

Whatcom County Council Public Works & Health Committee

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



Committee Minutes - Final

Tuesday, May 13, 2025

1:30 PM

Hybrid Meeting - Council Chambers

HYBRID MEETING (PARTICIPATE IN-PERSON, SEE REMOTE JOIN INSTRUCTIONS AT www.whatcomcounty.us/joinvirtualcouncil, OR CALL 360.778.5010)

COUNCILMEMBERS

Ben Elenbaas
Jon Scanlon
Mark Stremmler

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Cathy Halka, AICP, CMC

Call To Order

Committee Chair Jon Scanlon called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. in a hybrid meeting.

Roll Call

Present: 3 - Jon Scanlon, Mark Stremmler, and Ben Elenbaas

Also Present: Barry Buchanan, Tyler Byrd, Todd Donovan, and Kaylee Galloway

Announcements

Special Presentation

1. [AB2025-352](#) Public Works Quarterly Update

Elizabeth Kosa, Public Works Department Director, spoke in memory of Brandon Gipson.

She then read from the “Presentation Notes” (on file) on division highlights and answered questions.

She read from a presentation regarding Road Fund cash flow and strategies to address the imbalance (as a continuation of her earlier presentation in the Finance and Administrative Services Committee). She answered how the ferry system impacts the Road Fund, given the state of the Road Fund, and she spoke about the annual subsidy for the ferry and the periodic lump sum payments to the Lummi Nation as required by the upland lease agreement. She stated once the user fee portion of the Ferry Fund balance dries up, other funds will be needed to subsidize the system. She spoke about one-time fund infusions and stated even with those, the fund appears to have finished the year with approximately \$15,000 and is poised to deficit spend again in 2025. She stated the Council has four options to address the immediate need:

- Significantly cut service
- Approve further subsidies from other funds or funding sources
- Raise fares
- A combination of the first three

She answered questions about why they ended up not raising fares last year and stated Council did approve the fare increases through the Unified Fee Schedule and the lawsuit stated that the fare increases that they implemented could not use the \$430,000 of the dolphin in that equation.

She stated Public Works' opinion is that they "should continue with a fare increase for the immediate."

Aly Pennucci, Executive's Office, stated they do not disagree that fare increases will be necessary to maintain operations of the ferry. She spoke about the process for that and stated the ordinance allows the Executive to adjust the fee schedule by executive order in between budget cycles. They had contemplated doing some additional analysis and going through the options just outlined in more detail, but if the Council provided direction sooner on a preferred policy choice, at least to meet the 2025 needs, that would be welcomed by the Executive.

Elenbaas moved that the council affirms the need to increase ferry fares to address solvency issues and ensure that fare box revenues are meeting the required 55% fare box recovery rate per WCC 10.34.03. Further, the Council encourages the County Executive to increase ferry fares immediately to ensure solvency of the Ferry system annual operations, provided the rate increase is ample enough to meet the goals set forth in the code for fare box recovery and reserve fund contributions.

Scanlon suggested a friendly amendment to add "and pursue other revenue options for the Ferry Fund."

Councilmembers discussed the motion and the suggested amendment with the following people:

- Elizabeth Kosa
- Kimberly Thulin, Prosecuting Attorney's Office
- Aly Pennucci
- Satpal Sidhu, County Executive

They discussed that this would be a motion in committee and that Council would also vote on it later today, that the suggested amendment language should be added to the first sentence of the main motion, that Lummi Island contributes about 44 percent less than Point Roberts does to the Road Fund, that fares need to be set so that they finish 2025 solvent and they may not be increased as gradually as users would like, that the intent of the motion was not to direct an amount but to look at it and make the appropriate choice sooner than later, that the Administration's approach would be to raise the fares enough to achieve the 55 percent requirement as well as at least some contribution to the fund balance, and then project out a smoother path to maintaining that 55 percent, whether they will be asking residents or

taxpayers for funding for the new ferry since they did not get what they wanted from the State this session, and that Public Works is looking at other funding options (including a potential loan program).

Scanlon read the ***amended motion*** that the council affirms the need to increase ferry fares to address solvency issues and ensure that fare box revenues are meeting the required 55% fare box recovery rate per WCC 10.34.03 and pursue other revenue options for the Ferry Fund. Further, the Council encourages the County Executive to increase ferry fares immediately to ensure solvency of the Ferry system annual operations, provided the rate increase is ample enough to meet the goals set forth in the code for fare box recovery and reserve fund contributions.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 3 - Elenbaas, Stremmler, and Scanlon

Nay: 0

Councilmembers and the speakers discussed whether the financing plan for the Federal Government that is due in July can leave flexibility regarding the use of a countywide taxing district, that options for grant money are very limited, and that it is frustrating to hear that Public Works is looking to not fill 14 vacancies in order to bridge the gap on funding shortfalls.

