

Whatcom County Business and Commerce Committee  
Meeting Notes  
July 18, 2022

**Voting Members Present:** Ryan Allsop (Committee Vice Chair), Paul Burrill, Clark Campbell, Andrew Gamble, Troy Muljat, Bob Pritchett, Sarah Rothenbuhler (Committee Chair), Chris Trout

**Voting Members Not Present:** Debbie Ahl, Pete Dawson, Casey Diggs, Brad Rader, Dana Wilson

**Nonvoting Members Present:** Tyler Byrd, Don Goldberg, Eva Schulte, CJ Seitz

**Nonvoting Members not Present:** Bellingham Mayor Seth Fleetwood, Whatcom County Executive Satpal Sidhu

**Public Present:** Port of Bellingham Commissioner Ken Bell, Steve Bennett, Pam Brady, Cara Buckingham, Lance Calloway, Cary Clemenson, Liz Coogan, Ray Deck, Dan Dunne, Jessie Everson, Dean Fearing, Rob Fix, Executive Director - Port of Bellingham, Heather Flaherty – Chuckanut Health Foundation, Kaylee Galloway - Whatcom County Council, Mike Hogan, Jon Howe, Frank Imhoff, Pamela Jons, Erika Lautenbach, Robb Lee, Blake Lyon, Jennifer Noveck, Guy Occhiogrosso – Bellingham Regional Chamber of Commerce, Emily O'Connor, Heather Powell - Boys & Girls Club / Kids World, Gina Stark, Sandy Ward

**Introductions / Administrative Business / Comments welcome from the Public**

Committee Chair calls meeting to order

Committee Members introduce themselves

Approve June 2022 minutes

Invite public to participate along with Committee members during Q&A sessions

**Whatcom County Childcare**

- Review draft by Childcare sub-committee to County Council re: Healthy Children's Fund (20 min)
  - <https://whatcom.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=10979584&GUID=D6372E9F-E623-430D-9C30-929E84A22737>
  - Presented by Childcare sub-committee: Debbie Ahl, Clark Campbell, Heather Flaherty (Chuckanut Health Foundation),
  - Guy Occhiogrosso (Bellingham Regional Chamber of Commerce), Heather Powell (Boys & Girls Club), Sarah Rothenbuhler
  - Heather Flaherty to lead group charged with implementation and planning
  
- Review draft by Childcare sub-committee to County Council re: ARPA guideline recommendations
  - <https://cob.org/wp-content/uploads/Whatcom-County-Executive-Memo-re-ARPA-funding-framework-and-uses.pdf>
  - Presented by Childcare sub-committee: Debbie Ahl, Clark Campbell, Heather Flaherty (Chuckanut Health Foundation),
  - Guy Occhiogrosso (Bellingham Regional Chamber of Commerce), Heather Powell (Boys & Girls Club), Sarah Rothenbuhler

**Whatcom County Health Department**

- Overview by Director, Erika Lautenbach
- Invite WCBCC member collaboration with Public Health Advisory Board (PHAB)
- Q&A Discussion

**Briefing on WCBCC sub-committees**

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Hello Everybody. Thank you for coming to the Whatcom County Business and Commerce Committee meeting. We will start by having committee members introduce themselves. I'm Sarah Rothenbuhler, Owner of Birch Equipment and committee chair.

**Ryan Allsop:** For two years? I heard that it was for two years.-Laughter- Ryan Allsop, vice chair. Just riding on her coattails. -laughter-

**Paul Burrill:** Paull Burrill, food processing.

**Clark Campbell:** Clark Campbell. Outdoor recreation.

**Don Goldberg:** Don Goldberg, Director, Economic Development of the Port.

**Andrew Gamble:** Andrew Gamble, Energy.

**Eva Schulte:** Eva Schulte, Higher education. Whatcom Community College.

**Rob Fix, Executive Director Port of Bellingham:** Rob Fix, Port of Bellingham.

**Chris Trout:** Chris Trout with Wood Stone. Manufacturing.

**Troy Muljat:** Troy Muljat, Muljat Group. General Business.

**Jennifer Noveck:** I think that's it for committee members.

**Ryan Allsop:** All right. That was eight or nine.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Let's move on to the June meeting minutes. If everyone's had a chance to review. I did notice we had Brad Rader attending and also not attending. So, can we correct that to make sure he was noted as attending.

**Jennifer Noveck:** And then there was just one quick correction from Andrew as well. Yes. With those changes.

**Ryan Allsop:** I approve.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Thanks Ryan. June meeting minutes are approved. Just a quick reminder that the primary topic of this meeting is childcare, and we'll be reviewing proposal letters. This isn't just for committee members to discuss. Please, everyone in attendance. If you have something to contribute, we'd love to hear. With that, we can move right into the first letter.

**Ryan Allsop:** Clark, do you want to set that up?

**Clark Campbell:** Yes. I can set it up. A group we had formed for this was me, Clark Campbell, President of Gear Aid. Guy Occhiogrosso from the Chamber of Commerce was on that group. Debbie Ahl, Heather Powell, Heather Flaherty, and Sarah Rothenbuhler. Ryan's also on it, but he was out of town which made the meeting go quicker. -laughter

We had two issues. One is a ballot measure that was voted on by the county council back in June. The main point from Heather Flaherty from Chuckanut Health was to bring forward a letter from this group commending the county council for approving that ballot measure for a vote in the upcoming election. It outlines what that ballot measure would entail. There is another group that's forming that's going to be

putting more detail together on how that funding would come together or how the money would be allocated and spent. The measure, if approved, essentially lifts the ceiling on property tax for funds earmarked specifically for childcare.

There's no real 'to do' with council on this other than for the Business and Commerce Committee to review the details of that letter and then hold a vote on whether to send a letter to the council endorsing their decision to put a childcare tax on the ballot. Or if there's a difference of opinion, I think it's good for the Council to see what that looks like. My sense is good work was done on that letter, In addition, a second letter is on ARPA funding. Out of the \$150 million or so, at least \$10 million roughly has been allocated for childcare; \$3.5 million in 2022, \$3.5 million in 2023, and the remaining funds in 2024. We're halfway through 2022, so that money needs to get allocated and spent. This was really just an outline of both the case of the need and the recommendations on the parameters of where that money was spent.

**Ryan Allsop:** It's a timing issue now. Correct?

**Clark Campbell:** There is a timing issue, and I probably should defer to Heather Powell on how we are in terms of the details of when.

**Heather Powell:** We'd like to encourage the committee to weigh in before July 31, when we draft recommendations from a task force and submit to the county council, so they can compare and look at the two, to decide how to move forward.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Clark, do you want to read the letter, or maybe Jennifer.

