

# **Whatcom County Council Finance and Administrative Services Committee**

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



## **Committee Minutes - Draft Minutes**

**Wednesday, August 6, 2025**

**9:30 AM**

**Hybrid Meeting - Council Chambers**

**HYBRID MEETING - ADJOURNS BY 10:40 A.M. (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

### **CLERK OF THE COUNCIL**

Cathy Halka, AICP, CMC

## **Call To Order**

Committee member Barry Buchanan called the meeting to order at 9:32 a.m. in a hybrid meeting.

## **Roll Call**

**Present:** 3 - Tyler Byrd, Todd Donovan, and Barry Buchanan

Also Present: Ben Elenbaas, Kaylee Galloway, Jon Scanlon, and Mark Stremmler

## **Announcements**

### **Special Presentation**

1. [AB2025-010](#) Report from the Assessor's Office

Rebecca Xczar, County Assessor, read from a presentation (on file) on the functions of the Assessor's Office, how property taxes are determined, the assessment process, transparency and public access to data, and new internal department tools and efficiencies.

She answered questions about how they can shorten the timeline for the Assessor's Office to submit information for appeals, and stated they are not legally required to respond to the appeals. They have to do their statutorily required work, and if they have time, they will provide more information for the appeals as feasible. She explained how timing of the appeals and staffing have figured in.

Byrd stated the speed at which the Board of Equalization can process appeals is partly dependent on how quickly the Assessor's Office gets them the information. He stated they have been able to increase staff and technology for the Assessor in the last couple years, thinking that investment would increase efficiency for the office, but he is concerned the Assessor's Office is still not able to provide the same level of service to the community that it was able to historically (without that same technology and staff).

Xczar spoke about the increased number of appeals in recent years and stated they anticipate they will be able to answer and respond to all 600-some appeals this year. She stated she will check with the BOE office, but stated she is not aware of anything on the Assessor's end that is holding up the Board of Equalization processing, timing wise.

Byrd stated the written response to be heard at the hearing was another

aspect that they were hoping to get a little faster because that helps with the process and with homeowners. He stated it is important we create a smooth, streamlined, and easy-to-understand process since this is one of the areas in which we work with homeowners the most.

Xczar read the rest of her presentation. She answered whether there is an exit survey for citizens that go through the appeal process to give feedback on what their experience was like.

**This agenda item was REPORTED.**

2. [AB2025-560](#) Update from Public Works staff on the proposed Phase 2 of the Stewart Mountain Community Forest and request for Council direction on preferred ownership option

Chris Elder, Public Works Department, briefed the councilmembers. He stated they spent a couple years trying to determine what the best ownership strategy would be, including the County being the sole owner and a collaboration between Whatcom County and Nooksack Indian Tribe, and they ultimately landed on this recommendation to create a new subsidiary nonprofit under Whatcom Land Trust. Whatcom County would retain a couple seats on this new subsidiary nonprofit to help maintain its involvement and contribution toward future management of the site. They are recommending proceeding with this subsidiary community forest structure which would go to Whatcom Land Trust initially as they create this new subsidiary structure, and they recommend approval of the \$5.5 million stream flow restoration grant (under a separate agenda bill) as well. He showed councilmembers on a map where the Phase one and two land is.

The additional people also spoke and answered questions:

- Maggie Taylor, Nooksack Indian Tribe
- Alex Jeffers, Whatcom Land Trust Conservation Director
- Satpal Sidhu, County Executive
- Kayla Schott-Bresler, Executive's Office

The speakers and councilmembers discussed the Nooksack Tribal Council support letter (on file) and the phrase that reads, "participation on the management board does not preclude the option for formal consultations...", what powers the County maintains if they go with the recommended ownership model, whether there are any covenants on the land that would need to be removed, what recreation and public access might look like, whether values around creating balance in the use of the land for different needs should be put down in writing in an agreement now before they go ahead with this decision, who would have decision-making

for the development of the bylaws, whether future timber harvesting will also be in the bylaws or just assumed as they say forest jobs, that there is every intention to keep this as an actively managed forest and continue harvest, and that the number of people that would be on the board has not been finalized.

