

Whatcom County Business and Commerce Committee  
Minutes with Discussion Transcript  
January 24, 2022

**Voting Members Present:** Debbie Ahl, Ryan Allsop (Committee Vice Chair), Clark Campbell, Pete Dawson, Casey Diggs, Bob Pritchett, Sarah Rothenbuhler (Committee Chair)

**Voting Members Not Present:** Paul Burrill, Andrew Gamble, Troy Muljat

**Nonvoting members present:** Don Goldberg, Michael Jones, Eva Schulte, CJ Seitz,

**Nonvoting members not present:** Tyler Byrd, Seth Fleetwood

**Public present:** Ken Bell, Cara Buckingham, Kyle Christensen, Rob Fix, Mauri Ingram, Keith Johnson, Robert Lee, Derek Long, Jennifer Noveck, Guy Occhiogrosso, Satpal Sidhu, Gina Stark

**Call meeting to order**

Called to order at 11:00am

**Introductions / Comments from the Public**

No comments

**Administrative business**

Approve minutes from November 2021 meeting – approved unanimously

Open voting member positions: food processing & manufacturing

Nominations and election of a new Vice-Chair for 2022 – Approved Ryan Allsop unanimously

Approve 2022 draft schedule: 3rd Mondays 11-1230, unless a holiday – approved unanimously

**Don Goldberg:** It's 11:01 and we have a quorum.

**Clark Campbell:** Ok, well, I'm going to call the meeting to order and then I'm going to transfer the reins over to Sarah. This is my final meeting as chair of the Business Commerce Advisory Board, and Sarah will be taking over as of this meeting, so she will chair the meeting. I will open the meeting and with that, I will step back into the peanut gallery with the rest of you folks. Do we have a second? Ryan has a seconded, so I think we're open for business.

**Don Goldberg:** Ok, Sarah, I guess it's on you. We'll go to introductions and comments from the public. I think you have the agenda.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** I have the agenda here, and Clark, I thought this was your last meeting. However you want to do it. Thanks for all you've done.

**Clark Campbell:** I appreciate the support of everybody on the group, and I look forward to continuing on as the representative for the outdoor recreation sector. I think we have a productive agenda of things to talk about today and going forward.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** So, at this point, I'll open it up to comments from the public. Any comments? All right, moving on. We've got approval of the minutes from November 20, 2021. Does everyone approve?

**Clark Campbell:** I will second the motion to approve the minutes.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** All right, everybody approved?

**Jennifer Noveck:** Its unanimous.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Unanimous. Ok. Next topic is open voting member positions. We've got the food processing and the manufacturing sectors. We've got a few calls and messages out between Don and I, and some really good options out there. Does anyone want to throw any names out or just wait and see what develops over the next month?

**Don Goldberg:** The other thing I'd add, Sarah, is we just got an update from the county on when everybody's current positions expire. A lot of them will be expiring at the end of this year, so we have to look forward as well as to who will be staying on and if not, start to think about fulfilling a whole bunch of new positions. We all started almost at the same time.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** That's excellent. I was actually going to ask for that on our next conversation. Casey, did you have your hand up?

**Casey Diggs:** Thank you so much. Yeah, I was curious if we could get the county council to let the public know, because I know a lot of people watch the meetings. Maybe they could get it on their agenda to get it out there to the public. Our social circles and networks only go so far, but they have a lot more people's ears.

**Don Goldberg:** We can ask them at their Finance Committee meeting to bring it up when it's appropriate, so that everybody who's watching that will know.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** It might be a good idea to do a press release too.

**Don Goldberg:** Great idea.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** I've touched base with a few members, and I plan on just reaching out to each of our members and seeing if everybody that's currently on the committee is planning on staying on the committee or if anybody's having second thoughts or scheduling challenges. That's OK, too. We've got some good people on the committee, and we've got some good people in the wings willing and available.

Either way, I think we're in good hands, and it's going to be a good year. Anything else on that topic? So, we'll move on to the nomination/election of the new vice chair for 2022.

**Don Goldberg:** The vice chair, as Sarah was this past year, takes the chair position next year in 2023. So, it's to support Sarah and myself and then fill in when Sarah is not available and then be prepared to chair next year.

**Ryan Allsop:** That was not explained.

**Clark Campbell:** And just to clarify that one of the main roles of the chair outside of running the meeting is just working with Don and Jennifer and the vice chair on any subcommittees that we form and also on setting the agenda for this meeting. So what topics are either coming before the council that we want to have a conversation about and get more information on -- particularly if it's something that's relates to business that we feel we should be giving advice to the council on -- and then other things that are happening in the community that have an impact to business and commerce. In this last year, there's been a lot, right, so prioritizing what those are, finding who the speaker could be. They're really working with Don's team to get those folks and presentations lined up, so that we can have a productive meeting. It's not a ton of time, and it is very vital to the operating and running of this. Sarah's been a great support to me in this last period. And then if the chair is not able to be available for whatever reason, then the vice chair can run the meeting. It's not a huge time commitment, but it is important to running and operating this group in this meeting.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** I think I only ran one meeting last year where Clark couldn't make it, and I anticipate having very good attendance again this year. I don't see foresee any big challenges with that.

**Don Goldberg:** I guess every year we go through this like silent period now. Do you want to just ask the group?

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** I don't recall silence at all. I think I was nominated in a split second.

**Pete Dawson:** Following that theme, I'd like to nominate Mr. Ryan Allsop.

**Ryan Allsop:** I feel like I've been set up.

**Clark Campbell:** I will second that nomination.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Are there any other nominations?

**Pete Dawson:** Might be able to get a response out of Bob. Oh, I'll stick with Ryan.

**Don Goldberg:** So, I guess, Ryan, the first thing is whether you would accept the nomination.

**Ryan Allsop:** Yes. I'll, accept the nomination.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** That'd be great.

**Don Goldberg:** So, do you want to call for a vote Sarah?

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Let's vote on Mr. Ryan Allsop being the vice chair for the Whatcom County Business and Commerce Committee.

**Debbie Ahl and others:** Aye. In favor. Ok.

**Don Goldberg:** The vote is unanimous. Thanks, Ryan.

**Ryan Allsop:** I was made promises.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** That's awesome. Thanks, Ryan.

**Don Goldberg:** That's great. Thank you.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Our next topic is approval of the draft schedule to stick with the third Monday 11am to 12:30pm unless there is a holiday where we would move it like we did this month. Is there a motion to approve the 2022 draft schedule?

**Don Goldberg:** Clark seconds.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Ok. All in favor. (Aye, aye). The draft schedule is now the schedule. So, moving forward, we've got an update on flood damages. Is Kyle Christianson here?