**Don Goldberg:** And also, both letters are here. If you don't have a copy, I'd be happy to bring them over to you.

**Ryan Allsop:** I think from a timing standpoint, we really want to get both of them in, but the one with the ARPA one is the most critical in July. If we can't get a vote in on both today let's focus on the ARPA one first.

**Clark Campbell:** Because that's the one that's the most time sensitive, we'll start with the ARPA letter just to show the members. This went out, I think Friday. We had a couple of rounds of edits on this to try and get it to the final with everybody being out of town and trying to get connected. Why don't we just check to see who's had a chance to review it prior to this meeting. Anybody here? Anybody online?

**Jennifer Noveck:** Looks like Chris and Troy, who are voting members, both said, yes, they've reviewed it.

**Clark Campbell:** Okay. So, everyone's had a chance to review the letter. We could either read it or just open it up for comments. I think the goal here is to have some discussion on it and make sure that we encompass the main points. Debbie Ahl couldn't be here today. Her feedback, and she was part of the group, was just making sure that there are two buckets for both large providers and for small providers. That's also covered in the recommendations here.

**Ryan Allsop:** Just to add a little. We (Ryan and Sarah) met with Executive Satpal and Tyler Schroeder on some budget items last week. This letter came up and the discussion of ARPA came up in our meeting. We discussed that two concerns that came up previously was that the Opportunity Council is managing the funds for this and that there's maybe a slight conflict there. They didn't disagree with that. I would say just generally they said that they were looking for a place to put the money and have it controlled from there. We suggested eventually there should be a discussion about where the funds should be.

**Clark Campbell:** My understanding was that was City of Bellingham, not the county decision, to use the Opportunity Council.

**Ryan Allsop:** No, it was the county. He (Satpal) was very aware of that. I would think that if there was another place to have it distributed, they might not be opposed to that. And I mentioned the health department because that seems to be the place online with the ballot measure.

**Clark Campbell:** Did we include that?

**Heather Powell:** We did not but we can add that in.

**Ryan Allsop:** I'd want to add that. It might be worth mentioning that. Met with Satpal just last week.

**Clark Campbell:** That it needs to be a county government entity for that?

**Ryan Allsop:** They've already received funds, and they have that knowledge. I think generally in business and in the public sector, when someone receives funds and also distributes funds, it's a conflict of interest. I think this group would tend to lean towards not letting that happen.

**Heather Powell:** Would a statement that is general enough to say that nobody who is the recipient or potential recipient of funds should be the administrator of funds be acceptable?

**Ryan Allsop:** I would be comfortable with that. Yes.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Sounds good.

**Clark Campbell:** With that addition, are there any other comments with regard to the letter as drafted that people would like to make changes to prior to bringing it to a vote. Or if you're opposed to the issue, I'd like to make sure that we have views from both sides on this.

**Jennifer Noveck:** I also just wanted to mention that the highlighted portions are the portions that Debbie Ahl had noted questions about. I don't know if the committee wants to discuss those points specifically as part of this, but just wanted to flag it since Debbie is out.

**Clark Campbell:** I didn't get a chance to talk with Debbie, but her main concern was that there were two buckets -- one for large providers and one for small providers. I think that's contained in the recommendations. Debbie's not here to have a conversation about the metrics that are there. My view is that whether you're large or small, the goal from the county perspective is to increase capacity and to increase capacity of seats that are on state subsidy. The two requirements here is one, if you're currently taking less than 50%, which I understand is most of the providers, then you're required as a prerequisite to receiving these funds to increase your number of seats by 20%.

**Andrew Gamble:** I had a question about that particular point. If you have an established group of children in a facility and then this requirement comes in and they take this money, is this going to displace some of the children that are already there or are they grandfathered in and be required to provide more space?

**Clark Campbell:** It shouldn't displace children, but we have a gap of about 6,000 spots of unmet need or positions. The goal really is to grow the capacity and to make sure that those that are in greatest need have access to childcare. With those two overriding goals, what we're trying to do is make sure that money is spent to do that. It shouldn't harm anyone to receive ARPA dollars. These are one time use

dollars too, so you really can't use these dollars for operational costs or paying your staff. It's going to be for capital improvements or real estate or for other things because it's not recurring funding.

**Don Goldberg:** The 20% that you're talking about -- if somebody doesn't meet the 50%, then they'd have to increase subsidized spots by 20%?

**Clark Campbell:** 20%. Yes.

**Don Goldberg:** Up to 50%? What if somebody's at 45% and now they have to 20% more, so that puts them at 65.

**Clark Campbell:** I think it's height of the bar the way I read that. So, you're either at 50%, which is very few providers, or you're expanding your capacity by 20%.

**Heather Powell:** The idea is we need to grow. The nature of childcare is that children age out and go to elementary school, and because there is a long-term commitment for preparation, no provider is likely going to meet that on the day they receive funds. They would need to demonstrate they are achieving that over the length of the grant. I think it would be appropriate.

**Clark Campbell:** The other detail that's been highlighted is that this is a forgivable grant, but that the grant that you're getting doesn't exceed 25% of your total operating budget. So, if you're asking for \$2 million, and you have \$1,000,000 operating budget, that's probably not going to be approved.

**Ryan Allsop:** On the last page, or bullet point, which talks about prevailing wage. It doesn't really have a recommendation from this committee about it. In my opinion we should, especially for these smaller providers, there's a real limitation for them to actually manage that.

**Clark Campbell:** My understanding is that is for federal dollars.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** It's state.

**Ryan Allsop:** It's not a federal requirement, it's a state requirement. There's a bigger discussion, obviously, on trying to change it. If there's a workaround to get around that for small providers, I think we should encourage them to look at some workarounds for that. I don't think we have a specific recommendation for that.

**Heather Powell:** I don't think that there's a workaround because we would have found it. It was hard trying to find contractors in Covid, and we went over it every way possible. What I would say is the recommendation that I was trying to convey, and didn't do it well enough, is that they need to have a commitment from a contractor that they're going to perform for the prevailing wage work and then their bid is going to be solid through with the length of when the project can start. Typically, you put forth a budget and then you find your contractor. Procuring the contractor who is committed to do the prevailing wage work and stick to the budget means that all of the work that the county thinks that it's funding with ARPA dollars will be completed and that they don't come up short.

**Ryan Allsop:** Okay, that makes sense. I have a little bit of a sense there might be some workarounds, but I'm not sure. Maybe not.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** I think also making the point that it's further complicating and adding another cumbersome barrier.

**Ryan Allsop:** Especially with a smaller business. It's a real barrier. Is Pete (Dawson) on the Zoom? I am just curious to know how many of our contractors in this community are actually performing prevailing wage work and can actually manage it? Just for clarification, it would be great to know, because I don't think it's that many, or much smaller, that do that work.

