

Whatcom County Business and Commerce Committee
Meeting Notes
October 17, 2022

Voting Members Present: Ryan Allsop (Committee Vice Chair), Clark Campbell, Pete Dawson, Casey Diggs, Andrew Gamble, Troy Muljat, Sarah Rothenbuhler (Committee Chair), Brad Rader, Paul Burrill

Voting Members Not Present: Debbie Ahl, Bob Pritchett, Chris Trout

Nonvoting Members Present: Don Goldberg, Eva Schulte, CJ Seitz

Nonvoting Members not Present: Tyler Byrd

Public Present: PUD Sanitation Solid Waste Manager Brandon Brubaker, Royce Buckingham, Lancy Calloway, Jane Carten, Barbara Chase, Cary Clemenson, Rob Dale, Dan Dunne, Rob Fix, Marty Gray, Braden Gustafson, Jon Howe, Liz Howe, Mauri Ingram, Lieutenant Keith Johnson, Whatcom County Health Director Erika Lautenbach, Bellingham Police Chief Rebecca Mertzig, Jennifer Noveck, Guy Occhiogrosso, Sean O'Neill, Louis Parr, Andrea Ruback, Senator Simon Sefzik, Corey Schleitzer, Lyle Sorenson, Gina Stark, Carryn Vande Griend, County Executive Satpal Sidu

Introductions / Administrative Business / Comments welcome from the Public

Committee Chair calls meeting to order

Committee Members introduce themselves

Approve September 2022 minutes

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

Meet Bellingham's New Chief of Police, Rebecca Mertzig

Brief update by Chief Mertzig and Lt Keith Johnson on the City of Bellingham's Community Safety, Plans, Goals Moving Forward (30 mins)

- Q&A (20 mins)

Public Safety sub-committee update given by sub-committee Chair and WCBCC Vice Chair Ryan Allsop (15 mins)

- Q&A (5 mins)

Whatcom County Budget update given by County Executive Satpal Sidhu (5 mins)

- Q&A (10 mins)

Close

Gina Stark: I think the Vice-Chair is here so, we can get started.

Ryan Allsop: We won't call to order, then, we'll just do introductions. That would be great, we'll start with our members.

Casey Diggs: I'm Casey Diggs. I help manage Boundary Bay Brewery.

Clark Campbell: Clark Campbell, President of Gear Aid, representing outdoor recreation.

Eva Schulte: Eva Schulte, I'm from Whatcom Community College and the foundation, representing higher ed.

Don Goldberg: Don Goldberg, representing the Port.

Lance Calloway: Lance Calloway, Associated General Contractors of Washington.

Dan Dunne: Dan Dunne with Caz and Favinger.

Ryan Allsop: Ryan Allsop, Allsop Incorporated.

Cary Clemenson: Cary Clemenson, Matrix Services.

Keith Johnson: Keith Johnson, BPD.

Lyle Sorenson: Lyle Sorenson, Windermere Real Estate.

Rob Fix: Rob Fix, Port of Bellingham.

Corey Schlaitzer: Corey Schlaitzer, City of Bellingham Public Works.

Marty Gray: Marty Gray, Superintendent of Maintenance Public Works Operations.

John Neal: Sean O'Neill, Clean Up Coordinator with the Sanitation Division, Public Works.

Brandon Brubaker: Brandon Brubaker, I'm the Solid Waste Manager.

Police Chief Rebecca Mertzig: Rebecca Mertzig, Bellingham Police Department.

Gina Stark: Gina Stark, Port of Bellingham.

CJ Seitz: CJ Seitz, Western Washington University, representing Higher Ed.

Troy Muljat: Troy Muljat, Committee Member, General Business, Muljat Group.

Seth Fleetwood: Seth Fleetwood, Mayor of Bellingham.

Mauri Ingram: Mauri Ingram, Whatcom Community Foundation.

Jennifer Noveck: Jennifer Noveck, Port of Bellingham.

Satpal Sidhu: Satpal Sidhu, Whatcom County Executive.

Andrew Gamble: Yeah, this is Andrew Gamble, energy chair. Thank you.

Barbara Chase: Sorry, Don. Hi. Barbara Chase, Executive Director of the Whatcom Business Alliance.

Ryan Allsop: I think Paul and Sarah both racing over here.

