

**Whatcom County  
Council as the Health Board (Special)**

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



**Minutes - Final**

VIRTUAL MEETING - PUBLIC ENCOURAGED TO VIEW ONLINE

**Thursday, March 19, 2020**

**1 PM**

**Council Chambers**

**COUNCILMEMBERS**

Rud Browne  
Barry Buchanan  
Tyler Byrd  
Todd Donovan  
Ben Elenbaas  
Carol Frazey  
Kathy Kershner

**CLERK OF THE COUNCIL**

Dana Brown-Davis, C.M.C.

## Call To Order

Health Board Chair Barry Buchanan called the meeting to order at 1 p.m. in the Council Chambers, 311 Grand Avenue, Bellingham, Washington (via web conference call).

## Roll Call

**Present:** 7 - Rud Browne, Barry Buchanan, Tyler Byrd, Todd Donovan, Carol Frazey, Ben Elenbaas and Kathy Kershner

**Absent:** None

## Special Presentation

1. AB2020-116 Update on COVID-19

Tyler Schroeder, Executive's Office, gave a brief summary of the agenda.

John Wolpers, Health Department, gave an update on the Unified Command:

- They have been creating more branches under the Unified Command and filling various positions
- They have looked at their objectives and changed some.
- They received questions from Councilmembers and provided answers via an email.
- There are currently seven confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Whatcom County and there have been 220 negative test results.
- He stated the process for questions. Tyler Byrd will gather questions and relay them to the Joint Information Center (JIC).

Schroeder spoke about tracking the questions that have been turned in and how they will be answered.

Deb Slater, Joint Information Center, asked what the questions were that Schroeder referred to and Schroeder read them.

Elenbaas asked about getting timely information and whether the seven confirmed cases include the two confirmed cases from Lummi.

Wolpers stated that all information will be pushed out through the Joint Information Center and Councilmembers are a priority on the distribution lists. The two cases from Lummi are not counted in the seven because they were being followed up on and counted by King County.

Slater gave Board members the JIC email but prefers they to use Byrd as the liaison. She encouraged them to attend daily briefings at 9 a.m.

Buchanan stated the Council is not invited to that because of quorum issues.

Karen Frakes, Prosecuting Attorney's Office, clarified that if councilmembers are just passively listening it's not an issue.

Byrd asked if press releases from the JIC could be sent via email to elected officials an hour or two ahead of other recipients so that they are prepared to answer questions from the public. He stated he noticed that there are State agencies who are doing fever testing before people come into their offices and whether it is possible to set up nursing homes to do fever testing.

Wolpers stated it makes sense and he would have to look into it and talk to Unified command. They may look at doing thermometer testing of people coming into the Unified Command. They don't have them currently but could probably get them.

Byrd referenced conversation on Tuesday, March 17 about setting up an emergency overflow hospital system similar to King County and asked whether there is additional information or movement on that.

Wolpers stated he has had no direct contact yet with the hospital. He thought a hospital representative would be at the Unified Command this morning but there was not.

Charles Prosper, Peace Health Northwest Chief Executive, from St. Joseph Hospital, stated that Robert Taylor, the hospital representative, has been a participant in the incident command process. He is working under the operations section chief and that's where the hospital's updates are being delivered.

Bill Elfo, Whatcom County Sheriff, stated that a large part of the planning is to ensure that the hospital is not overwhelmed with a surging need for space. The hospital is very essential to the process.

Prosper stated the hospital is more than happy to have organizational structure revised but they have been at every meeting they have been invited to.

Rud spoke about a recent visit to the doctor at which he was concerned

about the following of guidelines as he would expect under these circumstances.

Frazeley stated they would like to see Peace Health involved in the 9am briefings and on every level of the Unified Command.

Prosper stated they would be more than happy to participate at any level requested. Their primary function right now is to protect their care givers and providers, and said they would be virtually present at meetings to maintain safety and be a role model and will participate at the 9am briefings.

Byrd stated their participation is crucial and they can help each other.

