

# **Whatcom County Council as the Health Board**

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



## **Minutes - Final**

**Tuesday, October 1, 2024**

**10 AM**

**Council Chambers / Hybrid Meeting**

**JOINT HEALTH BOARD/PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY BOARD MEETING -  
ADJOURNS BY 12:00PM (PARTICIPATE IN-PERSON, SEE REMOTE JOIN  
INSTRUCTIONS AT [www.whatcomcounty.us/joinvirtualcouncil](http://www.whatcomcounty.us/joinvirtualcouncil), OR CALL  
360.778.5010)**

### **COUNCILMEMBERS**

**Barry Buchanan  
Tyler Byrd  
Todd Donovan  
Ben Elenbaas  
Kaylee Galloway  
Jon Scanlon  
Mark Stremler**

### **CLERK OF THE COUNCIL**

**Cathy Halka, AICP, CMC**

**Call To Order**

Cathy Halka, Clerk of the Council, called the meeting to order at 10:01 a.m. in a hybrid meeting.

**Roll Call - Health Board**

**Present:** 6 - Barry Buchanan, Todd Donovan, Ben Elenbaas, Kaylee Galloway, Jon Scanlon, and Mark Stremler

**Absent:** 1 - Tyler Byrd

**Roll Call - Public Health Advisory Board**

The following PHAB members were present (audible at roll call or seen online):

- Amy Harley
- Chris Kobdich
- Christine Espina
- Emily O'Connor
- Guy Occhiogrosso
- Jon Scanlon, Health Board ex officio
- Joni Hensley
- Leah Wainman
- Madison Emry
- Robyn Phillips-Madson
- Shu-Ling Zhao
- Sterling Chick

**Announcements**

Halka stated the Council chair and vice chair are joining the meeting remotely and asked that the Council entertain a motion to identify an in-person chair for today's meeting.

*Elenbaas moved* to nominate Scanlon to act as chair. The motion was seconded by Buchanan.

The motion carried by the following vote:

**Aye:** 6 - Buchanan, Donovan, Elenbaas, Galloway, Scanlon, and Stremler

**Nay:** 0

**Absent:** 1 - Byrd

Scanlon chaired the meeting.

**Public Comment**

The following person spoke:

- Natalie Chavez

**Special Presentation**

AB2024-631

Update from Public Health Advisory Board Chair

Sterling Chick, Public Health Advisory Board (PHAB) Chair, spoke about the transition from a few advisory board members meeting in-person to 21 members meeting in a hybrid format, and a recent in-person PHAB retreat. They worked at that retreat on what the PHAB's role is and their priorities for 2025.

He answered whether the 21 members is a function of State law or if that is the number Whatcom County set, and stated it is from the State. He answered whether that number of members is working in terms of trying to get quorums, and he stated quorum is a problem. He answered whether the discussion included the alternative that they could have had under law which was to reconstitute the Health Board as something broader than it is now, and stated that is not up to the PHAB.

Scanlon stated he reached out to the Washington State Association of Local Public Health Officers who connected him with a few other counties that made different choices so he could hear from them. He stated hopefully they will be scheduling a learning session from those counties at their next Health Board meeting or at a Council meeting to learn from their experiences.

**This agenda item was REPORTED.**

AB2024-632

Update from Health Director and Health Officer

Erika Lautenbach, Health and Community Services Director, introduced the new assistant director of the Health and Community Services Department.

Charlene Ramont, Health and Community Services Assistant Director, addressed the group.

Lautenbach spoke about Health Department staff who are being honored for their work.

Amy Harley, Health Officer, stated the Co-Health Officer position is open for recruitment to fill the vacancy left by Dr. Greg Thompson.

**This agenda item was REPORTED.**AB2024-635**Presentation on Budget and Foundational Public Health Services Funding**

The following people read from a presentation (on file) and answered questions

- Erika Lautenbach, Health and Community Services Director
- Sabrina Houck, Health and Community Services

They answered whether cuts to the department's base budget (both in the General Fund and due to the end of COVID-19-related funding) fell evenly across all programs and stated they were able to utilize foundational public health services funding and other restricted funding for personnel and essential supplies, which resulted in decreasing some of their discretionary spending or programs. By eliminating a large portion of their discretionary funding, they not only put pressure on their other funds, but also eliminated their ability to be as flexible as they would like to be in addressing community problems that maybe do not have a dedicated restricted funding source.

Emily O'Connor, PHAB member, spoke about the annual department budget and stated it would be good to see the budget changes in specific funds to see where the pressures and impacts are.

Houck answered whether they expect State and Federal resources to remain where they are for the next few years, and stated there has not been an indication that the State is going to lower that support.

Lautenbach answered why it appears as though there was not a large budget increase between 2022 and 2023 despite the addition of the Healthy Children's Fund, and spoke about how the budget is a changing landscape with funds going on- and offline.

