 and additional edits proposed and motions passed by Council members as listed in the chart of proposed Council changes dated March 24th, 2026.

MOTION 2

Motion approved to amend new Policy 5H-3 to add language at the end of the policy after "tidal energy" that says "when the County has permitting responsibilities."

MOTION 3

Motion approved to amend policies 5H-3 and 5H-4 so that wherever Councilmember Galloway used the word "fusion," they substitute that with "nuclear" throughout the document, to add "low-carbon or" to Policy 5H-4 so that it starts with "Encourage and support the development of low-carbon or renewable energy projects..." and to add the word "or" to 5H-2 after "low-carbon" so that both policies (5H-4 and 5H-2) say "low-carbon or renewable energy..." All three policies would read:

Policy 5H-2: Explore emerging low-carbon or renewable energy technologies, and when applicable, update Whatcom County Code as needed to support renewable energy production, generation, transmission, and distribution.

Policy 5H-3: Whatcom County should engage and coordinate with Tribal treaty rights holders and other impacted communities before recommending resource, land, or water-intensive energy projects such as hydroelectricity, nuclear, and tidal energy when the County has permitting responsibilities.

Policy 5H-4: Encourage and support the development of low-carbon or renewable energy projects and technologies, such as anaerobic digesters, solar, battery energy storage systems, wind energy, geothermal, nuclear, wave, tidal, and green hydrogen where applicable

5. [AB2026-231](#) Discussion and preliminary Council direction on Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan Chapter 7, Economic Development

Boyle moved and Rienstra seconded to continue review of chapter seven using the preliminary Council draft for March 24th, 2026, which is the current version of the chapter with Planning Commission recommendations from January 25th and additional edits proposed and motions passed by Council members as listed in the chart of proposed Council changes dated March 24th, 2026.

Councilmembers discussed that adjudication-related amendment items (items 15-20 from the chart of amendments for today's date) are held until April 7th, that they could still vote on amendments 24, 26, 29, and 35, plus

the new ones listed at the bottom of the chart, and whether items 24 and 26 might need to be included in the water conversation.

Amendment number 24 part 1 (Approximate Timestamp: 1:51:02)

Gary Stoyka, Public Works Department, spoke about amendment number 24 (recommended new Policy 7B-8) and stated the phrase “shall ensure” could be interpreted that the county is going to ensure a supply of water for agriculture and he does not think that is the intent. We just want to have policies that that encourage that, because we are not a water purveyor.

Amendment number 6 part 1 (Approximate Timestamp: 1:53:45)

Councilmembers and Matt Aamot, Planning and Development Services Department, discussed amendment number 6 and whether their question on which programs it is referring to have been resolved. They concurred to ask the proposer of the language (Rud Browne from the Planning Commission) what he means by “our programs.”

Boyle’s motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Elenbaas, Galloway, Rienstra, Scanlon, Stremmer, Boyle, and Buchanan

Nay: 0

Amendment number 24 part 2 (Approximate Timestamp: 2:00:54)

Elenbaas moved to amend the amendment number 24 in the "Chapter 7 - Chart of Proposed Council Changes for 3.24.2026" (Policy 7B-8) to change the “shall ensure” to “should strive to ensure” so that it reads:

Preserving farmland alone is not sufficient to sustain Whatcom County's agricultural economy. County policy should strive to ensure that agricultural lands remain not only physically preserved but also economically productive, infrastructure-ready, and supplied with the water necessary for continued production. Agriculture must be treated as the highest and best use of designated agricultural lands.

Elenbaas spoke about the phrase, “and supplied with the water necessary for continued production” and stated it is insinuating that Whatcom County is going to provide the water, but he thinks *policy* should strive for the water necessary. None of our land use policy or regulations should prohibit you from lawfully using the water.

Councilmembers discussed the language then took a short recess at 3:15 p.m. and reconvened at 3:21 p.m. so Elenbaas could work on the wording of

his motion.

Elenbaas amended his motion **and moved** to amend amendment number 24 in the "Chapter 7 - Chart of Proposed Council Changes for 3.24.2026" (Policy 7B-8) so that it reads:

Preserving farmland alone is not sufficient to sustain Whatcom County's agricultural economy. County policy should strive for Agricultural lands to remain not only physically preserved but also economically productive, while acknowledging that access to water is necessary for agriculture to remain the highest and best use of designated Agricultural lands.