Satpal Sidhu, County Executive, stated he supports the questions asked by councilmembers. He stated he would like to see Council enunciate in a memo to the Executive's Office what values they would like to see because he would like input from them. He asked if the bylaws would be approved by the Council, and stated they should be vetted by our legal and approved by Council to show in perpetuity that it was a council decision to do that and not just an executive decision.

Galloway answered whether that would be something she would like to put in the Climate Action and Natural Resources Committee. She thanked everyone on the core planning team and expressed her support.

Buchanan stated the work that has gone into this has been incredible.

Elder answered if he wants a recommendation from the committee, and stated they would appreciate a motion confirming the County's agreement to this ownership model with the non-profit entity with County participation.

***Donovan moved*** to recommend to the Council that they endorse the co-management model that is in front of them (an ownership model with a non-profit entity with County participation).

He stated he would potentially like the Council to see the bylaws at some point, but thinks Mr. Elder is looking for whether they should continue planning to go on this path, and that is the spirit of his motion.

Byrd stated he would rather see the final structure and the bylaws before he moves forward with the motion.

Buchanan stated he is in favor of the motion because it gives clear direction to the Executive's Office for them to prepare what Councilmember Byrd is looking for.

Kayla Schott-Bresler, Executive's Office, stated they owe the partners some sort of assurances that we are heading down the right path, so direction

from the Council would be helpful.

Donovan restated his motion.

***Byrd suggested*** a friendly amendment to the motion to give their approval to move forward to the next step and complete the bylaws, but ***Donovan did not accept*** the friendly amendment.

The motion carried by the following vote:

**Aye:** 2 - Donovan and Buchanan

**Nay:** 0

**Abstain:** 1 - Byrd

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

Motion approved to recommend to the Council that they endorse the co-management model that is in front of them (an ownership model with a non-profit entity with County participation).

### **Council "Consent Agenda" Items**

***Donovan moved*** to recommend approval of Consent Agenda items one through seventeen.

#### **Consent Agenda item #2 (AB2025-544)**

Brett Piepel, Public Works Department, answered when the contract started and stated they switched last year (August 2024) when the City of Bellingham shut down their waste facility so the County had to go to a private option. It is on the agenda because they had a rate increase.

#### **Consent Agenda item #16 (AB2025-573)**

Scanlon asked what percentage of the cost the State is covering, whether there is a gap we are covering locally, and what the expectation is as far as continuing to have support from the State.

Mallory Hamilton, Superior Court, stated the staff who could answer those questions are not here today and asked if they could follow up.

*Clerk's note:* Scanlon discussed the answer to these questions under the Consent Agenda during the evening Council meeting.

#### **Consent Agenda item #8 (AB2025-562)**

Gary Stoyka, Public Works Department, answered when this started and where it is heading, and spoke about studies.

Councilmembers voted on the Consent items (see votes on individual items below).

1. [AB2025-543](#) Request authorization for the County Executive to enter into an interlocal agreement between Whatcom County and Washington State Department of Ecology to provide technical assistance and education outreach to small businesses, in the amount of \$308,750

**Donovan moved that the Interlocal be RECOMMENDED FOR AUTHORIZATION BY CONSENT. The motion carried by the following vote:**

**Aye:** 3 - Byrd, Donovan, and Buchanan

**Nay:** 0

2. [AB2025-544](#) Request authorization for the County Executive to enter into a contract amendment between Whatcom County and Cowden Brothers Trucking, LLC, vector waste facility for the disposal of waste produced by Whatcom County Public Works vector trucks while providing service to multiple functions within our Maintenance and Operations group in the amount of \$288,000 for a total amended contract amount of \$576,000

**Donovan moved that the Contract be RECOMMENDED FOR AUTHORIZATION BY CONSENT. The motion carried by the following vote:**

**Aye:** 3 - Byrd, Donovan, and Buchanan

**Nay:** 0

3. [AB2025-550](#) Request authorization for the County Executive to enter into an interlocal agreement between Whatcom County and Washington State Department of Ecology to remove litter and illegally discarded materials from public lands, in the amount of \$71,400

**Donovan moved that the Interlocal be RECOMMENDED FOR AUTHORIZATION BY CONSENT. The motion carried by the following vote:**