**Update on flood damages and looking forward** - Whatcom County Long Term Recovery lead, Former Sumas Mayor Kyle Christensen, CJ Seitz (Business Recovery Taskforce lead)

**Don Goldberg:** Yeah. Kyle's here.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Thank you so much, Kyle, for being here.

**Kyle Christensen:** Yeah, absolutely. Glad to help. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Kyle Christensen. I am the recovery manager hired by Whatcom County out of the Sheriff's Office to oversee and be the county liaison for the flood recovery efforts that are happening. If you have heard of me, I was the former Mayor of Sumas. I've been very involved in the flood response, emergency response as well. For an update, I'm trying to attend as many meetings as possible to get an idea of what's going on throughout the county, and this is a great committee to learn from. The updates: We've had about 734 people as of Friday that have registered with FEMA for the individual assistance FEMA declaration. We

anticipate that will continue to go up. The two centers that are active right now are located at the Christ Fellowship Church in Everson at 1208 East Main. They're operating out of that location. They've got a portable trailer set up there where people can come down and register and then also check on the status of their claims. We anticipate them to be on the ground at that location through March 7th, and then we also have another location at the Sumas Christian Advent Church in Sumas right off of Front Street.

As far as the business side of things go, I sit on the Business Recovery Task Force with CJ Seitz from SBDC through Western Washington University. The concerns we're seeing from the business side right now is outside of the SBA loans, we're not seeing a lot of help for local businesses. I had a conversation with the county executive over the weekend about trying to figure out how we can get money to the local businesses that have flooded. I was just talking to a business yesterday in a meeting, and they're thinking about closing an espresso stand here in Sumas. So, I think my biggest concern right now that would be beneficial to this committee is what can we do to help the businesses that have been affected by the flooding? We have some ideas. There's possibly ARPA funding since we're still in the COVID era, and somehow being able to use that money. We're trying to navigate if that's a possibility or access other county funds to be able to assist the businesses. We're talking about, expenses that are not covered by insurance, and so a lot of these business owners are putting in personal money, because a lot of the damages are not covered by their insurance.

One more thing and then I'll stop talking and answer questions. One of the ideas I've floated to CJ for her team is whether there is a way to stimulate the businesses that have been affected by the flood by doing a similar program to what we've done in Whatcom County before where we buy gift cards at these local businesses that need help then give those to some of the flood victims throughout the county. It's one possibility to stimulate those businesses where it's not really direct money to them, but would help drive the economy, help their business, and then also help those who have been affected by the floods. We're throwing all kinds of ideas out there, and I'll leave it at that. I don't know exactly what's in your wheelhouse, but that's an update. I'm happy to answer any questions you guys might have. Thank you for having me.

**Kyle Christensen:** Absolutely. Yeah, I didn't go through the participants. CJ is a great source and she's actually leading that effort, so I would have deferred to CJ first. She's got it together. Go ahead, CJ

**CJ Seitz:** Good morning, everybody. I'm really excited to be here today to talk to this group and hopefully get some insights and recommendations that we might consider. We're really looking at what types of capital could be helpful at this point. On a high level, we have a business recovery task force that's been meeting. We put three separate reports out. We have the data getting collected and that's being headed up by Jen Noveck, who is on this call, and Mike Pullella from the county. We decided to use GIS, and we got Department of Revenue data and overlaid it with the flood area to find out who the impacted businesses are. What we can tell so far is there is about 535 businesses that would have the potential to have been impacted by the flood. So far, we've heard from 110 and then I heard another 15 came in, but we haven't got that information from Whatcom County. Jen, did you want to add anything about the high-level data before I move on.

**Jennifer Noveck:** There are a couple of things about the reported data. The vast majority of the cases that were reported or from Sumas -- I think it's thirty 35 cases out of the 110 -- that saw some of the largest damage in terms of actual impacts, primarily to inventory. We saw millions of dollars of inventory lost four feet of standing water inside of buildings. As you get a little bit further down the river, the water level starts to drop a bit in the businesses, at least what they're reporting. The data is a little bit inconsistent in terms of owners reporting and then tenants. We have some building owners, for example, in Bellingham that have reported just structural damage, but no damage for the tenants has been reported and then vice versa. Particularly in Sumas, we have a lot of tenants reporting, but not a lot of landlords. We do expect those numbers to go up, but again, some of the assumption about why people haven't reported is those might be businesses that have insurance and/or have just dealt with the situation on their own. We're still asking businesses to please report even if they do have insurance, because it helps us make the case both to the state and to federal authorities that we need some sort of short-term relief funding for businesses. The larger impacts help us tell that story. So, if you have had flood damage to your business and haven't reported, please do that. It doesn't obligate you to anything. You don't have to take out a loan or anything like that. This is literally just so we can make the case to the state to establish a short-term relief fund.

**CJ Seitz:** Thanks, Jenn. So, of those 110 reported damages is \$43million so far in damages. The Recovery Task Force has started to split up into two different sections. One of them is outreach. We want to be proactive and meeting with those businesses and hearing their stories, finding out where the gaps are, and that's being held by Ash Ryder from my office. She's here on temporary assignment for three months. There is a business recovery center that was put up by the SBA that's just for businesses. That is in Everson, and I want to say it's next to Holly's Meat P, right there on the main strip. We're having a business resource meeting to share all of new benefits that are available under the presidential declaration. That's on Thursday. We have the SBA, Employment Security Department, FEMA, and USDA, so encourage folks to come to that if they want to learn more about the products that are available.

The other area is the finance area. We're learning more and more about the gaps in the system. The whole emergency recovery system is predicated upon the idea that the state is going to come in and help before the feds come in. In our state, we have no funding for this. While there is some legislation, that hasn't been funded. So, you can imagine a business now -- what has it been eight, nine weeks that it's been affected -- they don't really have a ton of collateral to go ahead and get some short-term financing. That really is the gap. Even if they do qualify, there are no grants. This is going to be a long term, low interest funding from the SBA. So, you can imagine you don't have any customers, you have economic damage -- folks aren't super pumped to take on more debt at this point.

Of course, we've got working capital payroll, loss of inventory, economic injury. We have been working with Representative Alicia Rule's office. She's introduced House Bill 1975. Both Don and I are testifying on that today for a pilot program for Whatcom County. This is the largest natural disaster we've ever had, and the pilot program would help with that short term financing and setting up a fund. We also are

working with Mauri Ingram from the Whatcom Community Foundation to set up a private philanthropy fund that could assist these businesses. Before I turn it over for questions, I also wanted to say that some of the data that we've been looking at is just the business survival rates post disaster. According to the Institute for Business and Home Safety, at least 25% of all businesses close up after a disaster and never reopen, and 60% closed within two years. We also all know here that small businesses create two out of three of new private sector jobs and are critical for our economy.