Leah Wainman, PHAB member, asked whether needs have doubled since 2019 and how the department is managing internal performance in light of the budget increase since that time. Lautenbach spoke about two areas that mostly account for the increase (Healthy Children's Fund and the addition of the Response Systems Division, both of which have rigorous performance and reporting measures), and stated the rest is foundational. Wainman stated she is more interested in internal performance, and Lautenbach spoke about the use of internal data.

Ann Beck, Health and Community Services, answered questions about the

sources of revenue for different services.

Lautenbach answered why the Behavioral Health Fund has more expenditures than revenue and what the increase was spent on, and stated they had \$3 million of reserves for school districts that they had to spend down and \$1 million earmarked for the 23-hour crisis facility that came out of that fund.

Houck answered whether there is the same pressure on dedicated funds as on the General Fund, and where revenue is not meeting expenditures, and stated that personnel costs have added pressure to the other funds but the funds had decent revenue coming in and are sustainable.

Lautenbach answered whether they are using uniform targets for reserves across the dedicated funds, and stated the only target in the Code is for the General Fund and the Road Fund. She continued the presentation, spoke about foundational public health services (FPHS), and answered questions about those various categories.

Joni Hensley, PHAB member, asked about how the department is looking at positions in light of the County's hiring freeze, and Lautenbach spoke about positions they need and that cannot be infilled with current staff.

Lautenbach answered what the intersection is with the Racial Equity Commission and Health and Community Services Department work, and stated they will be doing an equity assessment with department staff and are working to understand where they can improve as a department in that area.

PHAB members, Health Board members, and the presenters spoke about understanding where there is and is not flexibility with funding, how much money is going into addressing homelessness and whether the County is being efficient with that money, and whether there is a plan for making the budget more transparent and more accessible to the public.

**This agenda item was PRESENTED.**

AB2024-637

Update from the Whatcom County Health and Community Services Department on the Operations Plan for Fentanyl Executive Order

Erika Lautenbach, Health and Community Services Director, read from a presentation (on file) about what has been happening in the last four months since they submitted the Fentanyl Operations Plan to the Council and Executive and she answered questions.

Amy Harley, Health Officer, answered whether Whatcom County is still

looking into allowing Emergency Medical Services (EMS) providers to provide treatment after naloxone, and stated the Health Department has brought someone on as an opioid response medical advisor and he has been pivotal in helping to facilitate initiatives such as Medications for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD) in the field.

*Clerk's note:* Stremler stated he needed to leave the meeting around 11:20 a.m.

Lautenbach presented on the opioid settlement funds. She answered whether there is an operational cost component to the 23-hour crisis facility that affects the Health Department, whether there is a way to combine the settlement funds from Whatcom County and the three cities that are receiving them, whether Justice Project funds are available to be used now to support individuals in recovery or whether those will only be available down the road, and whether the discussion about creating spaces for youth in the community has come up in the Opioid Task Force.

Harley answered whether there is any breakdown of the data regarding overdoses or deaths by age range and what the youth data looks like. She stated the numbers in youth for overdoses are small.

Lautenbach answered questions regarding Fentanyl supply and how it affects the death rate, and what the overlap might be between Fentanyl and methamphetamine treatment.

Donovan spoke about whether opioid settlement funds might be able to take pressure off of the General Fund.

**This agenda item was PRESENTED.**

## **Discussion**

AB2024-634

Discussion of 2025 Public Health Advisory Board (PHAB) Work Plan

Sterling Chick, PHAB Chair, read from the 2025 PHAB Work Plan Draft (on file).

Joni Hensley, PHAB member, spoke about what the communications workgroup has been working on.

Lautenbach answered where they are at as far as vacancies on the Public Health Advisory Board and spoke about challenges with the hub and spoke model.

Donovan asked whether the roles of the PHAB mentioned earlier, including leading, advising, delegating, and responding, are in the State statute and Chick stated the State uses a lot of verbs to describe the roles.

Chick answered what timing they think is reasonable for the PHAB to give input to Council on things for which they have been asked for feedback.

Emily O'Connor, PHAB member, stated they need more time than they have been given in the past, and spoke about having a structure and process for triggering when to engage the PHAB on a topic so they do not come into it too late in the process. She also spoke about thinking about ways they can be flexible with how they use funding.

**This agenda item was DISCUSSED.**

### Other Business



Scanlon spoke about local Board of Health training happening in Leavenworth tomorrow.

### Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 11:56 a.m.

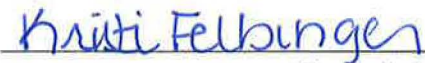
The County Council approved these minutes on October 22, 2024.

ATTEST:

  
  
Cathy Halka, Council Clerk

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL  
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

  
Barry Buchanan, Health Board Chair

  
Kristi Felbinger, Minutes Transcription