The motion was seconded by Scanlon.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Galloway, Rienstra, Scanlon, Stremmer, Boyle, Buchanan, and Elenbaas

Nay: 0

Amendment numbers 25 and 29 (Approximate Timestamp: 2:22:06)

Galloway stated amendment items 25 and 29 are the same. They have been added into the version they are reviewing today. The highlighted language on the table of amendments was added since their last meeting as clarification from the Planning and Development Services Department.

Amendment number 26 (Approximate Timestamp: 2:23:11)

Elenbaas spoke about how he would like to amend the proposed new policy 7B-10 to change both instances of the word "shall" to "should" so it is not legally binding.

Councilmembers discussed how to amend the language to say that agricultural water use (the ability to farm and to use the water) should be prioritized, but not necessarily above everything else, and that the County should support efficient water uses.

Galloway moved to amend proposed Policy 7B-10 (item number 26) so that it reads:

A viable agricultural economy cannot exist without reliable access to water. The County should support efficient agricultural water use in land-use, resource management, and economic planning. Water management policies should explicitly support ongoing and future

agricultural operations as a critical component of Whatcom County's economy.

The motion was seconded by Elenbaas.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Rienstra, Scanlon, Stremler, Boyle, Buchanan, Elenbaas, and Galloway

Nay: 0

Amendment number 35 (Approximate Timestamp: 2:45:02)

Boyle stated she wrestled with whether the Business and Commerce Advisory Committee should be referenced in this policy.

Boyle moved to amend Policy 7C-12 (7C-13) as noted in amendment number 35 in the amendment chart so that it reads.

Recognize that access to affordable child care supports workforce participation and economic vitality in Whatcom County. Support local efforts to expand the availability of affordable, quality child care as part of workforce development. Consider the recommendations of the Child and Family Well-Being Task Force relating to child care issues.

The motion was seconded by Rienstra.

Clerk's note: The policy was originally 7C-12 when this amendment was proposed, but would now be 7C-13.

Stremler suggested a friendly amendment to reinstate "available and" in reference to childcare in the first sentence.

Boyle accepted the friendly amendment so the policy would read:

Recognize that access to available and affordable child care supports workforce participation and economic vitality in Whatcom County. Support local efforts to expand the availability of affordable, quality child care as part of workforce development. Consider the recommendations of the Child and Family Well-Being Task Force relating to child care issues.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Scanlon, Stremler, Boyle, Buchanan, Elenbaas, Galloway, and

Rienstra

Nay: 0

Amendment numbers 53-56 (Approximate Timestamp: 2:50:49)

Galloway stated these have to do with off-grid work and are to ensure consistency across the chapters. She stated they are not going to close this chapter because they need to keep it open for the discussion on adjudication.

Question number 52 (Approximate Timestamp: 2:52:06)

Matt Aamot, Planning and Development Services Department, answered if Point Roberts, Birch Bay, and East County have a regular update cycle for their Economic Development Plans, and stated they do not. They can look at whether those plans need to be updated.

Amendment numbers 6 part 2 (Approximate Timestamp: 2:54:56)

Galloway stated they got clarification from Rud Browne that the reference to "our programs" on page 7-10 means "our local educational institution's programs."

Galloway moved that they amend the Issues, Goals, and Policies section (paragraph 4) to include the clarification, "our local education institutions programs."

The motion was seconded by Scanlon.

Scanlon suggested a friendly amendment that they delete the word "our" in "our local educational institution's programs" so that the paragraph would read:

Traditionally, as skilled professionals advance in their careers, some choose to establish startup enterprises, with a portion achieving success as living-wage employers for future generations. Similarly, certain graduates from local educational institutions' programs go on to serve as educational mentors, instructors, or venture capital investors.

Galloway accepted the friendly amendment.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Stremler, Boyle, Buchanan, Elenbaas, Galloway, Rienstra, and Scanlon

Nay: 0

Galloway stated they will come back to this chapter when they talk about water adjudication on April 7th.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED AND MOTION(S) APPROVED.