**Ken Bell:** Moreover, when we're looking at these really rural communities and thinking about the places that people gather and the fabric and the character of a community, the likelihood of these businesses surviving isn't super great, right? So, in Sumas, there's not a lot of commerce happening right there. Some of the restaurants have opened to some capacity, but people aren't up there rebuilding yet. They're waiting out flood season, so we're super concerned about the fabric of these communities in particular. Additionally, we have COVID and the border closing. We have people that may have wanted to reopen, but because of supply chain, they can't get the equipment. This is a really sad state that's going on up there, so one of the things that we really were hoping to hear from this group here today is if you have any insights or recommendations specifically for this Private Philanthropy Fund as we go out and start asking people to donate. Do you have any ideas about different kinds of capital that we could be accessing? I'm going to turn it back over to you all if you have any questions. There's a lot of people here on the business task force. If there is anything I missed, please jump in. We're particularly interested in getting to hear from you all today. Thank you.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** CJ, thank you. We're a business that was affected and finally just did our last repairs last week for our Iowa Street facility. Looking forward, one of the challenges is that flood insurance is so expensive. We didn't have flood insurance, and we're probably about \$40,000 in damages, and we would have spent \$40,000 in flood insurance in two years. I think that's a huge challenge for most businesses. Looking forward, we're a community that has two months of a real flooding season give or take and then about a potential of two months of drought, give or take. And we're one of the few communities that really doesn't have reservoir systems. Who do we talk to? Kyle, I was hoping you would touch on that. What do we do to enhance our community, help with our housing issues, and help our business issues?

**Kyle Christensen:** You've asked a really good question. I don't have a direct answer. I think something that plays into this discussion is sustainability and resiliency for businesses that are they're rebuilding. I don't have a direct answer for you, but I do believe that part of the solution is going to be taking some flood prevention steps to where businesses even want to rebuild and retry. We're still in flood season for another month and a half, and before winter of next year if we don't make some changes that will affect flood prevention, then I think that's the bigger issue. There are so many factors that play in. We've just seen that this is a big hole. Right now, we have individual assistance for homeowners and renters, but again, businesses are kind of left out of the FEMA response right now. I don't know. CJ, do you have anything for that question?

**CJ Seitz:** About flood mitigation? Certainly not. That was left out of my MBA program, but I do know that we're hearing from businesses that are seeking to recover, but they might not want to rebuild in the affected areas. They might want to get their loans and move. Of course, that's hard for us to really hear. I do know those conversations are happening, and it's at the top of all of the public decision makers minds right now. But I certainly can't speak to it.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Who's driving that train, so to speak, for our county, and who should we learn from and give our two bits to on that?

**Don Goldberg:** The county exec is the person who runs that process. If Tyler Bird was here, I would say he would be that direct link, because he's our new liaison to the committee. I do know of one thing that's been discussed in terms of what you mentioned, Sarah, and that's in Lynden. Lynden has talked about underground storage. I don't know whether they're moving forward or what, but that has come up in a number of conversations over the years. It's a complex process and problem, that's for sure, and the signs are that it's not going to go away on its own.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** No. And perhaps there's some improvements to our community, and there are steps that we can take that will help a handful of issues. We've just got a few more minutes on this.

**Debbie Ahl:** Kyle and CJ, thank you for your overview. That was really helpful. There's a pragmatic sense that if an area continues to be flooded, is there another opportunity for business where they rebuild? But just on the thought of the losses, I just was introduced to a new concept in a stop loss type of re-insurance where it's almost like a subscription fee. It's not like the kind of cost that you generally find in a re-insurance. I'm just wondering about a city-county pooled fund. It's almost like a line of credit -- it's a smoothing to some degree of the costs. You have to continue your subscription for a minimum of five years after the first loss event. It just was a fascinating concept, and I wondered whether it would apply to something like this. It's in the health payor world

**Don Goldberg:** It's almost like a public insurance policy.

**Ryan Allsop:** I've heard of that in the construction industry recently.

**CJ Seitz:** I'd love to learn more about it. I do know the National Flood Insurance Program is in the red. It's super expensive and if a business does want to receive SBA loans, they will have to get hazard insurance right. And of course, it's extremely expensive. As we know some of these industries, the margins are so thin to begin with. It's a science and an art, right? So, I love to learn anything that you any information you have. Debbie, I'm all ears.

**Debbie Ahl:** I'll connect with CJ Thank you.

**Ryan Allsop:** I think on that note, the FEMA flood plane is going to change, right? I'm sure there's been talk of that. It has to change the hundred-year flood plain out there, which is the scariest part. We've spent

last two years talking about housing. It's one of the most affordable housing areas in Whatcom County, and we're going to lose a significant amount of land. Has anybody done an analysis on what that land reduction will be out there for housing and if we can do anything? Sarah brought up water storage. You saw Mt. Vernon was installing metal plates all the way down Main Street to protect areas. If we're losing any developable land out of this for housing, we should be having a really, really serious conversation about it as a group. We're desperate for housing as we know, and that is our cheapest land in the county in Sumas and the Nooksack-Everson area

**Don Goldberg:** It's worse than that, Ryan, and I know Ken Bell has his hand up. We've also lost hundreds of potential homes from this flood. So, it's not only the land, it's the actual residence that did exist that may not be able to be reconstructed.

**Ryan Allsop:** That's right.

**Ken Bell:** I just wanted to weigh in on a couple of things. The Whatcom Family Farmers would be a good group to invite to this next time out. They're advocating for water storage, and that kind of goes hand in hand with another bill that I'm tracking that's going to be devastating to the farming community. The House is taking up a bill right now -- I think it's HB1838 -- that would force 200-foot setbacks for riparian areas up in the county. It's estimated we're going to lose about 30,000 acres of farmland. That particular bill will not do anything to help the flooding. When you think about it, storage is really the only solution to both those problems. We've got instream flow problems in the summertime, and we've got a storage capacity to handle that. We can also relieve the flooding issues. So, I think it would be wonderful if the entire business community could come together with the Whatcom Family Farmers and discuss something rational for not only helping instream flow for the salmon, but also help the flooding. If you're interested in weighing in, 1838 is what the Whatcom Family Farmers are currently fighting. I think it's important that we weigh in. That's all.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Ken, maybe we can touch base with you, and you can help us with getting that on our agenda with the right speakers. That's really what I was asking earlier.

**Ken Bell:** Yeah, I'd love to.

**Don Goldberg:** I wish Brad Rader was here today, because he represents that area and probably could give us a lot of information.

