

# **Whatcom County Council (Special)**

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



## **Minutes - Final**

**VIRTUAL MEETING - VIEW ONLINE  
(INTERLOCAL COLLABORATION MEETING WITH CITIES)**

**Wednesday, September 9, 2020**

**3:30 PM**

**Virtual Meeting**

### **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**

Council Chair Barry Buchanan called the virtual meeting to order at 3:30 p.m. and introduced the following agenda item.

**Roll Call****MEETING PARTICIPANTS**

Lisa Anderson, Bellingham City Councilmember  
Ken Bell, Port of Bellingham Commissioner  
Kate Bishop, Ferndale City Councilmember  
Rud Browne, Whatcom County Councilmember  
Barry Buchanan, Whatcom County Councilmember  
Tyler Byrd, Whatcom County Councilmember  
Kyle Christensen, Mayor of Sumas  
Atul Deshmane, Whatcom County Public Utility District Commissioner  
Todd Donovan, Whatcom County Councilmember  
Bill Elfo, Whatcom County Sheriff  
Rob Fix, Port of Bellingham Executive Director  
Seth Fleetwood, Mayor of Bellingham  
Carol Frazey, Whatcom County Councilmember  
Mark Gardner, City of Bellingham Legislative Analyst  
Cathy B. Halka, County Council Legislative Analyst  
Greg Hansen, Mayor of Ferndale  
Brian Heinrich, Bellingham Deputy Administrator  
Hollie Huthman Bellingham City Councilmember  
Michael Jones, Blaine City Manager  
Tom Jones, City of Nooksack Councilmember  
Marshall Judy, Nooksack City Mayor Pro-tem  
Scott Korthuis, Mayor of Lynden  
Gene Knutson Bellingham City Councilmember  
Nick Laninga, City of Lynden Councilmember  
Jeff McClure, Whatcom County Public Utility District Commissioner  
Michael Lilliquist, Bellingham City Councilmember  
Richard May, Blaine City Councilmember  
Bonnie Onyon, Blaine City Councilmember  
Herb Porter, Ferndale City Councilmember  
Katrice Rodriguez, Nooksack Indian Tribe  
Tyler Schroeder, Whatcom County Director of Administrative Services  
Satpal Sidhu, Whatcom County Executive  
Paul Shuey, City of Ferndale Councilmember  
Hannah Stone Bellingham City Councilmember  
Pinky Vargas, Bellingham City Councilmember

**Committee Discussion**

1. [AB2020-304](#) Discussion with city leaders to explore ways to collaborate to improve efficiency for the benefit of taxpayers

Chair Buchanan thanked all participant for joining the meeting and turned the discussion over to Councilmember Browne.

Councilmember Browne thanked meeting attendees for participating and shared a document (memo regarding General Information on Interlocal Collaboration) on the screen (on file) to start the discussion. He stated that the goal today is to come up with three top areas in which participants would like to start thinking about collaboration. He read from the memo and stated that any of the suggestions about cooperation are not designed in any way to take away control from another jurisdiction. Control should always remain in each jurisdiction that is receiving the services that are being shared. He highlighted examples of existing collaboration and also cooperation efforts in other jurisdictions. He invited comments on the project as a whole.

Todd Donovan, Whatcom County Councilmember, asked about whether they would discuss feedback from department heads, which led to the next part of the discussion.

**FEEDBACK FROM DISCUSSIONS WITH DEPARTMENT HEADS****CITY OF BLAINE**

- Richard May, Blaine City Councilmember: Feedback from department heads was that there are enough disadvantages about collaboration that they are not eager to preemptively start this kind of cooperation until they can no longer continue to have the autonomy and control they are used to. Set these things up as though they *can* happen and organize a framework in the meantime. If they have trouble delivering services, the framework for collaboration will be there.
- Ken Bell, Port of Bellingham Commissioner: What would the disadvantages be?
- Richard May, Blaine City Councilmember: It has to do with autonomy and control. If several jurisdictions share an emergency type vehicle then everyone will need it at the same time.

- Michael Jones, Blaine City Manager: We looked at two things: loss of control and increased risk. Having crews spread out around the county will cause challenges for responding to an emergency as opposed to responding locally. Asking departments to know the rules and regulations of the whole county will add a level of complexity that might make the work slower and add risk of errors and increased liability. It would be challenging to do what they do with the same level of service county-wide. Opportunities for collaboration might be the courts, purchasing, and routine maintenance.