**This agenda item was DISCUSSED.**

2. AB2020-151 Update from Peace Health on COVID-19

Charles Prosper, Peace Health Northwest Chief Executive, gave an update. He stated they have been doing this type of disaster planning for a while with other viruses. They have had their incident command structure in place for over a week and a half in terms of in-person activities but they've been planning for months. The hospital currently has an adequate number of supplies in the hospital for every patient encounter but supplies are days on hand. There is a nationwide shortage so they've been focused on conservation strategies and careful control of those supplies so they don't disappear or get overused. They are looking at taking care of nurses, doctors, and other caregivers, at sick leave and time off policies and strategies to connect caregivers to childcare services. The fundamental practice is to send resources where the demand is greatest. Seattle is reaching 100% of capacity and 100% of their available ventilators on hand so if there is going to be a State allocation of resources, they will go to Seattle first because that is where the need is.

Frazeley asked whether there is an exclusive contract for Quest to do testing and whether they can only do 50 tests a day.

Prosper stated at first all test were done through the State lab at first, but as soon as commercial labs became available they began to utilize Quest because of the ability of those tests to come back and interface with medical records. It's important that results come back to the testing doctor. Everyone is experiencing delays in results.

Browne spoke again about doctors wearing masks when getting near a patient's face and asked why the hospital only has a few days' supply of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) if they have been preparing for

months.

Prosper apologized for the doctor/patient encounter that Browne had and explained why he doesn't believe a mask is needed in such an interaction. He stated there have been pleas to tell the general public not to hoard PPE, but despite efforts to over-order it's been unsuccessful because of supply and demand as opposed to a lack of preparation.

Elenbaas stated the Health Officer and Health Department are responsible for protecting the citizens of Whatcom County and not Peace Health, but we've been asking for specific numbers and just hearing "adequate." It's important to get more definite answers in order to protect the citizens of Whatcom County. The hospital has been aware of questions asking for specifics but the questions have not been answered. We have funding sources and the ability to help you so the more information, the better we can all plan.

Prosper stated they have been submitting supplemental requests to the Unified Command. He spoke about surge capacity, the needed equipment and environment for patients requiring intensive care, and the steps the hospital has been taking including setting up alternate sites of care to potentially triple the capacity of their ICU, and working with all members in the medical community to see if they can contribute their own medical protection equipment.

Byrd asked about using the vacant St. Luke's building for extra capacity if it was cleaned up, whether outdated masks at the hospital could be exchanged out with new masks the county is getting for front line individuals, whether their main restrictions are beds and ventilators, whether they have seen an uptick in the number of calls or people coming to the hospital, whether the Unified Command has access to that information, and whether the hospital is doing temperature testing for people and staff coming into the building and doing tent screening

Prosper stated that the St. Luke's facility is not a good environment for patient care. With respect to supplies, they are doing an inventory of all supplies and have an algorithm as to when supplies should be used. Some old masks are still viable. They might be able to have dialogue about exchanging of resources. Emergency room volume has dropped. People are getting the message not to come in to the ER and are seeking care elsewhere. They have been doing symptom reviews at the door but are within 24-48 hours of being able to do full temperature testing at the door. Tent screenings have been used in other communities only if you have a

physician order and they've met those needs in the current medical group settings such as doctor offices, walk-in clinics and the Emergency Department. They re-evaluate the demand every four to six hours.

Board members, Erika Lautenbach, Health Department, and Cathy Halka, Council Office, discussed where they are working from, following up and engaging with the hospital to get updates, Board members listening to the 9 a.m. briefings and getting a link to be able to join the call.

**This agenda item was DISCUSSED.**

**Other Business**

There was no other business.

**Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 1:55 p.m.

The County Council approved these minutes on June 16, 2020.

ATTEST:



Dana Brown-Davis, Council Clerk

*Kristi Felbinger*  
Kristi Felbinger, Minutes Transcription

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL  
WHATCOM COUNTY, PA

*Barry Buchanan*

Barry Buchanan, Health Board Chair