**Ken Bell:** Quite frankly, Dylan Honcoop's been the one fighting the battle, so I would certainly put him on the list.

**Ryan Allsop:** Ok. And then you brought up the gift cards. That was something I thought was a good idea for retail and service. It's not great for the farmers and other people that were damaged out there, but I think that's an inexpensive way to facilitate something to help. It would be good to send the request out to the business group and send it out to the community down here. I think people want to help. They just

don't know how to help. The good part about that is I'd probably buy some through my business just to support it. Also, we donated some money as a part of our Christmas program just to a local charity up there. But I think most of it would just be written off, because I'm not going to drive to Sumas to buy a cup of coffee.

**Don Goldberg:** The problem, Ryan. What we found out with the Yiftee card is if you don't spend it, the money doesn't go to the retailer. It just sits in an account.

**Ryan Allsop:** Oh, that's great feedback. It needs to somehow be spent.

**CJ Seitz:** It doesn't have to be the Yiftee. We can just be promoting gift cards to these folks, and we could be gifting gift cards to flood survivors too. There are people that don't have kitchens that are hungry that would love prepared food, so I think there's a good synergy there between the businesses that need commerce and then also there's needs in the community. I love it, but I think you can bypass Yiftee. I concur.

**Kyle Christensen:** My idea on those gift cards is a little different. It's buying them directly from the businesses, and that way they're getting that boost right away. Then like CJ mentioned, regifting to people that need it in the area. I also wanted to follow up on the flood prevention. There are some other things being discussed, and I'm involved in those meetings as well. Things like removing gravel that's been exposed. We're talking about flood storage as a great option. Levees are an option, but those take time. It's just getting all the agencies to support that, that's still going on actively. We have meetings every week. It's just that it's a slow process to get everybody on board, because of all the agencies that have to sign off on it. So, there isn't really one solution. I think that there are multiple solutions out there, and it's going to take two or three different things to really have a significant impact to reduce the flooding. I just wanted to clarify and mention that those discussions are still happening. Thank you.

**Pete Dawson:** First Kyle and of CJ, thanks for your time. On a short-term solution, if the needs could be communicated to the county population, as Ryan was saying, I think a lot of people, including ourselves, will look to help. But how do we really benefit the community? If you could give the businesses specific needs for the public to respond to and somehow get that out in front of the public. On the longer term, clearly there needs to be some leadership in place, and I'm not sure if you could coach us or help us on who we could nudge or how we could help with following up on longer term solutions, be it storage or like Mount Vernon did with the kind of a temporary seawall. If you could let this group know how we could help with the longer term.

**Don Goldberg:** Yeah, that'd be great. I know we have to move on, but I want to do a big shout out to Mauri Ingram and Whatcom Community Foundation. The money that Mauri raised -- the last number I heard was \$2.5million that was privately raised -- went out right away. It's the only money that went out right away, and that came from businesses and individuals and areas around the country that had had floods themselves. So, Mauri's group really was the go-to group. It still is in many ways. I just want to thank her truly.

**CJ Seitz:** I just want to do one more shout out to Mauri's Group, too. There are several childcare facilities that had been affected, and they were on it right away. They were able to help those facilities. So truly, the Whatcom Community Foundation has been the biggest bright spot in the recovery. Thank you, Mauri.

**Don Goldberg:** So, Sarah, do you want to move on?

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Thank you, Mauri. That's just awesome, buddy. Well done. So, in summary, we will get with Tyler. We will get with Ken Bell. And we will get with Brad and see how we want to frame this up. Does that sound good to the committee? (Nods of agreement)

### **Update on Bellingham homeless camps and looking forward - Lt. Keith Johnson, BPD**

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Alright, so moving on. Lieutenant Johnson, thank you so much for being here. Could we follow on the same format where you give us an update on the homeless camps in Bellingham and then moving forward, what can we do better in our community? What can we do to help connect these people to help and keep our streets safe?

**Keith Johnson:** Sure. Thanks for having me first off. I'm a first timer of the meeting, so I thought I'd just give a quick intro. I went to Western in the 90s. I lived in Bellingham for 30 years. I've been with BPD for 23 years, and I'm currently the lieutenant of the outreach division. Part of my duties in the last month and a half have been to take over, on an interim basis, for a camp cleanup coordinator. We lost that person, so I'm kind of filling in on a very interim basis until we get somebody hired to take that over. So, I've learned a lot in the last couple of months. If I read the agenda right, I've got about 10 minutes to present and then have a question-and-answer period. I've got a few things that I thought I'd provide for you. First is just an update on what we're doing right now, and what resources are available for our homeless population. I'll also go over some of the challenges we face and then our plan, like you're saying, Sarah going forward. So, what's being done right now? I think the biggest thing that people may not be aware of is that the city last year contracted with a private cleanup crew to clean homeless camps. The scope of the problem, I think, is a lot bigger than most people realize, and I've certainly gotten a firsthand opportunity to see that over the last couple of months. Some of the camps along the Whatcom County corridor and some other more visible areas like the foot of Cornwall and down by the fish hatchery on C Street, are just kind of out of control.

It's staggering the amount of trash and other stuff that have popped up in those areas. So, we have this cleanup crew. For a while, they were cleaning up about once a week. We've bumped that up to three times per week recently, and we're starting to make some progress at once a week. We were just kind of treading water with three times a week, and we've pulled in our public works division as well to help out. They have some equipment and some economies of scale that help out on some of those larger sites. They have a mini excavator and things like that. Just to kind of give you a feel for the amount of trash and

stuff they're moving, the contracted crew pulled out 17,000 pounds their last work week, and I think Public Works said they took out 40 yards out of C and D Street. That can be anything from old mattresses to propane tanks to removing derelict vehicles. Lots of things getting accomplished, but still a lot of work to be done.

One thing that we implemented here in the last few months is to put together an interagency team between city departments. We pulled in the health department. There's somebody from the mayor's office. We have representatives from the cleanup crew and looking at efficiencies for that cleanup process, realizing that it's a problem of some magnitude. How are we going to best address that with the resources that we have just from the cleanup perspective? And that's been effective. We've been able to identify some ways to do that better. One thing that came out of that is we're going to be starting up something called the Purple Bag program, which we stole from Olympia and Tacoma. We ordered a bunch of purple bags, and the idea is that only trash goes in those -- no needles, no biohazard material. That will give the people living in the camps and citizens that feel the need to help out an avenue to help with those cleanups, particularly the campers. If we can get them to put their trash in those bags and maybe put those out at trailheads or on the sidewalk, we're willing to come pick those up on a weekly basis and help alleviate the trash portion of the problem.

