

Whatcom County Council as the Health Board

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



Minutes - Final

**Tuesday, August 2, 2022
10 AM
Hybrid Meeting**

**HYBRID MEETING (PARTICIPATE IN-PERSON, SEE REMOTE JOIN
INSTRUCTIONS AT www.whatcomcounty.us/joinvirtualcouncil, OR CALL
360.778.5010) JOINT MEETING WITH THE PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY
COMMITTEE**

COUNCILMEMBERS

Barry Buchanan
Tyler Byrd
Todd Donovan
Ben Elenbaas
Carol Frazey
Kaylee Galloway
Kathy Kershner

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Dana Brown-Davis, C.M.C.

Call To Order

Health Board Vice Chair Barry Buchanan called the meeting to order at 10:01 a.m. in a hybrid meeting.

Roll Call

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

Absent: None

Announcements**PHAB and Health Board Call to order. Land Acknowledgment. Roll call of PHAB and Health Board Members. Approve PHAB July 2022 minutes**

Steve Bennett, Public Health Advisory Board Chair, called the Public Health Advisory Board (PHAB) meeting to order.

Therese Horan, PHAB member, read the Land Acknowledgement into the record.

The following PHAB members were present:

- Steve Bennett
- Shamika Brooks
- Barry Buchanan
- Sterling Chick
- Therese Horan
- Edna Revey

PHAB members approved the minutes from their last meeting.

The following Councilmembers were present as the Health Board:

- Carol Frazey
- Kaylee Galloway
- Barry Buchanan
- Todd Donovan
- Kathy Kershner
- Tyler Byrd
- Ben Elenbaas

Additional people present:

- Laura Todd, Facilitator
- Erika Lautenbach, Health Department Director
- Kate Dabe, Health Department
- Greg Thompson, Co-Health Officer

Public comment

The following people spoke:

- Misty Flowers
- Fallon (last name not given)

Health Board/County Council update on relevant items

Buchanan gave an update on an upcoming workgroup meeting to work on the competency restoration issue that takes place in the jail to see what they can get the State to do to help dislodge that system and get some movement through. There are a lot of folks who are stuck in that system.

Kershner requested information, further discussions, and maybe work with the PHAB about the following topics:

- What the vaccine reactions are in Whatcom County and what people are experiencing
- Statistics and an update on COVID-19 case rates, death rates, vaccine reactions, and hospitalizations
- What the Health Department and PHAB think of the fentanyl crisis in our community, how that is affecting our young people, and what the plans are to do something about that
- Efficacy of low/no barrier housing and what we are going to do to move away from allowing things like 22 North to continue to occur in our downtown core while helping people by providing more services that help with substance abuse and mental health but holding people accountable for their actions

Erika Lautenbach, Health Department Director, stated the Council will receive a full briefing in committee on August 9th from the Opportunity Council and Northwest Youth Services regarding 22 North.

PHAB update on bylaws, growing membership, other items

Steve Bennett, Public Health Advisory Board (PHAB) Chair, updated the group on changes the PHAB has been going through to move up to some of

the new State requirements for the community health boards and working with other county boards and commissions that have a vested stake and interest in public health and health outcomes.

He answered whether they could have the back-up proxies for primary representatives of other boards and commissions vetted and whether they have reached out to the Climate Impact Advisory Board around health impacts and climate.

Health Department Strategic Plan

The following people spoke and presented the Health Department Strategic Plan initial draft (on file):

- Laura Todd, Facilitator
- Erika Lautenbach, Health Department Director
- Kate Dabe, Health Department

Buchanan asked how they are going to use the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) toolkit in some of this work and whether it should be stated in the plan since it is such an overarching goal of the County.

Kershner stated she thinks that equity and health are transposed in the purpose statement and it should read, “We serve Whatcom County by advancing *health* and partnering with our community to promote *equity*.” She asked why they put equity first there instead of health.

Lautenbach stated that the equity and partnership is kind of the “how” and the items below it are the “what.”

Laura Todd opened the floor to answering the following questions about the plan:

- **What is surprising?**
- **What do you like seeing?**
- **What do you wish was different?**
- **What is missing?**

Bennett asked whether there is a way to expand the phrasing of the fourth bullet (“Creating policy and law that impacts public health”) under “Community Partnerships and Engagement” for an understanding of the total impact of health in all policies.

Frazey suggested adding language under “Community Partnerships and

Engagement” about using data to eliminate and replace programs where things are not working. In the same section she likes “Improve external and internal communications systems and processes.” Anywhere we can improve on that would be helpful.

Galloway spoke about recruitment, retention, and other initiatives (under “Workforce Development”) and asked about an internship program, looking to the future and looking at how we are engaging young people now to prepare them for a career, thinking about bulking up an employee assistance program, and learning more about what is meant by “other initiatives.”

Kershner stated there is no meat in this plan and it feels very high-level. She asked where the issues are that our community is facing, where we are getting the data that we are basing our decisions on and how we can be sure that data is valid and relevant in itself and to our community. She also asked where the rest of the plan is where they are talking about the fentanyl crisis, the homeless crisis, childcare issues, the early childhood education initiative, senior services, and homes for seniors.

Dabe stated that there is just one page to the plan right now.