**Dan Dunne:** It's not just the paperwork but the wage rates and then a lot of the requirements. It costs more, but we do it.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Its one of those things that is well intentioned, but it's not only increasing costs it's making it harder to get projects going at facilities that need them.

**Clark Campbell:** As the letter states, it's the requirement of prevailing wage that will accompany these dollars further complicates their use, so I think it's been stated that that's our view. What we may want to add is just a statement to the effect that says if there are options for the small providers to waive this requirement it should be pursued.

**Ryan Allsop:** One of the options that came up in construction that we did was to stay below 49% of the total value of the market, I believe avoids the state's requirement for prevailing wage.

**Clark Campbell:** 49% of?

**Ryan Allsop:** Whatever the total value of the project is, so if its less than that, I believe you can actually avoid it. That should be clarified. I'm not an expert on this, but we had a project that we thought would have it for the the total project. The prevailing wage portion was smaller -- we did a TI job for the Department of Ecology in one of our buildings. We were actually able to skip that portion, which was a huge deal for us. It would add a ton of cost that we had not budgeted when we negotiated a price on the lease. So, there might be some workarounds. We talked about that with Satpal and Tyler.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** If we circle back to the subsidized spots by 20%, do we feel like that's going to inhibit the smaller facilities?

**Heather Powell:** I think it will stretch many providers. But again, I think to go from zero or one, when you are a provider that does 12 to 24 kids, increasing by 20% is a small number. I think it helps, but I don't think it should inhibit a provider.

**Clark Campbell:** I think the big goal is to increase capacity and then secondarily, to make sure that capacity is growing in the area where there is the greatest need and not putting all of that strain on the largest providers. So small independents can choose not to, but they wouldn't be able to access ARPA dollars. If they want to be a market rate childcare provider without state subsidized enrollment, you can continue to do that. You're just not going to get county or state assistance here. My sense is it makes sense to have that same metric for both, but to make sure that there's two separate blocks.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** What do the committee members think? Are we at a position where we could make a vote on this?

**Clark Campbell:** My only last question is, the 2022 dollars have to be allocated by year end, is that correct?

**Don Goldberg:** So, I think the ARPA funding was extended.

**Rob Fix, Executive Director Port of Bellingham:** It has to be spent by 2024.

**Clark Campbell:** The entire amount.

**Don Goldberg:** I think the federal money might have been moved out to 2026.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** I know it's at least to 2024, but the issue is that the spending needs to happen yesterday because we're in a childcare crisis.

**Heather Powell:** I think that it needs to be contracted by 2024, so all the money can be contracted out with spending needing to be completed by the end of 2026.

**Clark Campbell:** Right. But is there another goal within County's budget?

**Heather Powell:** This was their outline - the 2022, 23, 24 was their outline.

**Clark Campbell:** Which means you've got to get busy if you want to allocate \$3.5m by the end of the year.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** I think that's been studied for two years, so it's time to move.

**Clark Campbell:** So, to that, is there any other comment on the letter? It sounds like the two ads we're asking to have was just a statement with regard to prevailing wage and statement on administering funds.

**Ryan Allsop:** I would vote to approve with those two changes.

**Clark Campbell:** I'm going to put a motion on the floor for a formal vote of the voting members of the Whatcom County Business and Commerce Committee to approve the letter as drafted with the two amendments. Is there a second to that motion?

**Chris Trout:** Second.

**Clark Campbell:** Second, we haven't done a vote in a while. What's the protocol for them now?

**Don Goldberg:** I think the best way would be to call out people and ask them what their vote is so it can be recorded.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** All right.

**Tyler Byrd, Whatcom County Council:** Quick question. Sorry, I apologize. This is Tyler Byrd. I got here a couple of minutes late. Before you take a vote, is there anything that I can answer for you all related to the council questions for the letter?

**Ryan Allsop:** Just the last question, maybe about the schedule to spend \$3.5 million. If we don't, does it just roll into 2023? That question came up. There's a schedule that the county put forth of \$3.5 million this year, \$3.5 million in 2023 and a couple million in 2024. That schedule. If it's not met, it just rolls forward into the following year if we haven't actually spent that, is that correct? The federal requirement is 2024 with a contract and spent by 2026.

**Tyler Byrd, Whatcom County Council:** So, what would happen is that they would have to come back to the council and ask us to basically approve those funds for the new fiscal year and then we would take that action. We've always done that. I don't think there's ever been a situation that I'm aware of where we haven't re-approved those funds that were previously allocated and not spent.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Okay.

**Clark Campbell:** And with regard to the distribution of the funds via a county agency. Has that been further discussed within the county executive or county council in terms of how the funds will get distributed?

**Tyler Byrd, Whatcom County Council:** For the ARPA dollars or for the new tax?

**Clark Campbell:** For the ARPA dollars.

**Tyler Byrd, Whatcom County Council:** So there were some projects that had been previously identified that were earmarked to receive those funds. I want to say the majority of those funds were towards those earmarked projects. However, that's been the extent of the conversation at that point. Everything else the executive and the administration was bringing back as items had come up, but I'm not aware of any other projects that they've identified outside of the original allocation that we've discussed.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Should we proceed with the vote. Are we ready?

**Clark Campbell:** I'm ready.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** All right. We'll start with our Zoom committee members. So Chris Trout.

**Chris Trout:** Yes, I'm in favor.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Chris is in favor. Troy?

**Troy Muljat:** Yes.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Bob?

**Bob Pritchett:** Opposed.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Do you care to weigh in, Bob, on why you're opposed?

**Bob Pritchett:** No. There's been so much discussion on it. I don't think I have anything that's going to change anything.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** All right. We'll move around the table. Ryan?

**Ryan Allsop:** Vote to approve.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Paul?

**Paul Burrill:** Yes.

**Clark Campbell:** Yes.

**Andrew Gamble:** Yes.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** I approve.

**Don Goldberg:** That's 7 for, 1 opposed.



**Clark Campbell:** So noted. Jen, you got that?

**Jennifer Noveck:** Yep.

**Clark Campbell:** We will submit this letter at the close of this meeting with the adjustments that were recommended and it will be submitted to the County Council as a recommendation from this committee. Thanks to Heather Powell for doing the heavy lifting on getting the draft letter and doing all the revisions.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Now, do you want to head up next one?

**Clark Campbell:** Yes, the next one is much more of an advisory vote from the Business and Commerce Committee on the ballot measure that we've brought. I think it's probably good before we get into the detail of the letter just to review the background. This was discussed at the County Council meeting in June where it was voted on. I believe the vote was five in favor. One opposed. One abstaining. The primary issues on the opposition side of this was just whether it's the role of the county government to be involved with childcare and whether the mechanism for that, raising property taxes, was the right option legally.