#### CITY OF FERNDALE

- Herb Porter, Ferndale City Councilmember: Ferndale echoes the same thing that the Blaine speakers mentioned. A positive example of collaboration is how the CARES Act money was pooled and distributed. Ferndale is in the process of upgrading their council/court chambers and there was discussion at one time of using the court facilities of other jurisdictions during that time. Loss of control, practicality, and the issue of potential liability would need to be addressed in order to get buy-in from the jurisdictions. Ferndale did not get into specific ideas for collaboration but that could be discussed with the mayor, staff, and council.
- Greg Hansen, Mayor of Ferndale: Opportunities for collaboration might be a county-wide program to offer mental health and drug intervention services. In some situations, it might be more appropriate to send a therapist to an emergency situation than to send the police and a county-wide program could make a huge difference. He referenced a program that already exists in the County.
- Barry Buchanan, Whatcom County Councilmember: The existing program Hansen was referring to is the GRACE (Ground-Level Response And Coordinated Engagement) program. Leadership is in discussions about how to give the program a bigger scope and to scale it up to be a county-wide program.
- Greg Hansen, Mayor of Ferndale: People who are frustrated with the police could get on board with that so it has the potential of being a huge win across the county.

#### CITY OF LYNDEN

- Scott Korthuis, Mayor of Lynden: Bring some things back to the table that have been tried in the past including economic development (particularly for Cherry Point), water rights clarification and finding a way to divide water equitably amongst us all, combining police and fire together into one What-Comm call Center, and shared training which could be used for departments such as fire and police. We may want to invite fire commissioners into the conversation to get cooperation from them.
- Rud Browne, Whatcom County Councilmember: Shared training is an excellent idea because it does not include concerns mentioned beforehand. We could bring in an expert or teacher to teach everyone in the county at the same time.
- Michael Jones, Blaine City Manager: Shared training is an excellent opportunity for collaboration. Blaine has cooperated with Ferndale before for parliamentary training. There is a great opportunity to develop a program with a curriculum with something specific they are trying to achieve.
- Bill Elfo, Whatcom County Sheriff: Get an inventory of cooperation and collaboration that the agencies are already doing, along with what has been successful or a challenge, in order to build on those in the future.

#### CITY OF SUMAS

- Kyle Christensen, Mayor of Sumas: He echoed the support for collaboration in training and the concern about sharing resources in an emergency situation.

#### NOOKSACK TRIBE

- Katrice Rodriguez, Nooksack Indian Tribe: She stated she does not have anything to add at this point.

#### CITY OF NOOKSACK

- Marshall Judy, Nooksack City Mayor Pro-tem: Equipment sharing (such as a chipper) would be good.

CITY OF EVERSON

- There were no attendees.

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- There were no attendees.

PUBLIC UTILITY DISTRICT (PUD)

- Jeff McClure, Whatcom County Public Utility District Commissioner: He echoed comments from Scott Korthuis about cooperation in the area of water rights and watershed planning. The other area would be new development at Cherry Point and creating as much certainty as possible for new industries to be able to develop. The idea of not putting everything under a conditional use process but actually identifying outright permitted uses that could be developed there would go a long way to creating the certainty that would be required to stimulate new development and new interest.
- Atul Deshmane, Whatcom County Public Utility: He supports collaboration on economic development opportunities at Cherry Point and beyond. He would also like to see collaboration in improving fiber structure and health care. He agreed with Elfo about having knowledge of what collaboration is already taking place. He would like to encourage collaboration among local governments into the future, would like to understand the motivation behind working toward this effort for collaboration, and would like to get the public's thoughts on it.
- Rud Browne, Whatcom County Councilmember: He asked if anyone has done a study to see what we pay by jurisdiction for health insurance per employee. It might be in our interest to explore whether a county-wide health insurance program would be cheaper for us than individual ones. The motivation for this effort was to find a way to maintain services in a declining revenue environment.
- Ken Bell, Port of Bellingham Commissioner: Look at Bellingham Cold Storage's model for health insurance and whether something

like that could be established with the jurisdictions.

#### PORT OF BELLINGHAM

- Rob Fix, Port of Bellingham Executive Director: Look for collaboration ideas that will work. Look at resources for Human Resources (H.R.) and Information Technology (I.T.) and health insurance. A model like the Port's can have huge financial benefits.
- Ken Bell, Port of Bellingham Commissioner: He agrees with the collaboration on health insurance and he likes what he is hearing in the discussion.
- Rud Browne, Whatcom County Councilmember, extended an apology for not including the Port of Bellingham and the PUD at the last meeting.

