

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, January 27, 2026

11 AM

Hybrid Meeting - Council Chambers

**HYBRID MEETING - MAY BEGIN EARLY/LATE, ADJOURNS BY 12:00 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 Stremler

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Cathy Halka, AICP, CMC

Call To Order

Committee Chair Barry Buchanan called the meeting to order at 10:45 a.m. in a hybrid meeting.

Roll Call

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

Announcements

Special Presentation

1. [AB2026-095](#) Presentation from the Justice Center Owner's Representative, STV, regarding the Whatcom County Justice Project

Ashley McClaran, STV, read from a presentation (on file) on what has been done to date, what validation is (defined scenarios and recommendations, and budget and schedule implications for each, with clear decision-making points), the joint action workgroup (JAW) meetings and how that group will help in the decision-making process, how decision options will be brought to the Council, and other work happening in parallel with the validation work.

Adam Johnson, STV, answered where the conversation is around the jail capacity analysis and rated vs. non-rated beds, and if they have more localized data that can help inform those decisions. He stated they are in the process of refining the jail capacity analysis based on new information that has become available to them, and they should be getting a behavioral health analysis at the end of this week.

Hannah Fisk, Health and Community Services, answered whether there are any other diversion programs or incarceration prevention and reduction programs that are still under consideration at this point to impact jail capacity needs. She stated there are several conversations going on about different types of diversion programs and work is being done to get those off the ground, as well as work to bolster existing diversion programs.

Buchanan answered how things are going from his perspective of being involved in conversations of the JAW, the Finance and Facility Advisory Board (FFAB) or Incarceration Prevention and Reduction Task Force. He stated the first meeting of the JAW is tomorrow and they will be helpful in processing questions that have come out of the FFAB.

Kayla Schott-Bresler, Executive's Office, and Buchanan answered a question about opportunities for community input and spoke about community engagement and communication efforts in the next few months.

Rienstra stated with the set of options the Council will be receiving, it would be helpful to see at least a list of the differentials that have been ruled out.

Scanlon stated he hopes they are not ruling out options because they do not think the will of Council is there, and that everything should be on the table because the will of the Council is not known until the Council votes on something.

This agenda item was PRESENTED.

Committee Discussion and Recommendation to Council

1. [AB2026-038](#) Request for motion on Behavioral Care Center model and location

Schott-Bresler stated they are looking for a motion and direction from Council on the model and site for the behavioral care center so they can scope the project, but if any other work presents information which they think would inform or potentially change this decision or cause them to want to have another discussion, they would absolutely bring that back to Council.

She and Hannah Fisk, Health and Community Services, read from a presentation (on file) on proposed facility services, core questions around the facility's model (in or out of custody) and location, and pros and cons of each of the options. Fisk answered questions about what the difference would be in level of service in the jail for those who could not qualify for the behavioral care center if they opt for an out-of-custody model, and how it works if it is in-custody and outpatient.

Buchanan moved to proceed with design for an out of custody Behavioral Care Center, to be newly constructed at the Division Street Campus.

The motion was seconded by Scanlon.

Councilmembers discussed the motion with the following additional speakers:

- Jed Holmes, Executive's Office
- Rob Ney, Administrative Services Department Facilities

- Caleb Erickson, Sheriff's Office
- Adam Johnson, STV

They discussed what level of behavioral care services could still occur at the jail and that saying yes to this model is not saying no to having services in the jail, the funding sources for the behavioral care center and that they have submitted to the Department of Commerce a request for a change of scope for our existing capital budget allocation for the 23-hour crisis center to expand the scope of services we are allowed to provide using that money, that expanding our current contract for jail health services would be a separate bid, that the 23-hour crisis relief center was allowed under a previous plan contract and if this motion is approved they would work with the City of Bellingham to see if that still works with this expanded role and use, that it has been a long-standing stated priority of the National Association of Counties (NACO) to change the 16-bed Medicaid requirement, how the transfer of custody might go between the jail and the behavioral care center, how the size (and bed count) of the behavioral care facility is determined and ways they might be able to expand it (with horizontal expansion being the easiest), making sure the facility includes the possibility of expansion, that having an out-of-custody model does not mean there are additional services but that it serves the same people, just out-of-custody, because one does not need to be in custody to receive the services, and that there would be the possibility of offering psychiatric urgent care to other persons in the same facility.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 6 - Rienstra, Scanlon, Stremmler, Boyle, Buchanan, and Galloway

Nay: 1 - Elenbaas

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

Motion approved to proceed with design for an out of custody Behavioral Care Center, to be newly constructed at the Division Street Campus.

Items Added by Revision

There were no agenda items added by revision.

Other Business

There was no other business.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 11:42 a.m.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Barry Buchanan-via email 2/5/2026

Cathy Halka, Council Clerk

Barry Buchanan, Committee Chair

Meeting Minutes prepared by Kristi Felbinger

SIGNED COPY ON FILE