Another thing that we've been doing that's resumed in the last month or so is the tagging and towing of derelict motor homes and vehicles. That's something that's very visible. They move around, but there tend to be three or four areas in town that they really congregate. I mentioned the foot of Cornwall and up by Civic Field has been an off again on-again issue. Lieutenant Murphy is running the RV side of things, and over the past month we've towed, or we've tagged 90 derelict vehicles. With the tagging process, there are statutory requirements for time that we have to give them before we tow those rigs. It depends on whether that vehicle is an abandoned vehicle or whether it can qualify as a Hulk vehicle. If it's a Hulk vehicle, the time frames are different, and rather than taking them to a tow yard, we'll just take those right to the scrapper and have them destroyed. So, we pulled six of those RVs out last week -- a couple on Cornwall and some by Civic. That's kind of a new thing. That was something that was suspended for a long time, but we're back doing that again. We're hoping that's going to have an impact.

It is a multi-pronged approach. From the police department's perspective, a lot of it is coordinating the cleanup effort, but we recognize that the long-term goal is to get people off the street and get them into better living situations. So, I hear sometimes that the city isn't doing anything to help the homeless and get them out of the situations that they're in, and I don't buy that. I mean, I look at the city website and I direct people to the city website and say the city is doing a ton. I realize there's work to be done, but there's all sorts of programs to help with temporary housing and addiction and mental health disorders to try to get people pointed in the right direction.

The city and county partner on temporary cold weather shelters. We've got three tiny home villages up and operating now in the city, and the county helped out with that as well. Those have been very effective. I'll admit that I think a lot of people at the police department at least were a little skeptical at first that those were going to cause a lot of problems, and they really haven't. We've seen a lot of people that

are chronic issues for us, and they have gotten housing and they've kind of dropped off our radar. Those have been effective.

Some of the challenges that we've faced over the last couple of years, I think, are starting to recede a little bit. Covid, hopefully we're moving out of that, but that was a real issue for us as far as if we were going to displace someone from a camp, was that the best idea? Did we want to put them into a base camp or somewhere where a lot of people were living together and potentially spread that disease by doing that? There's a lot of uncertainty around that. Hopefully we're getting past that. There are a lot of talk about the Homestead Act at one point and whether people could be removed from illegal camps. I think we're getting some clarification on that and what we can and can't do. We work closely with Base Camp to see what kind of availability they have, because that can be a determining factor on how we proceed. So, I feel like we have our feet under us on that.

There are still a lot of challenges that remain. The first is staffing at the police department. We really don't have anybody left to address problems like this. All of our resources have been consolidated into our patrol division, which is basically responding to 911 calls in our investigation division, which is our detectives that follow up on major crimes. We just don't have the people that are able to work on ongoing issues and provide security for the camp cleanups and things like that. The question has come up -- is this really a role for the police anyway? Is that something that we want our police to be focusing on versus maybe another city entity? So, there are some conversations happening around that.

Another thing that affects us in a big way is jail booking restrictions. The jail has had had issues with that with COVID and in some other challenges, so for the most part, we don't really book misdemeanor offenders into jail, which is honestly most of what we're dealing with when we're talking about people living in camps and in RVs and things like that. As the police, we have a couple of options to address that from an enforcement perspective. A lot of times there are infractions being committed, whether we're talking about parking violations or camping in areas that you're not allowed to be in. But really, what we found is the effectiveness of issuing those campers infractions, which are non-criminal citations or sighting them for misdemeanors is not a deterrent for what they're doing. People realize that after going a few rounds. They realize that the powers of the police to address what they're doing are not a deterrent. They recognize that and start acting accordingly, unfortunately. One thing I always want to emphasize is that in our in our homeless population, a large percentage of them are people that have found themselves through unfortunate circumstances being homeless. There's also an element of that population, a percentage, that is what we call our criminal transient population. I would say it's less than five percent, but it's the people that that we deal with over and over again.

So, the challenge is finding an effective way to address that problem. Another thing that we've run into is a purely logistical challenge for cleaning out camps and RVs. The police department is mandated by accreditation standards. One thing we found is that the property retention part of that is difficult. If we do move someone from a camp or from an occupied RV, we are responsible for all their items of value, and sometimes it's difficult to determine what exactly those are versus what's garbage. For us, storing that stuff along with all the requirements is a challenge. Another thing we have is access to tents and RVs.

Basically, those have been found by the courts to be residences, so it's not like we can open a tent up and tell somebody they need to get out. If we want to do that, we will need to get a search warrant, and we've got to weigh that on a case-by-case basis on whether that's worth doing. Finally, the availability and willingness in the RV realm of the tow companies to come grab some of these rigs, which are often stuffed with all sorts of unpleasant things inside -- whether they're willing to come out and get those. We've been working on that.

**Keith Johnson:** Can you hear me again? I was just thinking, I forgot to mention it at the beginning, I love the fact that Bellingham is such a small community. I looked at the list of people in this meeting and realized that I know several of you from various activities. It's kind of neat to come into something like this and have those prior connections.

Moving on from the challenges which can be discouraging at times, our goal is to be compassionate to our homeless population and help, but we also want our citizens to feel safe. We don't want our taxpaying citizens and people that are trying to enjoy our parks and downtown to have to deal with trash and drug use and abandoned cars and not feel safe walking through areas. So, we're trying to find the right balance for that. The plan going forward is we are going to continue the cleanups with the city contracted crew and our public works division. In the last four to six weeks, we're making some progress with that. If you look at some of the historically bad areas, a lot of those are looking for good right now. It's not to say that people won't come back, but I think our aim is to stay on top of those, so we don't get that kind of sprawl that starts when you let those camps get established.

I talked about finding some efficiencies between the various groups that are helping with the cleanups. I think we've done that. We want to keep campers in encampments and the RVs from getting established to prevent those large camps that quickly get out of control, and you start having criminal activity. A great example of that was the camp that set up down around City Hall. It got too big and too wild, and it was a danger. We want to prevent that from happening. We want to continue to connect homeless individuals with services and ultimately get them off the street. That's the best for our community and that's the best for those individuals. We do want to take enforcement action when necessary. One of the things we've been looking at with the jail restrictions is if we have someone that is just not getting with the program, we do have an option to transport them down to another facility. Unfortunately, it's in Pierce County so that takes some resources to take somebody down there, send a couple of officers down for half a shift. We're going to implement that purple bag program. Like everything else, there was a delay in getting the materials, but we just got those bags in. You'll start seeing those around the city here and realize that's a joint effort between campers, citizens, and city departments to get as much trash off the street and out of the parks and right away as we can.