That said, as you see in the letter, what we're trying to do with this is to address what is a crisis issue in our county with the funding mechanisms that we have legally available to us. There are no other ways. We can't do an income tax. We can't do a sin tax. Property tax is the main legal option, and based on the way it has been drafted, my understanding is that on a median home price that will translate to around \$8.00 per month and would raise...

**Heather Flaherty:** ...about \$8.2 million annually.

**Clark Campbell:** Then there's a separate group that's forming that's going to be talking about what the requirements are for this money to be spent, making sure that's being done in a transparent way. Whereas the ARPA dollars are really focused on non-recurring costs, things like capital spend or real estate or upgrading HVAC systems and things that are costs to childcare providers but not recurring costs, this would be available to cover the recurring costs to try and make it more affordable and again, specifically for kids that are on this state reimbursement. Heather Flaherty drafted this letter, and we made several rounds of updates to it, but I guess I'll just open it up for questions.

**Ryan Allsop:** I'll just mention that Guy with the chamber came out in support of this tax which is not standard for the chamber.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** We have had a lot of discussion about what a shame that the sin tax can't be accessed to support this, so I'm hoping as we talk about budgets in the future, we learn a lot more about the sin tax and where all that money is going.

**Clark Campbell:** At the state level?

**Rob Fix, Executive Director Port of Bellingham:** The county doesn't see any of those funds. All the marijuana money stays at the state level.

**Heather Flaherty:** I actually looked into that a little bit. I understand that some of them go to different counties, but I think it's not earmarked.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** I think that's something that we really should lobby for. That's what this should be.

**Clark Campbell:** What is it being here for all of us?

**Ryan Allsop:** A lot of it goes back to paying back the union. When they broke up the union-based stores, they were obligated to pay the retirement fund in perpetuity. That was a huge portion of it I recall. There's more than that. There's a surplus now. I did see an article about Everett. They're going through the exact same thing. They're trying to figure out their childcare. It's not just a Whatcom County thing. It's a national problem. We were talking about at another meeting. There was just an article on King 5 News last weekend that brought it up and how they're looking to solve it themselves. I think this is where this group should get together with other communities. If we want to change by bringing bigger ideas at the state level, we need to rally together as a group, as communities, to go back to the state. So, a little bigger picture than those groups typically handling, but there are some subjects, I guess, that we may want to get behind and support. It might be powerful to bring in another city of their size, not just Bellingham and Whatcom County.

**Rob Fix, Executive Director Port of Bellingham:** Do we want a report out from my group that might be able to share what their understanding is of the sin tax?

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** That would be great.

**Ryan Allsop:** That would be fabulous.

**Gina Stark:** There is a lot that goes into the education system. There is a tax task force that is going to look at the Washington state tax structure, and we will give them a lot of input. That might be a good group to look at.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Would you mind sharing that?

**Rob Fix, Executive Director Port of Bellingham:** I think Gina just volunteered.

**Ryan Allsop:** I actually took their poll. It was heavily biased to one way. It was a very interesting polling method. It was clearly looking for one answer, because every option was the same which I thought was frustrating. I sent it out. Frank, I think I sent it you. I sent it to a bunch of people I knew. Somebody sent it to me. I can't remember how I got it.

**Gina Stark:** I can send it out.

**Clark Campbell:** Okay. So just to be clear, with this letter, basically all that we are doing is applauding the county council for its vote and going on record in support of the initiative, which will be going forward for a vote in November? Is that correct?

**Heather Flaherty:** Yes.

**Clark Campbell:** So that will be brought forward to a full vote on the public bond. Measures that require property tax liens to be lifted are contentious issues in our county but equally, I think with the Business and Commerce Committee and the Chamber of Commerce behind it, I think that's a strong statement.

**Ryan Allsop:** And it has a sunset clause in it.

**Clark Campbell:** Ten years.

**Ryan Allsop:** And we talked about it briefly with Satpal. It would be nice on our annual tax statement to have that actually spelled out, showing which items have sunset clauses. I brought up paying for 100-acre woods. I have no idea. Will we ever stop paying for that? It seems like it's been going on forever.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Guy. Did you want to say something?

**Guy Occhiogrosso:** I was just going to provide a little bit of context here. Trick question for everyone in the room. Who likes property taxes? No one. And I think speaking to this point of investigating other taxing opportunities is really important. This is the one that we've got at our disposal. I do think it's important to acknowledge there is work being done from the business community at a state and national level. The US Chamber as well as the Association of Washington Business, which is the state chamber, are engaging in childcare as it is impactful to the current workforce, but it's also really valuable producing -- I like to say a quality workforce, but also quality humans. It's just a 25-year investment before we really start seeing some of the value of that.

I think it was important to acknowledge that component, that this is hopefully something temporary until other systems catch up. With that said, we're still lacking 5,000 slots. That is a substantially more amount than other communities. We will probably have to do something at some point. Those are really important components to this dialog some of which is why, and again our committee at the chamber and our board, both voted to endorse this. So just wanted to provide a little bit of context. Thanks for the opportunity

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Thank you Guy.

**Ken Bell, Port of Bellingham Commissioner:** Is there ever a point to become self-sufficient or are we going to be subsidizing childcare in perpetuity? Is there a mechanism to develop efficiency ever? We have not looked ten years down the road yet. We're filling a community need. Nobody is saying what's in your plan and how do we make this okay or not?

**Clark Campbell:** Well, I think that it's going to be a larger question about the tax structure.

**Ken Bell, Port of Bellingham Commissioner:** This is our public policy. We're about to ban plastics in the city without a long-range compost, recycling proposal. Nobody knows ten years down the road and says, what's the long-range planning.

**Clark Campbell:** First grade is being funded through your tax dollars. The question really is, should that extend beyond the first grade to Pre-Kindergarten and to childcare? Well, you ask, what's the sustainable solution? The sustainable solution is to apply the same approach that we do for first grade to pre-K and to childcare. Now, that's a big gap.

These dollars that we're talking about here won't do that. They won't provide another 6,000 seats, which is really the gap we have today. And so, the larger issue beyond like how do we fix this problem is what is the impact of doing nothing. The impact of doing nothing has an impact on economic development and our ability to hire employees. That's one of the things that I see in my business, and I think in other businesses, is in the absence of this, are business is going to have to try to find a way to open childcare in every single manufacturing facility? There's liabilities associated to that additional costs. Or is there some sort of hybrid approach. I'm actually interested within this in looking at ways that that money can go to existing childcare providers. But also, if a business, a large employer wants to do onsite, how do we create funding mechanisms to help them do the facility upgrades, including things they need to do to provide those provision that we can?