Don Goldberg: Ryan, while we're waiting, since there's a little bit of business coming up, I just want to remind everybody who's a member, there are a number of you where your term will be ending at the end of January. I'm just going to call out whose terms are ending. You have the choice of, of course, reapplying, which we would love you to do, or maybe you can help find a replacement in your sector. These are the people whose terms will be expiring January 31st. Bob Pritchard, Chris Trout, Casey Diggs, Paul Burrell, Pete Dawson, Andrew Gamble, Debbie Ahl, Sarah, Ryan, CJ, and Eva. Those roles expire January 31st. We would love you to reapply, and you'll be getting a notice from the county execs office.

Ryan Allsop: Okay, since that's pretty much two thirds of the group. (Laughter) I'm assuming that it's going to be a pretty simple process to reapply for those who want to?

Don Goldberg: You do the same thing you did before. It goes in front of the county council. And the only way that it would be a discussion would be if somebody else was applying for that same position.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: Right on, lets approve, is there a motion to approve the meeting minutes?

Clark Campbell: Motion to approve the minutes.

Ryan Allsop: Seconded.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: Okay, so moved. We have our new police chief Rebecca Mertzig and all sorts of great people at the table. Thank you all so much for coming. Do you mind if we just hand the mic over to you?

Police Chief Rebecca Mertzig: I've done my intro probably to half the room already in various capacities, so I'll give you the shortened version. I grew up here in Whatcom County, went to Ferndale High School, graduated from there. So I have a lot of local ties. In fact, my sister works at Dawson and my brother worked at Whatcom. It's really cool to have all those community connections here already. I went to Ferndale, and then to Western for a couple of years, and ended up transferring over to Eastern to pursue a degree in criminal justice. I spent the last 18 years at the Snohomish County Sheriff's Office. When I left there, I was the Chief of Stanwood, which is much different than City of Bellingham. It's been about four and a half months here in the City of Bellingham. It's been amazing. I'm surrounded by amazing people. Obviously, we have some challenges. I can go into those. I prefer more Q&A interactive, if you guys have additional questions, I'd love to hear them.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: I think maybe start off with, we've got some real concerns in our community. The last time Lieutenant Johnson and Police Chief Simons came and spoke there was approximately 1000, and I might be misquoting this, but I think there was 1000 known homeless vehicles on the streets that were refusing care or refusing any sort of help, and that maybe 95% of those were known to have needles and signs of heavy drug use. We've got a real drug addiction, mental health and enabling challenge and we'd like to know what the plans are and how we can help.

Police Chief Rebecca Mertzig: So there's a trifecta of concerns all occurring at once up here, not so much where I was working previously. The first is the jail. We have very limited booking ability. Anything that's not a violent crime and a public safety concern, those folks aren't getting booked. That has severely impacted our ability to hold a level of accountability here in Whatcom County. Another factor in that is staffing. I'm currently down about 30 positions. That's including folks that are on long term medical. I'm not including folks with conditional offers because as someone told me, you don't buy the house until you've seen the inspection. Those are folks that have applied with us that have conditional offers on the table, but have to pass our background process, have to get to the academy, take a polygraph, do a psychological exam and a medical exam. There's a lot of times when that can shift your numbers a little

bit. Solving our staffing can bring a lot of the solutions, especially in the city. I'm looking at those challenges going, I can solve that with a downtown bike patrol. I can solve that with outreach. I could solve that with behavioral health officers. And so really it's my mission and my first priority here in the city, and I spoke about it during the selection process, recruiting is everything right now.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: How many people are applying? Regarding our police force, everyone was treated very poorly for the last few years.

Police Chief Rebecca Mertzig: Yeah, there's a little bit of that sentiment. The legislation that occurred in 2021 adds to that. Washington state is absolutely in last place, it has been for several years for officers per population. We're about 1.2 per 1000. Even to be in the middle, we would have to double. So it's pretty significant in terms of overall numbers. And we know statistically that if crime is up, and violent crime specifically is up, adding more police makes that go down. It's simple math. So again, my highest priority has been recruiting. When I first arrived, I got the unfortunate news that only I think 13 people had signed up for the local public safety test. That's not our agency. That's everybody. Which is diabolically low.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: What did the numbers used to be?