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

Motion approved that the council affirms the need to increase ferry fares to address solvency issues and ensure that fare box revenues are meeting the required 55% fare box recovery rate per WCC 10.34.03 and pursue other revenue options for the Ferry Fund. Further, the Council encourages the County Executive to increase ferry fares immediately to ensure solvency of the Ferry system annual operations, provided the rate increase is ample enough to meet the goals set forth in the code for fare box recovery and reserve fund contributions.

2. [AB2025-358](#) Presentation from Health and Community Services on housing program updates

The following Health and Community Services (housing and homeless services program) staff read from a presentation (on file) about the severe weather shelter after action report, the 5-year Homeless Housing Plan (in development), and options for year-round shelter expansion, and they answered questions:

- Chris D’Onofrio
- Michaela Mandala
- Ann Beck
- Janie Oliphant
- Ashley Geleynse

Michaela Mandala spoke about the severe weather shelter after-action report. She and councilmembers discussed a comparison of the cost per bed between this last season and the prior one when the service was more sporadic, that the Consolidated Homeless Grant covered the total costs, adding a severe weather shelter objective to focus on no crime and no drugs, considering next year that one of the impacts of the County's model is that not having something for people during the day has negative consequences for the community at large, having a discussion with City of Bellingham elected officials regarding a commitment to help fund expenses over \$450,000 to support severe weather shelter operations in Bellingham, how much it was a conscious decision to make the library a spillover space during the day, considering the issue of the current model impacting the Health Department's daytime operations, if there is anything they can do to help with sleep quality of people spending the night at the shelter for next year, why there was a drop in the number of volunteers and how long the window was for them to apply, and the feedback from Health and Community Services that this may not be a sustainable model for them for the future.

Donovan thanked the staff for what they have been doing.

Janie Oliphant read from the presentation on the Whatcom County 5-year Homeless Housing Plan, what services and interventions are funded in Whatcom County, the County's role in the various interventions, external influences on our homeless housing system that are out of our control and what the plan *does* impact, guiding principles developed by the Housing Advisory Committee, the timeline for completing the plan, and objectives being considered as part of strategy development. She and councilmembers discussed funds committed by funding source in 2024 and that none of those come from the County's General Fund, that there is a plan to report the performance measures to the Council on a regular basis, having expanded objectives and solutions around the theory that one of the main causes of homelessness is the lack of relationships, and making sure they are planning ahead and zoning appropriately to accommodate housing needs and thinking about the time that projects take.

Ashley Geleynse presented on year-round shelter expansion, and the work of the shelter subcommittee and Whatcom County Housing Advisory Committee, and she gave an overview of the recommendations for supporting the expansion of year-round shelter capacity in Whatcom County (memo on file) from the subcommittee.

Scanlon stated he would like to schedule more time to discuss this further and see what action Council may want to take, and stated he thinks some of the recommendations are things that Council might want to take up and recommend to the Executive as they go through the mid-biennium review. He stated, though funding is tough, they can make choices about the funds they have and about where they would like to invest them.

This agenda item was PRESENTED.

Committee Discussion and Recommendation to Council

1. [AB2025-328](#) Resolution adopting an amendment to the Whatcom County Comprehensive Solid and Hazardous Waste Management Plan

Jennifer Hayden, Health and Community Services, read from a presentation and summarized the plan amendments. She stated Whatcom County received a petition from the Department of Ecology (due to changes in the recycling system proposed for Whatcom County after the City of Bellingham transitioned to single stream recycling) to amend the solid waste management plan. She confirmed that Sanitary Service Company (SSC) is planning on moving to single stream but Nooksack Valley is not, and answered whether the plan addresses unresolved concerns around increased contamination with this type of recycling. She stated there are plans for addressing very specifically how to reduce contamination in single stream recycling.

Scanlon moved that the Resolution be RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 3 - Scanlon, Stremmer, and Elenbaas

Nay: 0

Items Added by Revision

There were no agenda items added by revision.

Other Business

There was no other business.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 3:30 p.m.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Jon Scanlon-via email 6/5/2025

Cathy Halka, Council Clerk

Jon Scanlon, Committee Chair

Meeting Minutes prepared by Kristi Felbinger

SIGNED COPY ON FILE