**Ken Bell, Port of Bellingham Commissioner:** But it's not going to happen directly.

**Heather Flaherty:** I think there's a variety of reasons why the private market has not been able to fully solve the childcare economics. I will say, though, that one of the best opportunities is that we get to shape the implementation plan. And that's that last part of this letter is an invitation to a representative from the Business and Commerce Committee to help make sure provisions like that are in that implementation plan and that in ten years, we're weeks ahead from where we are today. And that's what's involved here.

**Ken Bell, Port of Bellingham Commissioner:** Would that be Bob Pritchett?

**Heather Flaherty:** Sure. I have read the last two years of this committee's minutes, and I know how important streamlining the process is. And I think you guys are really poised to help with that expertise and make sure that there's minimal barriers and that we're actually looking at it from a business perspective, how can we make this sustainable? And there is a ten-year sunset. There's also quite a few accountability mechanisms built into this. It's very well designed to make sure we're getting the impacts and achieving the things that we're saying we want and need. So that's a sincere invitation.

**Clark Campbell:** So again, with this, what we're doing is stating the problem, stating that we are in favor of the proposed solution of raising the property tax lid on a ten-year basis to do so and outlined kind of what those costs are and how they'll be distributed. The details of that are going to come out of the working group and then that will get put forward in the November ballot.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** So C.J. and Tyler would like to weigh in.

**CJ Seitz:** I weighed in on the chat and just responding to Commissioner Bell who asked about business hosted childcare solutions. And I was just offering to chat about that any time. There is positive ROI research on businesses investing and onsite childcare solutions and other childcare solutions for their staff. So just put in a plug that I'd love to chat about that anytime.

**Tyler Byrd, Whatcom County Council:** You referenced the council vote when this topic came up. It was specific to approving the tax initiative for the ballot, and I was the abstention on it. My reason for abstaining was I truly am split on this. Here's what I like about it. There's a group of people like Ray Deck and Heather Flaherty that are here in the group today that have worked on this that I have a ton of respect for, and I love the approach that they've taken and what they've accomplished both professionally outside of this, but also in getting this forward. Specifically, I like all of the metrics that they're looking at and how they're going to make a decision on whether or not we're making a meaningful impact regularly as we are moving forward, not just at the very end of it, but throughout the entire process.

The way I look at it is, if this works out really well, it could become a model for everything that the county government does for programs throughout. I would love to see that kind of a data centric model with everything we do. It has the potential to be phenomenal on the childcare side, but also from a model standpoint. I think the flip side of that, the 5,000 kids' number, I think that's a little misleading in the way they came up with the number because that takes into account all of the kids under an age group that are actually using childcare today. So, if you aren't in Kindergarten and you're not in the childcare facility, that's 5,000 kids. Then it was just assumed that all 5,000 of those kids would then need childcare or want childcare. I don't believe that that's the case either. So, I don't think that 5,000 is an accurate number.

The bigger issue for me on this was I really wanted to see a plan, specifically what programs we're going to be investing in, how much money we're going to be putting into those programs, and what we believe the anticipated outcome would be of each of those programs. How are they going to impact those measurements that we're going to be holding everyone accountable to, so that we actually knew where we were going and spending money on? I feel like all too often we get into a place where we go out and we raise a tax without a plan and then we have money that we're throwing at anything that pops up because we didn't have it pre-laid out. We need a group of people to get together and say here's exactly

how we're going to be spending this. I know that there just wasn't enough time. I see Emily on here, too, another awesome person working on this. But if that was included, I would have hands down voted for this in a heartbeat. I think we can get there. I just would have liked to have seen it beforehand. Food for thought. Thank you.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Thanks Tyler. Heather?

**Heather Flaherty:** Thank you very much, Tyler, for your really helpful comments. A couple of things I'll add is Western did the needs assessment, and the 5,000 is the projected demand by 2026. They actually did do a sample survey and took into account that we have 2,000 kids born every year and probably about half of them need childcare. We did account for that in the calculations with the overall demand.

Whether we need 2,000 or 5,000, we still need funds to build those slots and expand. I'll add to Tyler's third point about the plan and the details, and your point too Ken, is that is what that workgroup doing in August. We have really clear metrics, and I think that that's actually different than many of the levies and funds that are approved by the county. They don't even include metrics. I don't think our behavioral health fund says we have the goal of decreasing suicide, for example, in our community. They don't hold themselves accountable to metrics, so I really appreciate Councilmember Byrd's comments about the design of this. This could be a model. Starting in August, we'll have, I think, the Center for Child Care Expansion. There are 20 providers right now with projects ready to expand. They just do not have funds secured for them. We have all of those details starting in August to bring those and to pay for those. If it is approved in November, we'll have a plan that has metrics tied to it and will be measured every year.

**Ryan Allsop:** Just going to throw this out there. Would it make sense for us to review that, prior to us supporting the letter from the committee standpoint, just so we understand what those metrics are, where we have better insight. Not to delay it, but it's not a time sensitive issue. It is for November, I understand, but not like with that committee meeting in August. Any time we raise taxes, I think this group is highly sensitive, I know I am. Generally, this is probably a better plan for a tax compared to taxes for a lot of things needing to be paid for. I think maybe as a committee, we might want to hold off to do more research on that.

**Ken Bell, Port of Bellingham Commissioner:** Do you have information based on company profiles. Do you know how much IMCO verses BP verses a Birch, Iron Creek, Port of Bellingham need childcare? Do you have a needs assessment that shows which county employer has the greatest need? And that's where we start by saying you're the most logical people to do this in house? Start at it from the front end looking at the largest employers that would be the cheapest way to add capacity and those would be the most beneficial.

**Heather Flaherty:** I think that both Jen and Guy have both spoken to that before. I know Guy with the Center of Child Care Expansion was looking at different within the North County in particular what the business needs are.

**Ken Bell, Port of Bellingham Commissioner:** Well, it fits in with what CJ and I are talking about with certain employers more likely to pick up the call and have the immediate call for that service.

**Guy Occhiogrosso:** Since it's Ken, I'll go ahead and interrupt you. Thanks for the reply text message there buddy. Appreciate that. A number of years ago, probably 2017-2018, considerably before the pandemic, the Opportunity Council who has been a longtime partner of the chamber in this work as it relates to engaging the impact on employers, pulled together what we were calling the North County Child Care and Employer Consortium. This impact is so considerable that BP as a corporate entity had established workgroups, which are kind of their internal advisory committees across multiple sites for childcare. There was a local group prior to the pandemic. Considering everything's gotten worse, my

guess is it's still there. But the dilemma was still siting a location of something that considerable and then also sharing the wealth. So yes, there have been a number of dialogs on that what I'm calling a cooperative model. But it's not happened yet for whatever reason. I think Heather Powell and the club stepped up huge with the Kids World situation. I think that relieved a lot of pressure in the county right about that same time. Then, of course, the pandemic hit, and the dust is settling.