We are going to hire a new camp cleanup coordinator to direct efforts and continue what we're doing. The last thing is the city has looked at the downtown corridor, because we've had lots of lots of issues downtown. We've always had, but it seems like recently things are getting worse, particularly in certain aspects. So, we're looking at a downtown ambassador program, which I don't know if people are familiar with, but that's going to be a presence downtown and also some private security down there. I wish I

could tell you as we get into that question-and-answer period that we're going to solve this problem. I don't know if that's realistic. I'm looking at it right now as a management and mitigation effort. Maybe we will get there, but it's a difficult, complicated problem, something that's being experienced by a lot of cities, and I feel like if someone had come up with the perfect solution, everyone would be copying them. That's not necessarily what people want to hear, but I'm trying to be realistic about it. I think a lot of progress is being made, and I think we can continue that. I think that's all I had, and I'm open to any questions that you might have.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Thanks, Keith. That was a great overview. Questions?

**Debbie Ahl:** Do you have any idea of who is actually living in the RVs and that down on Cornwall? Are they individuals or are they families? Are there any children there and just any thoughts about are they more recently homeless or long term?

**Keith Johnson:** They're long term, and I can say in the time that I've been working on bikes and doing the camp cleanups, I haven't run into any kids that have been living in the campers and the tents. That's not to say that's not happening, but the people we're seeing that are living in those campers are mostly part of that transient population that has been offered services and is not interested. They kind of want to do their own thing, and what that looks like is living in camps and living on the street.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** What percentage of the campers are battling with drug addiction?

**Keith Johnson:** If I was going to throw out a rough number, I would say 90 percent. It's a lot. A lot of what's going on is fueled by drug addiction.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Really, they could be called drug addiction camps versus homeless camps, because there are resources available.

**Casey Diggs:** KJ, thanks for being here. I'm just curious with the private security, I couldn't track down the actual routes they're going to be at downtown. Is it every alley that's going to be or are they just going to focus on the Parkade and the sidewalks at the foot of Cornwall?

**Keith Johnson:** Their focus is going to be on city property, parks, and rights of way. I don't think they'll be patrolling on a set pattern, and I think there will be overlap. That's going to be their focus.

**Casey Diggs:** Ok. And one more. I've been trying to get the mayor and the chief to get the bike beat back downtown. Just reading the Herald article last week, I think we have 15 officer0 we need to get hired. Do you know how many applications are in right now?

**Keith Johnson:** That's another topic. It's hard to find qualified applicants for law enforcement now. When you do get qualified applicants, the agencies are fighting for them, which is a huge change from where it was 10 or 15 years ago. We have hired a bunch of good folks here in the last six months to a year. We

run into a delay because it's hard to get them into the academy right now. There's a several month delay for that and then training when they are at the academy and when they get back. Basically, we're a year out from when we hire people to when we can put them on the street. We're hiring as frantically as we can and trying to get people in, but you know, I don't know what that looks like over the next three to five years.

I agree with you, Casey. The bike patrol downtown is very effective. It's a huge deterrent just having people cruising through there on a regular basis. I was a bike officer for three years myself. I've seen seeing the benefits of that, so I agree with you. When we are in a position to bring some specialty units back, I would anticipate that would be near the front.

**Casey Diggs:** Thanks. Yeah. And then the bike cops having relationships with the private security, so it could just be like, 'hey, so and so the frequent flier is down at The Granary. Can you get down there?' That type of communication and coordination would be great. It takes all of us, in my opinion, to figure this out.

**Pete Dawson:** Hey, Keith, first, thanks for all that you guys are doing there. It's a really tough, complex situation, and I appreciate your working so hard at it and the compassion we hear in trying to find a solution. Hats off to you guys. My question is, has there been any thought or work on an alternative place to camp -- something between in the woods and base camp where folks get in a controlled setting to park their RVs or pitch their tents. As my sister might mention, I've lived in a bus over the years, and I lived in a tent city in a different situation completely. But in Alaska, we've seen where there are these temporary controlled places where there are sanitary services for cleaning, cooking, that type of thing. Any work in that direction?

**Keith Johnson:** That's a good question, because we get asked all the time when we're asking people to leave certain locations, where can we go? Where can we go to park my RV or where can I set up a tent? I will tell you that the mayor is opposed to the idea of having a general site like that. There are a lot of challenges with it, one of one of which is who's going to run it. Seattle tried something like that recently and had all sorts of problems and basically terminated that program. What we've found is that the more people you get living together, the greater potential for problems and losing control.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Drug use might have been less prevalent on your bus, Pete.

**Don Goldberg:** More or less? (laughing)

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** I was in 12 states last year, and there was nothing like this. It's so sad, because it seems that, like you said, this transient population has come west and we are enabling tough, really sad addiction. You only see it on the West Coast like this. I think you probably went over this in the last meeting, but how come they're able to park on the streets where we would park on those streets and get towed? Is it because they're saying that their vehicle is their home? Is that the crux of it?

**Keith Johnson:** That's a lot of it.

**Clark Campbell:** First off, I want to thank you for your service and the work the police department does. I know between both the police department and the fire department -- police handling the enforcement issues and the fire department being the front lines for medical and mental health issues. Most fire department workers and probably most police department workers probably didn't think that that's what they were signing on to, and that's what's right now, given the resources and the structure we have seems to be where it's going. You made a point, I thought, that was quite appropriate, wondering is this really the function of the police department? My question is, has there been discussion in a meaningful way with the city or the county in looking at a different model? I know that that Eugene, Oregon, has had good success. Obviously, there's a mixture between mental health issues and drug addiction and the interface between those two and homelessness. What Eugene has done is said we're going to create a completely different group that is regularly on the beat that's doing outreach and connecting these people to services, and then when they need police support, they're connected. They have a good relationship. They have radios, but their primary job is not to be a police officer that requires resources. It requires a different mindset, but it seems like this problem is not going to go away. We've got to look at a different structure, particularly in our city. The only other model I've seen out there that seems to be working is the one that's happening in Eugene, Oregon. Has that been discussed at all?

**Keith Johnson:** I think the one you're referring to from Eugene is the CAHOOTS (Crisis Assistance Helping Out on The Streets) program, which is exactly what you're talking about. There are some other ones as well. We have things in place already, and there are some things that are in the works. Currently, we have our GRACE team. We have some other deferral programs, like LEAD program. We have a mobile crisis outreach team. Those are all in place and focus more on the Community Paramedic program. We had our behavioral health officer, and those are all in place to get a little bit more at the root of the problem than a quick police response and fixing the immediate issue and then moving on. Those have been effective. The other thing that we're working on right now, that's a countywide effort being led by the health department is the alternative response team. It's basically an unarmed response to people that are having behavioral health crises, which could include drug issues and things like that. As far as timing for that, I'm on that committee and I would say it's probably at least a year from becoming operational. There's a lot, a lot of progress being made, and who knows, maybe we'll get it up and running before then. But there's just a lot of logistics and hiring and getting qualified people. There's certainly a movement towards that, and I think that's what the community wants and that will allow the police to focus on criminal behaviors.