Police Chief Rebecca Mertzig: There were hundreds of people when I first started my career, and now you have recruiters like ours and Whatcom County Sheriff's Office and other agencies, Blaine was there, working the line and saying, Hey, have you considered our agency? And if you haven't, why? We're all competing for the same small group of folks.

One of my first decisions when I came here, and it was a skosh controversial, especially for those in education. You don't want to see education requirements go down, but I needed to cast a wider net. I eliminated that requirement. Just at this last test, I met an amazing young lady who was an EMT. She's got a heart for service. She wants to help her community but didn't finish college. By lifting that requirement, she was able to apply for our agency and she was there on Saturday. I won't see the fruits of that probably for at least a year. Just entry level, it takes someone at least a year to get through not only our process, but the police academy, our field training, and then off probation and then be fully ready to go. We're doing heavy investments in recruiting and retention and all those things to try and get our numbers up. I'm seeing it's not going to happen fast enough for me, I'm a little impatient in terms of staff. But we are seeing a little bit of a curve, an upward trend in terms of hiring.

Don Goldberg: How much do you think the hiring problem is based upon the job and how much is just that everybody right now is having problems hiring?

Police Chief Rebecca Mertzig: I think it's a lot of both. We're all drawing from the same pool. Another thing is, you're not going to see a lot [of lateral], especially up here in Whatcom County. You have the sheriff's office, you have us in terms of larger agencies. And then there's smaller cities, right. Whereas in Snohomish County. If you want to jump around between Lynnwood, Edmonds, Mill Creek and get a change of agency, you don't have to move. You're right there. The housing market definitely plays another factor in all of this. Who wants to move up here if you're a lateral or even thinking about law enforcement? Housing is a big factor as well.

Ryan Allsop: That's a big subject in this group, housing. One of our main subjects for five years.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: It's good that you're pointing it out.

Police Chief Rebecca Mertzig: It's amazing how all these interweave, right? I mean, we're so dependent on the jail to do our job, and we're dependent on housing markets to get people here. We're all on the same page.

Casey Diggs: How do you feel the private/public partnership with RSU is going in the downtown core? Are there any plans from a budgetary standpoint, this might be more of a Mayor Fleetwood question, to

get some more funding to that because they're able to hire quicker those safety agents. What are they, they're not calling them security.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: Are they ambassadors?

Casey Diggs: The ambassador is different. The ambassadors are put on by the Downtown Bellingham Partnership and the RSU is partially run by the city as well as to have building owners contracting them as well.

Police Chief Rebecca Mertzig: I've heard positive interaction, but at the end of the day, I consider it a band aid. Yes, something that was necessary, needed at the time, but it's not a permanent solution because at the end of the day, they observe and report. They call us if things get out of hand. They might be a little more plugged in if they're dealing with it on a day to day basis. They form relationships with folks. That's also what we try to do when we're able to get out in the community more. I can't tell you how many times I've been downtown with guys on patrol and they like, Oh yeah, that's Johnny or Sally or whoever. They know their clientele.

Lyle Sorenson: How has the conversation gone for you and the other law enforcement leaders in our state with our legislators, and reversing some of the unfortunate bills over the past couple of years?

Police Chief Rebecca Mertzig: It went kind of through an ebb and flow, right when first legislation was getting underway there was some very extreme stuff that was on the table that WASPC and WACOPS and organizations like that were able to get whittled down into a bit more palatable... But there was still some huge gaps. We went over a year without the ability to make a Terry Stop, for the folks in the room, that's simply an investigative stop and it gives us time to just figure something out, figure out what's going on, figure out if you have a crime or not. When they made it so that we could not force someone to stick around, so we can investigate if there was a crime, that was a huge tool taken away for us. And also with our mental health crisis that we're experiencing, the legislation made it so we couldn't use contact on those individuals. I've told this story before but I think it's significant. Millcreek had an incident where a gentleman was living in this car, completely refusing services would not get help and just deteriorated, ended up passing away in his vehicle because we could not physically intervene.

There were some unintended consequences to that legislation that has since been reversed, which is great. There was a, I can't remember if it's a Senate bill or House bill, 5919 last year, that was not passed, it kind of just died on the floor. That bill would have fixed the current pursuit situation. You have probably heard about some of our limitations there, The Blake Decision which I talk about all the time, it essentially decriminalized any drug use, hard or otherwise. If somebody is now using fentanyl in downtown Bellingham and I observed that I would hand them a card that says, here's how to get the services and that's it. And then if I caught them the next day or even hours later, I hand them another card. And then the third thing I am allowed to do is issue a ticket to go to court. They probably wouldn't go and I can only keep handing out tickets, there's really no incentive for somebody suffering from that to change.