**Don Goldberg:** I believe the working waterfront has also done some work on pooling private employers. The work is out there. Have we seen any other change because of hybrid workplace demand?

**Heather Flaherty:** The demand study did take that into account, and it has shifted. It's also a chicken and egg sometimes because people have dropped out of the workforce because they can't find the childcare, whether or not they're working in the home.

**Clark Campbell:** I can speak to my business. As businesses are trying to now return back -- maybe not all the way back to what it was pre-pandemic -- but more of a hybrid approach of a couple of days in the office. That's one of the first comments. Well, what do you want me to do about my new problem, which is my child doesn't have a spot anymore, because I've been doing it at home. So now you're having to put together different policies for different groups and try to work out accommodations which long term is going to have a business impact in terms of innovation, speed, problem solving and capacity. It's becoming a business issue, whether we like it or not.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** And beyond affordability. For people that need childcare, it's been challenging for a number of years long before Covid.

**Clark Campbell:** Whether we should hold off on this vote or not. What this vote is about is whether or not we believe there is a problem and that the problem merits the fix that's being proposed. This letter doesn't draft specifically what the outcomes and what the actual plans are. We're just saying that the vote that was taken by the county council in June, that we're in favor of that vote. We are supporting the position that was taken by the Chamber of Commerce, that the tax is the right mechanism and it's going to take state, federal and local funding to close this gap.

**Ryan Allsop:** The council has already supported this already, put it through to this going on the ballot. From a professional standpoint, we're also getting behind it from a tax standpoint as a group which is fine. I would say we would benefit more knowing more of the details behind that. It's not a no. It's simply that it will be even stronger with more information behind it if you have some of those answers.

**Frank Imhoff:** Is there some kind of a standard cost per day or hour for childcare? If I had one kid at one point paid 20-bucks and hour for one kid. If I had 12 kids, it would cost a lot less. What is the target here for reasonable childcare?

**Clark Campbell:** Well, what we know is it costs roughly the same as tuition, room, and board at Western Washington University for FT childcare.

**Heather Flaherty:** Annually. And there's no grants for that like there would be to go to Western.

**Frank Imhoff:** What is the cost?

**Heather Flaherty:** \$13,000 a year.

**Clark Campbell:** That is market rates.

**Frank Imhoff:** So, we're trying to knock that price down by helping subsidize.

**Clark Campbell:** Yes, by helping subsidize primarily the folks having difficulty.

**Ryan Allsop:** Its \$18,000 a year for an infant right now after tax.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** And then there's some layers of bureaucracy that childcare facilities have to wade through that may not be productive.

**Heather Flaherty:** And there are some that are good, that help with more quality care. The reason that we wanted to talk to your committee, of course, because it is consistently one of your top two concerns, priority for the economy and the workforce. And this is a response...imperfect...coming to you with a lot of humility, but at least it's a step forward. Private business has not been able to figure this out, and Jen you share some really staggering statistics about what that annual expense would be to a private business to run childcare and how cost prohibitive that is. And if they were to support this levy, it would be much less expensive. We're talking about supply in general, not only for subsidized slots but for all affordable ones.

**Don Goldberg:** The three most consistent questions we get from all of you and new companies coming into the area is housing, childcare, and available space for their business. Those are the three questions over and over again.

**Ken Bell, Port of Bellingham Commissioner:** You say 1,000 are going to need childcare. If you look at those demographics, in what areas will those 1,000 are going to need it?

**Ryan Allsop:** But a certain percentage drop out when they turn 5.

**Ken Bell, Port of Bellingham Commissioner:** So, let's assume you've got 1,000. Do we know the financial demographics? How much of this is 'it's not available verses, it's not affordable'?

**Ken Bell, Port of Bellingham Commissioner:** So, making it available will solve huge problems.

**Heather Flaherty:** And that's what its focused on -- expanding the pie.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Could you talk a little bit about the group that's going to get together in August?

**Heather Flaherty:** Yeah. So, the Chuckanut Health Foundation and the Whatcom County Health Department are co-hosting the implementation planning group. We're building that table. We'd love a business and commerce representative or two, if there to interest, for people to actually say okay in the first year what dollars go out the door to what businesses, what programs, what are the goals that we focus on? I think increasing supply in general is the biggest first goal. One way or another we need to do this work and if through the tax, we'll have to find another way to raise \$8.2 million annually, and we'll be looking for other options. What we get with that is transparency, accountability and leveragability and local control. Right now, all of the dollars coming in for childcare are largely federal and state controlled, and we have no say over where they go or what they do.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** What would be the structure of the meetings? When would they start?

**Heather Flaherty:** We get to decide. Let's say the first week of August we start, and I think we have to meet until we have a plan, a I think the plan needs to be ready by the end of September.

**Clark Campbell:** Guy. Just a little background on your committee's or your membership's vote to endorse this. How did that come together, and what was the discussion pattern there?

**Guy Occhiogrosso:** Our process for any type of endorsement, especially a ballot endorsement is that most of the time it would start at our Government Affairs Committee, which is a monthly subcommittee of the chamber made up of members. It's hard to see the little panoramic view, but maybe even some of the people in the room were at that meeting. A combination of Ray, Emily and Heather presented to the committee. I want to say it took about 45 minutes for the presentation and the dialog, at which point we excused the proposal team. And then the committee had a dialog. Ultimately, the committee voted to move the endorsement to the board, which again is part of our process.

I think Heather attended the board meeting. The presentation, I think was a little shorter than it was of the Government Affairs Committee, and then the board members took a vote. Again, the same process after excusing Heather from that. I think our board is knowledgeable about childcare as it impacts business and relates to business because we've been engaged in this over a number of years.

**Clark Campbell:** And was there discussion about holding back on that advisory vote until all the details of the plan were out or was it more just an endorsement of the ballot measure.

**Guy Occhiogrosso:** So, I can't speak for every individual board member as to why they voted. Some of the things that were said are similar to what we've heard here today. The problem is so big and it's so specialized here, we have to do something. That was part of the dialog. One of the other pieces, and I think Council member Tyler Byrd mentioned this. The accountability that's built into this, maybe Ryan, you mentioned it, too, is, gosh, can we have this across multiple taxing opportunities to have this built-in accountability? That would be wonderful. So, I think that there was a 'this is a better model and there's a problem here' and some combination of the two.

**Clark Campbell:** And what was the result of the vote like it was? Was it a majority, barely or broadly?

**Guy Occhiogrosso:** I would say, again, I'm adding context. It's not included in our minutes. Let's just say majority, supermajority. Most of the people in the room voted yes.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** We're at the point where we need to decide.