**Clark Campbell:** Are there funding challenges around that or getting jurisdictionally between departments which part is going to be police, fire, and health?

**Keith Johnson:** The jurisdictional thing is being worked out. I don't know a whole lot about the funding, but my understanding is that there is money available and that's even partly been the driver to get these programs off the ground. I think funding is in place. We just need to figure out exactly how it's going to run and who's going to do what.

**Ryan Allsop:** I consider this a kind of the field of dreams. If you build it, they will come, and so the whole West Coast has kind of worked under that philosophy for the last 20 years, which is why we're in that situation. We need to take care of them now because they're here. It's become our problem. But how do we stop it from the inflow of that five percent, 10 percent that you're talking about of the drug addicted transients? What do we have to do as a deterrent, so they stop coming? We've spent a lot of time talking about the solution for people that are here, but I'm equally concerned about the people that are coming. There's just an open door for them to come.

**Keith Johnson:** That's absolutely an issue. We do provide, particularly in Bellingham, relative to some of the other cities along the I-5 corridor, we do provide very good services and that's something that we've seen is people come up here for those services or for the housing. The other thing we have in Bellingham is we get a lot of turn backs from the border that can't get across and end up here. And so, I think that the solution to that is as we're looking at our housing pool of applicants, getting real clear guidelines for what qualifies as a Whatcom County resident and giving those people priority. Unfortunately, that's outside the purview of the police department as far as determining how that's going to work. I absolutely agree that's an issue and you get varying responses depending on who you ask whether that's actually happening. But I've seen it.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** CJ, did you post some questions that you wanted to ask, Keith?

**CJ Seitz:** Well, there are some new programs that I believe that the City of Bellingham is funding for downtown. I'm texting the Tara Sundin right now because my memory is vague. I believe there's some new security happening. There's more funding going to the hot team, and I swear there's something else. I bet Keith knows more than I do.

**Keith Johnson:** I'm guessing the other one you're thinking of is the alternative response team, because that's really kind of getting in the initial phases of getting spun up. The hot team is something we haven't really talked about. They're out in the camps connecting with people on a daily basis and trying to figure out based on their individual circumstances, the best path for them going forward. They just increase the funding. I think they're going to hire a couple more positions.

**CJ Seitz:** And Tara said she's going to follow up with this team about the solutions that they're working on in more detail. I recall, there was a significant investment being made.

**Keith Johnson:** Yeah, there's a lot of irons in the fire, and a lot of funding being pushed towards the program. When I look at problems facing Bellingham, I put that near the top, and it's something that we do need to address and be effective on.

**Don Goldberg:** Mayor Seth is of this committee and hasn't been coming for a while, so I'll follow up with see if either he or Bryan will start attending the meeting again.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** That'd be great.

**Clark Campbell:** I was just in Salt Lake City over the weekend. My daughter is actually going to be taking a job next week with the 4th Street Clinic offering health care outreach services to the homeless and getting them access. Salt Lake City, like all big cities, has this problem, but it seems like they are addressing them between their ambassador program for the downtown area, being pretty aggressive with keeping those areas clean and then connecting between nonprofit groups that have funding and the police. One of the challenges I've heard directly from my daughter, who is going to be working in this area, is that there's just always going to be a fundamental fear and distrust of people who are in that place and the police department no matter how good the police department works in that area. So, getting this intermediary group where they're having regular contact and then trying to segment the ones that need health, mental health, or other assistance from the five percent that you talk about is challenges that every city is dealing with. The bigger cities are starting to look at that and go what is the core role of the police? What's the role of the fire department? There's a new thing that needs to happen here with a little bit of enforcement without the incentives that I think Ryan was talking about and getting them placed into services.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Correct me if I'm wrong, but I think Keith said if he had to estimate, 90 percent of the campers are battling drug addiction, not five.

**Clark Campbell:** And he said the criminal element of that, the criminal element. So, there's a whole lot of layers of issues here in a population that's not monolithic, but that's one of the big challenges is getting them to trust so that you can get them help to get them moved on, right?

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** There's the issue with addiction. We have some family members that have just had really tough addiction battles, and the last thing that they were ever going to do was get help. The last thing. And it's a compounding issue. It gets worse and there's a huge deterioration that happens with judgment and how you're spending your time and what you're doing to get your next hits. It doesn't stay peaceful. And if our family members hadn't ended up in jail, they'd be dead right now. It's the only thing that sobered them up enough to consider rehab and really they only went because it was a way to get out of jail and they had no other place to go. They still hate the police. They still complain about them and think they're horrible people, but we were so grateful for the police. This was in another state and they were doing well checks, letting us know they were still alive trying to help through the whole process. It's the only reason they're alive, so thank you, Keith, for all you're all doing.

**Clark Campbell:** Yeah. Tough job.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** We are right at the point where we've got 10 minutes left of the meeting. Are we at a good wrap up point?

## **Update on Safran and Alcoa - Port of Bellingham's Economic Development Director, Don Goldberg**

**Don Goldberg:** I wanted to give a quick update on something that's super important to the area. We talk about housing all the time and costs of living here, but part of my job is also to try to find jobs that pay more so that we can get it from the other side. The two largest lost employers were Safran with almost 300 jobs and Alcoa with seven hundred, so approximately a thousand good paying jobs in the last two years. Safran, for those of you who do not know, was purchased by Janicki Corp. That is really exciting for us because Janicki is a quality company, local, and they pay well and are in future technologies. They have purchased the Safran building. We're waiting to find out exactly what it's going to be used for, and I'm very involved with a company called Blue Wolf, who is in the process of trying to re-open the Alcoa building. They would hire all 700 people and spend about \$150million to renovate and update the plant into one of two green Alcoa aluminum smelters. That process is very political right now. The company wants to do it. There are issues with BPA and their power contract and final negotiations between them and Alcoa. It looks very good, and they're very serious, real buyers. We're hoping to know in the next two or three months whether the Alcoa facility will reopen, so I just wanted to give everybody an update. That could be as much as 1,000 new jobs between those two companies.

**Ryan Allsop:** Great.

## **Update on ARPA spending - Whatcom County Executive, Satpal Sidhu**

**Don Goldberg:** I know we have, Sarah, a little spot for Tyler, who's not here, but Executive Sidhu is with us. Did you want any update from Satpal Sidhu by any chance?

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Yeah, if he's prepared to give an update, that would be wonderful.

**Satpal Sidhu:** Hi, good afternoon, everybody. I don't know what questions you have. I can talk for a long time. We have very limited time, so I rather answer any questions anybody has.

