

Whatcom County Council as the Health Board

**COUNTY COURTHOUSE
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Minutes - Draft Minutes

VIRTUAL MEETING - VIEW ONLINE

Tuesday, February 2, 2021

10 AM

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 Vice Chair Carol Frazey called the meeting to order at 10:01 a.m. in a virtual meeting.

Roll Call

Present: 6 - Rud Browne, Tyler Byrd, Todd Donovan, Carol Frazey, Ben Elenbaas and Kathy Kershner

Absent: 1 - Barry Buchanan

Public Comment

Council staff played a short video on how to speak at the meeting and the following people spoke:

- Markis Dee Stidham
- Amy Glasser
- Melissa Greg

Director and Health Officer's Report

The following people updated the Councilmembers and answered questions:

- Erika Lautenbach, Health Department Director
- Greg Stern, Health Officer

They spoke about availability of the COVID-19 vaccine, the relationship between provider capacity and vaccine supply, and related upcoming events and communications.

Councilmembers and staff discussed what people can do to make the distribution of vaccines more equitable, having control of where the Whatcom County allocation goes, improving the vaccine reservation system, and how people without a provider or insurance will get a vaccine.

Public Health Advisory Board Report

[AB2021-082](#) Public Health Advisory Board Report

Sterling Chick, Public Health Advisory Board Chair, briefed the Councilmembers on the work of the Public Health Advisory Board on the Child and Family Well-Being Task Force and the Racism Resolution and spoke about determining the board's role in the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED.

Update on Homelessness

[AB2021-083](#) Update on Homelessness by Health Department Housing Staff

The following staff briefed the Councilmembers:

- Ann Beck, Health Department
- Anne Deacon, Health Department
- Chris D'Onofrio, Health Department

They presented and answered questions about Whatcom County and City of Bellingham's homeless housing system, the Health Department's contract housing budget, community collaboration efforts, a more formal process to work with community partners countywide on affordable housing, a \$6.8 million U.S. Treasury grant dedicated to rental assistance, and finding venues for communication with the public.

Byrd moved that they request the Public Health Advisory Board (PHAB) to focus on this issue as their primary issue this year. The motion was seconded by Kershner.

Kershner suggested a friendly amendment that they ask the PHAB to work on this but not make it their primary objective.

Byrd accepted the friendly amendment.

Councilmembers discussed the motion and the following staff discussed whether the Housing Advisory Committee would be a better board for the work:

- Erika Lautenbach, Health Department Director
- Anne Deacon, Health Department

Kershner clarified that the motion she thought she was seconding was to ask the PHAB to support the Health Department in getting information out to the public in an expedited fashion.

Kershner suggested an amendment to the motion to ask the Housing Advisory Committee to support the Health Department in coming up with creative solutions to get information out to the public rather than the PHAB.

Byrd restated his motion to request that the PHAB focus on solutions for

helping to solve our homeless problem as well as communicate what we are doing for the homeless problem, and not as a primary focus but a top priority.

Deacon stated there is also the Behavioral Health Advisory Committee as well and there may be better expertise on that and the Housing Advisory Committee.

The motion failed by the following vote:

Aye: 3 - Byrd, Elenbaas, and Kershner

Nay: 1 - Frazey

Abstain: 2 - Browne and Donovan

Absent: 1 - Buchanan

Erika Lautenbach, Health Department Director, stated there are ways they can share information between the various boards and committees to align with the work they are doing but the best expertise for this topic would be the Housing Advisory Committee and the Behavioral Health Advisory Committee.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED.

Other Business

Kershner moved that the Council send the amended letter (that Councilmember Donovan made amendments to this morning) to the Governor regarding the reopening plan for Whatcom County and ask that the amended version includes other governments within the county such as cities or other members that might want to sign on to that letter to make it a stronger statement that Whatcom County wants to open as soon as we are eligible. The motion was seconded by Byrd.

Elenbaas stated he supports the letter but suggested the Council send one just from them and request the other jurisdictions send one as well from each of their bodies. He would also like to see a letter about vaccine roll-out.

Erika Lautenbach, Health Department Director, answered whether the letter could be sent around to other jurisdictions in the county and then sent to the Governor by the end of business today. She stated she is happy to help with a letter about vaccine too.

Councilmembers discussed the motion.

Kershner amended her motion to accept Elenbaas' suggestion to send the

letter from the County Council and then send it to the other Whatcom County jurisdictions if they want to submit their own.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 6 - Byrd, Donovan, Elenbaas, Frazey, Kershner, Browne

Nay: 0

Absent: 1 - Buchanan

Byrd stated he would like to discuss emergency winter shelter, what they plan to do, and how they intend to move forward and address it.

Anne Deacon, Health Department, stated they will coordinate with the City of Bellingham since it is in the City’s jurisdiction and the City is the lead. She answered why people might be turned away from shelter facilities and discussed with Councilmembers whether they need to define what the City and County are doing, how to move forward from here, and what to do with those who do not go to the Basecamp shelter. She stated she would start the conversation with staff at the City of Bellingham and will get something prepared if the Council would like to address this in a committee.

A motion carried 6-1 (Buchanan absent) for Council to send Governor Inslee the amended letter (with Councilmember Donovan’s edits) regarding the reopening plan for Whatcom County and also send the letter to other governments within the county that might want to send their own letter to make a stronger statement that Whatcom County wants to open as soon as eligible.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 12:04 p.m.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Dana Brown-Davis, Council Clerk

Barry Buchanan, Council Chair

Kristi Felbinger, Minutes Transcription