**Clark Campbell:** Yeah, so I'll put it out there as a motion. The letter was drafted basically stating that we are in favor of this being brought to a vote of the public in the next November ballot and that further details are going to need to be fleshed out but that the mechanism for addressing the need is outlined here in this letter and is outlined in the proposal. So, in my view, it's good for the Council to see if there's a division or if there is a broad majority in favor. So, I'm going to put it up there in motion to bring this to a vote today with the idea that we could do a second vote if we have more details.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** What we are putting up to vote right now is that we are submitting this recommendation?

**Clark Campbell:** This letter as drafted.

(there was no second to the motion)

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Or we wait until end of August instead of doing it twice.

**Clark Campbell:** If we don't get a second.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** So, the silence is saying we wait.



**Clark Campbell:** The silence means we're going to wait until August and wait until the August plan comes out before putting forward another letter.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Are there any committee members now that would be interested in joining the Children's Fund Implementation Workgroup?

**Rob Fix, Executive Director Port of Bellingham:** I'm not a committee member, but I would be interested.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** OK. Rob Fix would be interested. Ken Bell?

**Ken Bell, Port of Bellingham Commissioner:** I'm not a committee member.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Would you be interested?

**Ken Bell, Port of Bellingham Commissioner:** Yes.

**Clark Campbell:** I'll do it.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** I wonder if Debbie would also.

**Andrew Gamble:** I've got some time, so I'll be on it also.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Heather you've got two committee members for sure. Possibly a third.

**Ryan Allsop:** And a possible volunteering of Bob Pritchett. Bob would you be interested in being on that committee and working on the details of this?

**Bob Pritchett:** No, I don't think I'd be a good fit.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** That might be why you'd be perfect. And that's said sincerely.

**Clark Campbell:** So just to recap on that. Since that was the sticking point, is having more specifics on where the money is going to get spent and how it's going to get distributed? If there's feedback from the other members, voting or non-voting, for or against this measure, I think probably the best way to do that is to give that to Jen.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Jen, can you stay with me on that I'd like to add this group under childcare on the subcommittee list

**Jennifer Noveck:** Of course. So just to be clear, the motion is to wait until August when there is an implementation plan.

**Clark Campbell:** Yeah. The motion to approve didn't get a second, so we'll wait till the August meeting to start again.

**Ryan Allsop:** What's that date Jen?

**Jennifer Noveck:** August 15th.

**Ryan Allsop:** From a timing standpoint is that ok? That's a month.

**Heather Flaherty:** It's really a complicated landscape, so if we only had a couple of meetings, I'm not sure.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** We can shoot for that, and we can also review in the meeting in September as well. We want to see some good layout to support. We're rooting for you.

**Clark Campbell:** And Tyler, are you still on the call? Your comments today, I think, were quite valid. And if there's anything specific that you're looking for that would shift this. Obviously, when it came up for a vote in June, there wasn't even this level of detail. But if you've got specific feedback of the kinds of things you're looking for, see if you can kind of drive that into the implementation plan.

**Tyler Byrd, Whatcom County Council:** I appreciate that. Emily and Ray and I and Heather have had some of those conversations. I've shared that information with them.

**Clark Campbell:** Okay. Thank you.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** I'm going to move on to our next topic if we're good with that. We've got Whatcom County Health Department who had reached out and also with the same message. They would like to invite a member of the community to partake in some of the work that the Health Department's doing. I just asked Erika if she wouldn't mind doing a quick overview on the Health Department and Whatcom County and kind of what's going on...beyond the topic of Covid.

**Ryan Allsop:** Covid's over.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** I think Erika is zooming in as she's out of town and perhaps on vacation. Thank you so much.

**Erika Lautenbach:** Yes. Steve Bennett's a volunteer, so I'm hoping he can go first and then he doesn't have to sit through the rest of your meeting.

**Steve Bennett:** I'm thoroughly enjoying the meeting, so I just want to say that.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** That's great, please join us in the future.

**Steve Bennett:** I'm the chair of the Public Health Advisory Board here in Whatcom County, and state regulations have changed slightly for the Public Health Advisory Board and has expanded our responsibilities. But even in conversations around some of the responsibilities for the Public Health Advisory Board, Erika and others have talked about the need to increase partnership and alignment and communication amongst a lot of boards and commissions within the county to really align a lot of the work that we do. I think it's telling that you have spent most of the meeting today talking about the same things that we've been talking about in the Public Health Advisory Board for a couple of years -- mainly access to childcare, a lot of the social determinants of health. You're looking at it from a slightly different angle, which I think is great and helpful, whereas we tend to look at a lot of health outcomes. But we also know that socioeconomic status and access to work and things like that are highly tied to health outcomes as well. To that point, I've been doing a little virtual tour across various commissions and boards in Whatcom County to offer up an opportunity to increase partnership communication and just general understanding. We have a spot on our expanding public health advisory board that we can offer to a member of this board.

Essentially, you would become a public health advisory board member and you would be a voting member of the Public Health Advisory Board after going through the onboarding application process. You would have the extra benefit of also being able to share some of the voice and experience that you have

on this board and bring that voice and experience to the Public Health Advisory Board. I think the overlap from these two boards has been actually fairly big. I know half of the people on the screen that I'm looking at right now because of partnerships with the Public Health Advisory Board and the Health Department over the past two and a half years for that thing that we're not going to mention the name of, but in response to that. Also, with the Employer Support Task Force and things that have come out of those public private partnerships. That's what we're bringing today. How you all decide who you want that to be or if anyone is even interested is up to you. I'm here to answer any questions. The individual would essentially be required to meet with us monthly and then would function as a public health advisory board member. We meet the first or second Thursday of every month from 7 to 8:30 a.m. We have a hybrid model similar to this one, so you can meet in person or virtually. There would be no expectations of work outside of the monthly meeting unless the individual chose to participate in any of our task forces that that we have, such as the Child and Family Well-Being Task Force or anything like that. Hopefully that quick summary was as clear as mud for you.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Great. Thank you for the invitation. It really falls in line with our Public Safety subcommittee. Does anyone have any questions, or do you want to give us a quick synopsis on current status or any topics that you'd like to share with us?

**Steve Bennett:** Current status of the Public Health Advisory Board?

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** You've got the floor for about 5 minutes.

**Steve Bennett:** To give you an idea of what the role of the Public Health Advisory Board is as well we are a community-based board of community members and professionals engaged in public health. Our role is really as advisor for the Health Board. In our county, the county council serves as the health board. We also review and give support and advise the health department. Within that context of public health, we're one of the three organizations within that communications matrix, which is a word I'm going to use to describe that right now. The state has currently required that the Public Health Advisory Board review any policies, any public health policies or programs that are sent forth in front of the health board. They require a pre review from us according to the state. Another one of our roles is to initiate or recommend any health policies or programs. So, we have the ability to bring policy in front of the health board for a vote.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Great. Is it something where we could keep your meeting on our agenda or keep our members updated for when we have an interested committee member? And would it be possible for that person to have a backup?