**Don Goldberg:** There was a question earlier, Satpal, about water storage. We were discussing as to what are we going to do as we have too much water part of the year and not enough for part of the year. Does the county have any plans for addressing that?

**Satpal Sidhu:** Yes and no. We do have a committee formed and we are considering this thing. This involves a lot more. The federal and state drives the process as well as the local government than all the people involved to come up with a plan for storage. We have only 25 miles of river. We are not like in the middle of the state that we have 70 miles of river have a lot of opportunities. Why I say 25 miles -- up to Deming, water is tumbling down and going into the ocean. It takes less than four hours from when the rain falls for that drop of water to get to our ocean and become salt water. If we try to do reservoirs in the upper part of the river, how would we mitigate all the rain because that takes care of only snowmelt. So, this is a little complex problem, not that we are not studying, but I think there are good possibilities. We

have talked about one time to flood all the gravel pits in our county and have a pumping system and then pump the water out, pump the water in. I don't think it is enough of a reservoir of capacity to do that. Lynden got \$5million, which the county is supporting them for an aquifer recharge. This is a technology where you can take extra water during winter and artificially charge the groundwater aquifer and then dry it out in summer. So that is hopefully in 2022 that experimental well will be established and we'll start that experiment. The Department of Ecology is giving the grant, and we are trying to provide them with suitable land and an ability to draw the water from the South Fork. So, this in the works. So that's my short answer.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Thank you. I think Clark had a question.

**Clark Campbell:** Yeah, separate, but related. Thanks for the summary. On that ARPA funding any further updates on that in terms of I know these things have timelines of when they need to be actioned. You had your priorities, but if we moved anything to actually seeing funds flow and being implemented yet.

**Satpal Sidhu:** The only place we have spent the money is in health related and the pandemic related. Another thing we have done is we put about \$1.6million into our court system. That was already approved, and we have hired attorneys. We've rented an extra building to house those attorneys on the prosecutor side and on the public defender side, and we are in the process of getting an extra judge to move that. Of course, the Delta came and now the Omicron came, and we have actually rented the place and people are working from home and all the duty trials have been postponed. So, we were hoping that this system would be working in November with actual backlog cases being worked through, but now we have another three-month delay. It seems like end of February; the court will resume but we are working. So that's the only thing that we actually spent the money. The other money has been allocated. We do not want to rush it, because the money can be committed until December 31, 2024, and can be spent before December 31, 2026. So, this is not money that we instantly have to spend. Of course, we have made these allocations.

If you remember, we did talk to this committee that we made for childcare and affordable housing. All those so-called buckets have been already allocated, but money has not been spent. It will be spent with the permission from the council. So, the next coming up immediately this year is the infrastructure projects from Ferndale, City of Blaine and in Columbia Valley. Those are the three projects where they have sewer projects, which we have ongoing negotiations with these governments to allocate the money to them from ARPA. We have also invested money in our Forest Street affordable housing project and for a childcare facility, \$1 million from ARPA. We are going to invest in two more childcare projects in this year.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** To my understanding, that's been studied throughout 2021. We've got this big empty mall in Bellingham. Has there been any thoughts on also utilizing that for care?

**Satpal Sidhu:** The mall is a very attractive thing, but is the mall willing to work with us or they are in a position that they want to sell it? The mall would be useful if we can get the whole thing -- the city and

county -- and do that planning. Of course, this mall is not going out of business. They have not indicated anything that they would be willing to get into even talks.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** What about a 30-year lease? It would be probably so much more cost effective, especially if there are things going into place. Wouldn't a 30-year lease be something to consider?

**Satpal Sidhu:** Sarah, it's not available yet.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** The funding or the or talking to the mall?

**Satpal Sidhu:** GGP, or whatever their new owners are. They're not interested.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Oh, interesting.

**Don Goldberg:** What we find is some of the big retailers like giant anchor tenants that have gone out of business is where some of the locations that some of these new schools are going into and things like that.

Before we closed off Sarah, I got a note just now from Tara Sundin at the city, and the five programs that downtown is doing is Private Security, Homeless Outreach, which is the Hot Tea Ambassador Program, Centralized Dispatch and Training, and Alternative Response Team. There's a little explanation for each, so we'll forward this out to the whole team on this email.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** That would be great. We are right at the two minutes left of our meeting. Does anyone else have anything that they'd like to add? Did I see a hand up, Casey?

**Casey Diggs:** Yeah, I just wanted to bring up the Bellingham City Council might be voting to raise parking rates and change in the time downtown tonight. I think they're trying to change the time from Monday to Saturday, 11a.m. to seven p.m. and parking tickets will be \$41. The Public Works meeting was happening right now, so I wasn't able to watch that, but I had a coworker watching it, texting me what was going to happen. If you don't want \$41 parking tickets, maybe call your City Council member this evening.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** That's going to make it even harder for the downtown businesses.

**Casey Diggs:** I tell people my job is actually parking and garbage, not really a brewer.

**Don Goldberg:** Or parking garbage.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** You're an amazing business downtown and add a really nice tone . It's had to have been a real struggle so thank you.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** So, everybody, thank you so much. Thank you to all of our speakers. You were amazing and we appreciate your time. I'll be reaching out to all the members. I didn't anticipate leading this meeting, so sorry if it was a little bit clunky, but a special thank you to Clark. We've got a game plan for ongoing agenda items and really want to get all of your input. With that, I'll make a motion to end the meeting, the January 2022 meeting.

**Clark Campbell:** I'll second that motion. And Sarah, sorry for throwing you off the deep end, but I knew you could handle it. Figured a nice clean transition as of January was going to be the best way to do that. So. Well done. Thank you.

**Close**

**Next meeting:** Monday, February 28, 2022, 11am (note: February 21 is a holiday)

*Potential Future Meeting Topics:*

- Future of flood mitigation in Whatcom County
- *Impact of COB Initiatives #2 and #3 passing*
- Status of American Rescue Plan relief dollars in Whatcom County
- *Water Rights in Whatcom County – Presentation from PUD, update from Brad Rader*
- Cherry Point Master Planning / Infrastructure
- *Status of Permanent Affordability of Child Care in Whatcom County*
- *Status of Affordable Housing in Whatcom County, items related to annexations, Buildable Lands, EDI program, COB Planning Director search, Worker Housing in Whatcom County – Updates from POB Economic Development*
- *Presentation on Bellis Fair Mall Repurpose/Redevelopment*
- *Updates on County financials and budgets, economic resiliency of the County*
- *Port industrial and commercial land report – what is occupied, what is vacant, who is there?*
- *All Sectors: Near term business impacts of the on-going labor shortage (brief update from sectors with +40 employees)*