MOTION 1

Motion approved to continue review of Chapter 7 using the preliminary Council draft for March 24th, 2026, which is the current version of the chapter with Planning Commission recommendations from January 25th and additional edits proposed and motions passed by Council members as listed in the chart of proposed Council changes dated March 24th, 2026.

MOTION 2

Motion approved to amend the amendment #24 in the "Chapter 7 - Chart of Proposed Council Changes for 3.24.2026" (Policy 7B-8) so that it reads:

Preserving farmland alone is not sufficient to sustain Whatcom County's agricultural economy. County policy should strive for agricultural lands to remain not only physically preserved but also economically productive, while acknowledging that access to water is necessary for agriculture to remain the highest and best use of designated Agricultural Lands.

MOTION 3

Motion approved to amend Policy 7-10 (item #26) so that it reads:

A viable agricultural economy cannot exist without reliable access to water. The County should support efficient agricultural water use in land-use, resource management, and economic planning. Water management policies should explicitly support ongoing and future agricultural operations as a critical component of Whatcom County's economy.

MOTION 4

Motion approved to amend Policy 7C-12 (7C-13) as noted in amendment #35 in the chart so that it reads.

Recognize that access to available and affordable child care supports workforce participation and economic vitality in Whatcom County. Support local efforts to expand the availability of affordable, quality child care as part of workforce development. Consider the recommendations of the Child and Family Well-Being Task Force relating to child care issues.

MOTION 5

Motion approved to amend paragraph 4 of the Issues Goals and Policies section to include clarification by removing the words "our programs" and replacing them with "local educational institution's programs" so that the paragraph reads:

Traditionally, as skilled professionals advance in their careers, some choose to establish startup enterprises, with a portion achieving success as living-wage employers for future generations. Similarly, certain graduates from local educational institutions' programs go on to serve as educational mentors, instructors, or venture capital investors.

6. [AB2026-249](#) Discussion regarding schedule for Council review of the comprehensive plan update

Galloway read from the "Updated Comprehensive Plan Review Schedule" (on file) and highlighted amendments such as the deadline for edits, and a tentatively added Special Committee of the Whole meeting on April 21st. She stated her hope is that all substantive edits get finally resolved at this meeting so that they are looking at a clean version that is ready for introduction on April 28th.

Cathy Halka, Clerk of the Council, spoke about ordinances that will be coming from Planning and Development Department staff and that they want to make sure there is not a lag time between the point at which Council adopts an ordinance approving this full, Comprehensive Plan and the Council's adoption of the related ordinances. She stated those ordinances are going to the Planning Commission around April 21st.

Kiana Oos, Council Office Staff, stated the zoning amendments that go with the Comprehensive Plan will be going to the Planning Commission sometime in April but she is not sure of the specific date.

Halka stated the point in bringing this up is that it may require that this schedule delay the final council action on the Comprehensive Plan to align with action on those ordinances.

Matt Aamot, Planning and Development Services Department, stated they have zoning map changes and zoning text amendments and those will go to the Planning Commission at both meetings in April and probably the first meeting in May, and those are supposed to go concurrent with the final Comprehensive Plan adoption to have consistency between them. So, May 12th would be too early to have the zoning map and code amendments along with it.

Kimberly Thulin, Prosecuting Attorney's Office, stated there is a requirement that those be aligned or the county will be out of compliance in the interim.

Councilmembers and Thulin discussed that they may still have the Comprehensive Plan ready on April 28th but they will have to wait to formally introduce the ordinance at a later date to time it with the Planning Commission's work on the other ordinances, that they will still add the new date of April 21st to the schedule and possibly hold dates in May, and if it is possible to see the Planning Commission-approved versions the Council will be working off of linked to future dates on the Council's Comprehensive Plan web page.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED.

Items Added by Revision

There were no agenda items added by revision.

Other Business

Scanlon stated the quarter four financial report is now online on the County's Finance page.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 4:15 p.m.

The County Council approved these minutes on April 14, 2026.

ATTEST:



Cathy Halka, Council Clerk

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA



Kaylee Galloway, Council Chair

Meeting Minutes prepared by Kristi Felbinger