**Steve Bennett:** I think that we've worked within our new bylaws hopefully to allow for an official member, but then if they need a proxy or backup is something that we're hoping to facilitate.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Okay. Great. Does any committee member present today have an interest in this? It might be something that we just need to think about for a bit.

**Steve Bennett:** It's not an emergency.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** And really, thank you very much appreciate it.

**Steve Bennett:** Thank you very much. If anyone has questions, I'm happy to answer them.

**Ryan Allsop:** How much would it be related to our homeless outreach, the homeless issues we're having in the city. We have a subcommittee for public safety that we're starting as well? Just curious.

**Steve Bennett:** Homelessness is one of the things that comes up. One of the benefits and challenges of the Public Health Advisory Board is that it's literally everything. And so, if something has a health outcome, then it is within our realm at some point. And some of it is actually motivated by our membership, which is one of the goals for us to diversify our membership, including adding members for Veterans Affairs and we're talking to multiple committees so that those issues and voices are able to get put into the Public Health Advisory Board.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** It makes sense and we're seeing our subcommittees are a lot more powerful when there's public and private personnel working together. It just seemed like collaboration like this would have been so appropriate working through COVID as well. It probably would have been nice for you and for the business community for us to have a seat at the table as everyone maneuvered through the state laws and on the local level. This is a really good idea.

**Steve Bennett:** I think that was one of the lessons that we learned in that initial response to COVID with the Employer Support Task Force and working together on that with that partnership there.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Does anyone else have anything to say on this? Erika, do you want to chime in at all? Thanks for being here.

**Erika Lautenbach:** Thanks for having me. Sarah, when you and I talked last week, you said, okay, so what is the scope of the health department? And I'd like to give you just a brief overview, the laundry list, of all the activities that we're involved with.

We are a Health and Human Services Agency, so it's not just public health, and we have a number of divisions. I'll just rattle them off and am happy to answer questions. As you all know, we have a communicable disease division which has been very, very busy. In addition to some of the disease investigation work and casing contact investigations, etc., we also have TB nurses that do treatment with our Health Officer of latent and active TB throughout Whatcom County. They also do all the screenings for new immigrants and refugees, so all of the folks from Ukraine that are coming to this county are screened by our TB nurses. We also within that division have our needle exchange or syringe services program and our model is very clinically related. Not only do we do that transactional handoff, but we do wound care with a registered nurse.

We screen and test for hep C, HIV and other blood borne diseases. We refer to treatment. We have a chemical dependency counselor and a housing counselor on site with our clinical team and really try to meet people where they are. Many of the folks that we serve in that program, the only contact they have with health care is with the health department. We see ourselves as a conduit to stability, hopefully sobriety and recovery among this population. So that is that's communicable disease and there's other programs within that.

We have our environmental health division, which some of you may be familiar with for restaurant inspections. We do pools, parks, school inspections. We have a school program. We do all the solid waste and recycling contracts in the county and do some investigations of illegal dumping and other solid waste complaints and also hazardous waste, and we do work around exposure to methamphetamines, etc. We also have our onsite septic program that does the operational maintenance and inspections of septic systems all over the county and clean drinking water programs. So that's environmental health.

We have human services, which is housing and homelessness, developmental disabilities, and veterans' services, and we provide for veteran's utility assistance, access to the VA and other health care services. Sometimes we can provide rental assistance through the benefits that veterans have. That is a direct service that we provide to all veterans in Whatcom County and also connection to housing. We have our behavioral health program that puts out money to behavioral health providers all over the county, through

both state and federal funds, as well as our behavioral health sales tax, which has been collected for a number of years now. We also have prevention programs. We are the regional hub for the marijuana and tobacco dollars. I heard you talking about the sin taxes for the marijuana and tobacco dollars. We contract with four other counties in our region to put out that money as well as use the funding to do programs in schools for youth prevention. We build coalitions within all of the school districts on prevention activities for drugs and alcohol.

Then we have our response systems division, which is brand new. It is our GRACE and LEAD programs. These are very intensive interventions for people who are frequent users of our emergency systems or our jail and criminal justice systems. They have really successful outcomes in diverting these familiar faces, as we call them, away from crisis services and the criminal justice system and into stability. We are adding to that program and hopefully we'll be recruiting early next month for our alternative response team, which will be 911 responder. That will include an intensive behavioral health provider as well as a public health nurse that can divert calls now sent to the police or fire that don't require law enforcement or a fire response. So, part of that system, as well as that 9-8-8 system that's coming online in order to address some of the behavioral issues or neighbor concerns that don't require law enforcement.

So that's that team. We run the mental health court and we're expanding that program as well. And we contract for the drug court within the court system. So that's our response system and that's a newer division within the Health Department. And then we have our broader team of community health that look at coalition and community building around different areas. It could be a coalition to have a farmer's market or a new trail or a park in an area. We also do a lot of work with children and family coalitions aligned with some of the conversations you've been having today.

Of course, we have all of our internal systems. We have over 300 agencies and contracts that we administer every year. I think it's 306 this year. So, a lot of money is going out to the community. We have a budget of around \$44 million and only \$2.4 million of that -- so less about 5% of that budget -- comes out of the county general fund. The rest is federal and state grants, dedicated funding sources like the developmental disabilities' millage, the veteran's millage, the behavioral health sales tax, the Solid Waste Fund, and other dedicated permanent funding sources. That's the very high-level overview of the health department. We are much more than disease investigation and really have the goal of partnering well with community so we can solve some of these really difficult issues. Unfortunately, we've worked through the easy ones. Everything that's left is nuanced, complicated, multi-sector and really hard to get to the bottom of. I'll stop there and if you have questions or comments and I'm happy to hear them.

**Ryan Allsop:** What does the rest of the county do? Seems like a good catch-all. I'll probably reach out to you regarding our Public Safety committee to see if somebody would be a good fit from your team for us to have on board also.

**Erika Lautenbach:** Great.

**Ryan Allsop:** Especially the drug counseling side of your treatment. You sound busy.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Thank you and thank you for the invitation. I think it's going to be a good connection going forward. We are at the end of our meeting time. We'll move our overview of the Commerce Committee subgroups to the next meeting. Chris Trout will also be talking about his business, Wood Stone and we'll be focusing on whichever of our subcommittees are ready to present, there's a lot of work going on in between these meetings. Thank you so much for everyone for being here.

**Ryan Allsop:** Is Chris bringing pizza?

**Chris Trout:** We may have to do a road trip.

**Ryan Allsop:** I'll bring beer.

**Sarah Rothenbuhler:** Excellent plans- Thank you, everybody.

Meeting Closed

Next meeting: Monday, August 15, 2022, 11am

Hybrid Meeting- In-person encouraged and Zoom option available!