#### CITY OF BELLINGHAM

- Seth Fleetwood, Mayor of Bellingham: He seconds jobs at Cherry Point and what Scott Korthuis said about water rights. Also look at Lake Whatcom, criminal justice and facility planning, and combining efforts on wetland mitigation banking.
- Michael Lilliquist, Bellingham City Councilmember: 1. For economic development we had a great example recently with the Whatcom Restart program led by the Port of Bellingham's regional economic partnership. More of the same would be appreciated. 2. Look at sharing equipment that can be planned and scheduled and create a lending pool. 3. Look at facility sharing and planning for large new buildings such as a public safety center for high security needs. 4. Have the County Health Department lead in behavioral health and senior services and give the cities ways to support those efforts.
- Pinky Vargas, Bellingham City Councilmember: Priorities for her are what they can do economically and economy of scale and efficiency. She agrees with sharing in the areas of public safety, emergency management, dispatch, and mental health; finding ways to support the GRACE program; and combining incomes and facilities to do a criminal justice center that they can all share in. Prioritize ways to save money right away.

- Lisa Anderson, Bellingham City Councilmember: We are on the right track by looking at contracted services or safety personnel, but also ongoing contracted services for which they are purchasing outside assistance. Look at sharing equipment for non-emergency things such as paint striping, and combining maintenance contracts to raise purchasing power.

### WHATCOM COUNTY

- Satpal Sidhu, Whatcom County Executive: There are some things that the jurisdictions are already collaborating on but also look at collaboration on training and steps toward racial equity. Set up a task force that would come up with benchmarks and model policies then let the individual jurisdictions decide which to adopt. There are things already in progress that the cities could be involved in. Create a database of collaboration that is already taking place and a list of potential collaboration items then pick four or five things we can work together on.
- Rud Browne, Whatcom County Councilmember: Council Office staff can work on this.
- Carol Frazey, Whatcom County Councilmember: She thanked everyone for coming together and echoed Executive Sidhu about creating a task force for racial equity or children and families. We may want to collaborate on H.R. and I.T. departments, grant writing, and bringing police services together under one roof.
- Todd Donovan, Whatcom County Councilmember: Focus on things we would like to expand such as mental health, water rights, purchasing, and courts. Purchasing might be a good starting point. We would need to have the County's I.T. director, Perry Rice, in the conversation to talk about I.T. collaboration.
- Barry Buchanan, Whatcom County Councilmember: The one idea that rings true for him is using the GRACE program and having a good co-responder model for mental health and substance abuse. Use the crisis stabilization facility as a hub that can operate county-wide as a central place for treatment. When we are talking about specifics of I.T. and facilities we need to have those department heads in the room. The key to the next steps is how we



organize ourselves in a methodical way.

- Tyler Schroeder, Whatcom County Director of Administrative Services/Deputy Executive: Recognize what we already collaborate on and see where we can add efficiencies to those programs already in place, then start to prioritize what we will work on next.

### **NEXT STEPS**

- Make a list of all the ideas that have come up and rank them by the number of times they came up
- Do an inventory of things we are already doing where we have had successful collaboration
- Start digging into what training programs we are already doing among the jurisdictions
- Create a roadmap of three things to move forward on and create a culture of collaboration

### **OTHER COMMENTS**

- Ken Bell, Port of Bellingham Commissioner: We would save money if we look at the option of putting a government health clinic in place.
- Rud Browne, Whatcom County Councilmember: Do we do that solely for government or invite other institutions to join?
- Michael Jones, Blaine City Manager: Look for an online brainstorming app to populate with things the jurisdictions are already doing, get subject matter experts in on the conversations, and be conscious of how conversations with staff come across when figuring out how to do better with fewer resources. It can come across as job threat.
- Rud Browne, Whatcom County Councilmember: Change can be assumed as a threat instead of a benefit and we have to manage that. He asked if there are any other comments about next steps.
- Richard May, Blaine City Councilmember: He agrees with Ken Bell about health insurance. Talk to Mike Kreidler, the Washington Commissioner of Insurance.

- Satpal Sidhu, Whatcom County Executive: He went to a seminar recently on insurance and there is a lot of opportunity in that arena.
- Atul Deshmane, Whatcom County Public Utility: He expressed gratitude that he is a part of this and for Browne's initiative.

Browne gave closing comments and called the meeting to an end.

**This agenda item was DISCUSSED.**

### **Other Business**

### **Adjourn**

The meeting adjourned at 4:42 p.m.

The County Council approved these minutes on September 29, 2020.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL  
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dana Brown-Davis, Council Clerk

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Barry Buchanan, Council Chair

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Kristi Felbinger, Minutes Transcription

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