**Aye:** 3 - Byrd, Donovan, and Buchanan

**Nay:** 0

4. [AB2025-555](#) Request authorization for the County Executive to enter into a cost reimbursement agreement between Whatcom County and the City of Ferndale for participation in the Floodplain Integrated Planning (FLIP) process, including participation on the FLIP Steering Committee, FLIP Team, and FLIP Reach Teams, in the amount of \$30,000 (Council acting as the Whatcom County Flood Control Zone District Board of Supervisors)

**Donovan moved that the Contract (FCZDBS) be RECOMMENDED FOR AUTHORIZATION BY CONSENT. The motion carried by the following vote:**

**Aye:** 3 - Byrd, Donovan, and Buchanan

**Nay:** 0

5. [AB2025-556](#) Request authorization for the County Executive to enter into a contract between Whatcom County and Columbia Policy Advisors to assist Whatcom County in developing and implementing a legislative advocacy program in the amount of \$86,040

**Donovan moved that the Contract be RECOMMENDED FOR AUTHORIZATION BY CONSENT. The motion carried by the following vote:**

**Aye:** 3 - Byrd, Donovan, and Buchanan

**Nay:** 0

6. [AB2025-557](#) Request authorization for the County Executive to enter into a cost reimbursement agreement amendment between Whatcom County and the City of Everson to increase the budget for participation in the Floodplain Integrated Planning (FLIP) process, including participation on the FLIP Steering Committee, FLIP Team, and FLIP Reach Teams, in the amount of \$30,000 for a total amended amount of \$103,000 (Council acting as the Whatcom County Flood Control Zone District Board of Supervisors)

**Donovan moved that the Contract (FCZDBS) be RECOMMENDED FOR AUTHORIZATION BY CONSENT. The motion carried by the following vote:**

**Aye:** 3 - Byrd, Donovan, and Buchanan

**Nay:** 0

7. [AB2025-561](#) Request authorization for the County Executive to enter into a grant agreement between Whatcom County and the Washington State Department of Ecology to acquire Phase 2 of the Stewart Mountain Community Forest, in the amount of \$5,517,000

**Donovan moved that the Interlocal be RECOMMENDED FOR AUTHORIZATION BY CONSENT. The motion carried by the following vote:**

**Aye:** 3 - Byrd, Donovan, and Buchanan

**Nay:** 0

8. [AB2025-562](#) Request authorization for the County Executive to enter into a contract between

Whatcom County and Associated Earth Sciences, Inc. to conduct additional monitoring and data collection for a groundwater-surface water interaction study and an investigation into the impacts of agricultural tile drains on stream flows, in the amount of \$77,420 (Council acting as the Whatcom County Flood Control Zone District Board of Supervisors)

**Donovan moved that the Contract (FCZDBS) be RECOMMENDED FOR AUTHORIZATION BY CONSENT. The motion carried by the following vote:**

**Aye:** 3 - Byrd, Donovan, and Buchanan

**Nay:** 0

9. [AB2025-564](#) Request authorization for the County Executive to amend Whatcom County Contract No. 202005011 between Whatcom County and Runback Election Services, increasing the original contract amount by \$111,428

**Donovan moved that the Contract be RECOMMENDED FOR AUTHORIZATION BY CONSENT. The motion carried by the following vote:**

**Aye:** 3 - Byrd, Donovan, and Buchanan

**Nay:** 0

10. [AB2025-566](#) Request authorization for the County Executive to enter into a contract amendment between Whatcom County and Matrix Consulting Group, Ltd. to evaluate human resources policies and procedures in an amount of \$0 for a total amended contract amount of \$76,500

**Donovan moved that the Contract be RECOMMENDED FOR AUTHORIZATION BY CONSENT. The motion carried by the following vote:**

**Aye:** 3 - Byrd, Donovan, and Buchanan

**Nay:** 0

11. [AB2025-567](#) Request authorization for County Executive to enter into a contract amendment between Whatcom County and Mission Critical Partners, LLC to complete a countywide fire and EMS study, in an amount of \$0 for a total amended contract amount of \$223,056