Donovan stated he was surprised that the first priority is internal organization. The “Workforce Development” and the “Quality Management” boxes seem internal to the operations to the Health Department. He asked what our policy priorities are.

Lautenbach stated they will build out a much more detailed plan. It does not yet talk about what outcomes we want to achieve, or the results or the specific areas we want to impact.

Donovan asked whether this is talking about workforce development in Whatcom County or within Whatcom County Government.

Lautenbach stated it is both and they need to do a better job of differentiating that and clarifying.

Horan stated she is a clinician and spoke about seeing, throughout the pandemic, an even deeper divide in our community over things such as vaccine mandates and understanding why we are recommending these policies. It would be helpful to flesh out the first bullet (“Improve external and internal communications systems and processes”) under “Community Partnerships and Engagement” to provide an opportunity to at least name the difficulties that we are having crossing divides of education and political

differences and acknowledging that we can have all the plans in the world, but if we just keep disenfranchising certain groups it is going to become more and more difficult. Also include how we plan to cross that divide.

Fraze spoke about honoring the differences. Instead of constantly pushing against them, really look at it and speak and talk to each other and try to come to an understanding.

Lautenbach stated rebuilding trust with our community is really important so that we are not in a situation where some folks question everything we do and every piece of data we put out.

Bennett suggested splitting the first bullet (“Improve external and internal communications systems and processes”) under “Community Partnerships and Engagement” because they are very different. Finding information on websites in Whatcom County is very difficult. He also spoke about workforce development within public health and that facilitating supportive and healthy work environments for public health employees is a huge deal.

Sterling Chick suggested explaining the “why” of the elements of the plan (such as why workforce development is important) before you get to the “what.”

Laura Todd posed the following question:

How can this Health Department Strategic Plan support your goals and priorities when you think about the work you do for our county and the service you provide?

Fraze stated she wants to stick up for staff who develop our websites. She spoke about workforce development and stated she would like to see the government trying to set an example of what a workforce should be. It would be important to get GARE throughout the county and implement Succession planning for future managers or leaders. She hopes it will be a whole-County strategic plan.

Shamika Brooks, PHAB, stated she is a clinician and likes the aspects about providing ongoing opportunities for training and education. She suggested that current workers may want to find a different job and that may be a great opportunity to find workers who would be willing to train and go into a different avenue.

Bennett stated that having these listening sessions and having this draft provides a really good framework for when they then begin tackling the

specifics. He appreciates the listing of the values and that service is listed as a value.

Laura Todd posed the following question:

What areas of the Strategic Plan and the priorities would you like more information about as we go along and/or what areas do you feel like you could support the Health Department in moving forward to collaborate with them?

Galloway remarked how multidisciplinary the Health Department is and stated she is interested in health impacts as it relates to climate change, pollution, water quality, waste management, food security, and healthy food systems.

Brooks stated that advocating for community partnerships and engagement would be her focus.

Edna Revey, PHAB, asked how this plan works for the public. She likes the format but as they try to make this very clear to the public, maybe switch up the boxes or color so you can differentiate what is for the internal Whatcom County organization versus what is specific for the community just so that you can see clearly who this is impacting and how it is working. It should show who this affects and how the community can see what is for them.

Bennett asked whether there is a way to move the “Community Partnerships and Engagement” box to be first. It aligns more with the values.

Revey suggested that the final draft has this one-page bullet point as the first page but a two-page explanation attached to it if you want to read more detailed information.

Fraze spoke about diversity in the workplace and policies to create supportive and adaptive work environments. There was a limitation with the GARE tools that only County workers could use it but not all boards and commissions.

Buchanan stated we are looking at how we can get all boards and commissions to have access to the GARE resources. There will be a meeting about it next week with the Administration to discuss that access issue.

Elenbaas said he would like to see the plan be broader and more focused on the basics that are more statistically relevant and affect more people such as

obesity and nutrition. If we address that kind of thing we are addressing everyone and not just certain groups.

Byrd said he agreed with Elenbaas and stated the Health Department has lost the trust of the community in many ways. He stated we did not handle COVID-19 super well and yet we are already looking at other issues coming to light that may impact our county. But we are not taking the time to assess and ask how we can do better. It seems like zero time and energy is being put into making what the Health Department is already doing better. He is not interested in expanding the Health Department's scope any more. If the Health Department wants to expand the scope it first needs to rebuild the trust of the Councilmembers and the community. Also, if it is not the Council's job to go out and double-check the performance of a project that is performing poorly, put into this plan how you are going to assess these things.

Lautenbach spoke about what aspects of the plan they agree on.

Fraze spoke about her earlier suggestion about eliminating and replacing programs where they are not working. Maybe we need action items that say when we have a service contract with someone new we will evaluate if they are meeting the service and will break down how we will eliminate the service provider or program if they are not.

Laura Todd thanked the participants.

Bennett thanked Lautenbach and the Health Department for the work they do and the opportunity to provide feedback. He looks forward to future joint meetings.

Buchanan thanked Laura for facilitating.

Meeting Evaluation

Each participant gave their evaluation of the meeting.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 11:32 a.m.

The County Council approved these minutes on August 9, 2022.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Dana Brown-Davis, Council Clerk

Todd Donovan, Health Board Chair

Kristi Felbinger, Minutes Transcription

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