

Whatcom County Council Committee of the Whole

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



Committee Minutes - Final

Tuesday, August 10, 2021

2:05 PM

Virtual Meeting

**VIRTUAL MEETING - ENDS BY 5 P.M. (TO PARTICIPATE, SEE
INSTRUCTIONS AT www.whatcomcounty.us/joinvirtualcouncil OR CALL
360.778.5010)**

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 meeting to order at 2:05 p.m. in a virtual meeting.

Roll Call

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

Absent: None

Announcements

Special Presentation

1. [AB2021-471](#) Presentation from the Health Department of the Community Health Impact Assessment

Erika Lautenbach, Health Department Director, updated the Councilmembers on the following concerning COVID-19 in Whatcom County:

- An almost 500 percent increase in case counts in the last five weeks
- A one-day increase of Covid-positive patients in the hospital from 22 to 25
- 41 businesses as of this morning impacted by COVID-19 cases
- A 100 percent increase in call volume in the last three weeks with requests for information on testing and vaccines
- 600 plus tests being administered each day at the NW Labs airport testing site due to increased prevalence, and the opening of the Canadian border which requires testing by travelers

Katie Stanford, Health Department, gave a presentation on the Community Health Impact Assessment and Lautenbach gave closing statements and spoke about next steps.

Councilmembers discussed with the speakers when they would be releasing the report on the assessment and giving a media presentation, having discussions about using American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to solve the childcare problem, broadening the group that will work on the childcare issue to get the best input from the most qualified people in the community, whether the Health Department has any advice to people who have been told to get vaccinated or else lose their job, whether there is any Federal Government guidance coming out on immunity after someone has had the virus, why someone who has recovered from COVID-19 would still be

required to get a vaccine or lose their job, whether the Health Department is mandating private employers to require vaccination of someone who has recovered from COVID-19, and where the Health Department stands with the requirement for students to wear masks for the upcoming school year.

This agenda item was PRESENTED AND DISCUSSED.

2. [AB2021-482](#) Presentation and discussion regarding Whatcom County's proposed American Rescue Plan Act funding priorities

Satpal Sidhu, County Executive, gave a presentation and answered questions about partnering with the cities on infrastructure projects when they have their own American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, why the County should use ARPA funds instead of Economic Development Investment (EDI) funds, the size of the buckets as presented, and whether money given to cities for development can have a string attached of permanently affordable housing.

This agenda item was PRESENTED AND DISCUSSED.

3. [AB2021-484](#) Presentation from Prosecuting Attorney, Public Defender, Superior Court and District Court on the impacts and staffing needs due to the significant backlog of court cases caused by the COVID-19 pandemic

The following people presented, discussed with Councilmembers about their needs and requests, and answered questions:

- Eric Richey, Whatcom County Prosecuting Attorney
- Tyler Schroeder, Executive's Office
- Dave Reynolds, Superior Court Director
- Stark Follis, Public Defender
- Bruce Van Glubt, District Court Administrator

They answered whether requests will come to the Council as individual supplemental requests, whether there has been further discussion on expanding the number of pro tem judges, whether ARPA funds will be enough, how the expense of added positions would be funded after the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds are used up, whether there are other types of projects not related to personnel such as software that could utilize ARPA funds to increase efficiency and help staff, and whether they have looked at vendors for software that has already been funded.

This agenda item was PRESENTED AND DISCUSSED.

Committee Discussion

1. [AB2021-463](#) Discussion and review of the draft update to the Climate Action Plan

The following people presented and answered questions:

- Chris Elder, Public Works Department
- Ellyn Murphy, Climate Impact Advisory Committee Chair
- Phil Thompson, Climate Impact Advisory Committee

They answered questions about asking for general funds instead of going to a ballot for establishing an office of climate action, the benefit from a climate mitigation perspective of burning natural gas to produce electricity as opposed to burning natural gas to generate heat for buildings or water, how electricity is practical until it is being generated by renewable means and you have the ability to store it to provide baseload power, where electricity comes from if it is not produced by natural gas, whether there is enough electricity being generated to power all of the current facilities that are using natural gas or other types of power, what local government can do to get to an electrified future and more efficiencies locally, how much detail is in the plan about electrifying school buses and whether there are federal dollars available for that, how the plan can be broken in pieces going forward in terms of implementation and which chapters should go to which committees, how this fits in to existing county programs, and how much land would be productive if they rezone Rural Forestry to Commercial Forestry.

Councilmembers and the speakers discussed putting together a workshop plan for the Council for the next few months, talking more about staffing and how to implement the plan, and how to go forward from here.

This agenda item was PRESENTED AND DISCUSSED.

Items Added by Revision

There were no agenda items added by revision.

Other Business

Councilmembers discussed the Council appointment of an interim District Court Judge scheduled on the Council's agenda and how they should vote on it.

Dana Brown-Davis, Clerk of the Council, and Cathy Halka, Council Legislative Analyst, also spoke about staff's readiness to change how they vote tonight. No motions were made.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 5:04 p.m.

The County Council approved these minutes on September 14, 2021.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Dana Brown-Davis, Council Clerk

Barry Buchanan, Council Chair

Kristi Felbinger, Minutes Transcription

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