**Donovan moved that the Contract be RECOMMENDED FOR AUTHORIZATION BY CONSENT. The motion carried by the following vote:**

**Aye:** 3 - Byrd, Donovan, and Buchanan



Nay: 0

12. [AB2025-568](#) Request authorization for the County Executive to enter into a contract between Whatcom County and Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission to continue building an officer wellness program, in the amount of \$50,000

**Donovan moved that the Interlocal be RECOMMENDED FOR AUTHORIZATION BY CONSENT. The motion carried by the following vote:**

Aye: 3 - Byrd, Donovan, and Buchanan

Nay: 0

13. [AB2025-569](#) Request authorization for the County Executive to enter into a contract between Whatcom County and the Executive Office of the President's Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) to implement the strategy of the Northwest High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA), in the amount \$193,147

**Donovan moved that the Contract be RECOMMENDED FOR AUTHORIZATION BY CONSENT. The motion carried by the following vote:**

Aye: 3 - Byrd, Donovan, and Buchanan

Nay: 0

14. [AB2025-571](#) Request authorization for the County Executive to enter into a contract between Whatcom County and the Washington State Department of Commerce to help cover a portion of the Victim/Witness Coordinator position salary and benefits in an amount not to exceed \$52,029

**Donovan moved that the Interlocal be RECOMMENDED FOR AUTHORIZATION BY CONSENT. The motion carried by the following vote:**

Aye: 3 - Byrd, Donovan, and Buchanan

Nay: 0

15. [AB2025-572](#) Request authorization for the County Executive to enter into an agreement between Whatcom County and Washington State Department of Children, Youth and Families for reimbursement for daily bed rate for detention services for juveniles committed to Juvenile Rehabilitation, in the amount of \$250 per day

**Donovan moved that the Interlocal be RECOMMENDED FOR AUTHORIZATION BY CONSENT. The motion carried by the following vote:**

**Aye:** 3 - Byrd, Donovan, and Buchanan

**Nay:** 0

16. [AB2025-573](#) Request authorization for the County Executive to enter into an agreement between Whatcom County and the Administrative Office of the Courts for reimbursements of costs related to water adjudication, in the amount of \$1,721,200

**Donovan moved that the Interlocal be RECOMMENDED FOR AUTHORIZATION BY CONSENT. The motion carried by the following vote:**

**Aye:** 3 - Byrd, Donovan, and Buchanan

**Nay:** 0

17. [AB2025-574](#) Request authorization for the County Executive to enter into an interlocal agreement between Whatcom County and the Washington State Military Department to receive pass through funding in support of WhatComm 911 in the amount of \$74,045

**Donovan moved that the Interlocal be RECOMMENDED FOR AUTHORIZATION BY CONSENT. The motion carried by the following vote:**

**Aye:** 3 - Byrd, Donovan, and Buchanan

**Nay:** 0

### **Committee Discussion**

1. [AB2025-559](#) Discussion of an ordinance amending the 2025 Whatcom County Budget, request no. 9, in the amount of \$956,986

Buchanan stated this is on the agenda for introduction tonight, so no motion is needed.

The following people answered questions:

- Satpal Sidhu, County Executive
- Kayla Schott-Bresler, Executive's Office

They answered why they are seeing the ninth budget amendment if the goal was to have fewer of them, what policies and practices are being used to try to reduce the number of budget amendments they are doing, if they could add a column to show if a fund has a target fund balance and where they are at in each fund in relation to the target, and if they could include in the quarterly reports where we are with fund balance and what the target is.

Sidhu stated fund balances are available online for councilmembers and the public in the budget portal and they want to get to the point where more and more is online.

Donovan stated he has talked to the deputy executive about the number of budget supplementals, but it would be interesting to compare to other counties. He spoke about public perception that the County passes a budget then does not stick to it. That is one of the reasons this gets to be an issue.

**This agenda item was DISCUSSED.**

### **Items Added by Revision**

There were no agenda items added by revision.

### **Other Business**

There was no other business.

### **Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 10:39 a.m.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL  
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

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Cathy Halka, Council Clerk

\_\_\_\_\_  
Todd Donovan, Committee Chair

Meeting Minutes prepared by Kristi Felbinger