Ryan Allsop: So, can we open a beer then walk down the street?

Police Chief Rebecca Mertzig: Well, is there an open container ordinance. But the Blake Decision's definitely having an impact. For those folks suffering, there's no incentive to stop right now.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: We're enabling.

Police Chief Rebecca Mertzig: Yes.

Ryan Allsop: What about creative solutions outside the jail? Because the jail is obviously a long term. I think your recruiting chances are better than that getting built fast. First we have to fund it, second permit it, which we've talked a lot about in this group. It's a lengthy, lengthy process. Other options was it Tacoma? One of the big cities down south just passed a no camping within certain distance of shelters or any public property. I think it's Everett or Tacoma, one of the big cities down south, it might have been

Tacoma. And we have the sheriff's, what's it called, the Clean Up Crew? I think Wade, you said you clean up garbage and that's your responsibility, which is an insane amount of work in this city right now. Insane. And I have total empathy for you of it's just incredible what you guys have to do and put up with. But why not have homeless clean them up and put them out there since they're usually the ones making the mess, actually enforce it. So just to disincentivize them, to continue to have those behaviors.

Police Chief Rebecca Mertzig: We would have to be able to book people committing crimes, right? Otherwise, you can't impose a punishment. So again, those other communities are great for thinking of clean up and no camping, but they don't have restrictions that we have.

Ryan Allsop: So you have localized restrictions?

Police Chief Rebecca Mertzig: Right, I could book somebody for a very low-level misdemeanor in Snohomish County right now.

Ryan Allsop: Okay, so if it's localized crime that I'm going to change my question to Satpal, and any city council, county council members as well as Seth, can we change these laws sooner so we can actually enforce what we should be enforcing in our town?

Bellingham Mayor Seth Fleetwood: What specific law are you referring to?

Police Chief Rebecca Mertzig: It's not just about the law itself. It's about where do you put them.

Ryan Allsop: But instead of jailing them, making them work, making them do other things, are there other alternative we can use?

Police Chief Rebecca Mertzig: Alternatives, but again, there has to be processes in place. The other thing we're going to reexamine in January of next year is, the contract with Snohomish County. There's a lot going into that, but they have staffing issues just like we do. Skagit County has said no, because their staffing issues. At the end of the day it's staff. Who's going to run that program? There's a lot to it, a lot of challenges all at once.

Lyle Sorenson: Staffing issues, generally, if you can't attract good staff it's because you're not offering good compensation. I hear you talking about your recruiting challenges and all of those kinds of things. But why aren't we able to recruit laterally from other forces? Do we just not have the resources that offer attractive enough salary and things to make that happen? And the same thing with corrections, actually.

Lyle Sorenson: I know I've heard from the city that the police department is fully funded, but if you're thirty officers short, and even when you're fully staffed, you're half the level that you think we should be at. That doesn't sound like fully funded to me, but yet I see the city spending millions and millions on parks. I think that we need to reprioritize. I know that's not for you, as just being said, for the good of the order. What can we do as citizens to encourage the powers that be to fund you so that we should be able to provide the police services that we need and maybe some of the other creative suggestions that have been thrown out.

Police Chief Rebecca Mertzig: It's a chicken and egg... what sets them apart makes it attractive is that we have specialty units, things that outside of patrol and detectives. That's all I have right now is patrol answering 911 calls and detectives. Things like behavioral health and bike patrols....(conversation not clear) I would love to have. That's why people come and go and they can do something different. Whereas some of the smaller cities don't have those options. I need people to have specialties and I need specialties to get people. And then the housing thing as well.

Ted Mischaikov: What percentage of your time is spent ... standard ops? Any number you can put on that?

Police Chief Rebecca Mertzig: I'm going to volley over to Keith.

Sound could not pick up Lieutenant Keith Johnson's response

Police Chief Rebecca Mertzig: I don't think we have the infrastructure, to be honest for people that need a lot of interventions, people that need a high level of care. And again where are we going to put them?

Lieutenant Keith Johnson: I think there is funding, but it's diverted to alternative response groups. Which is good, I mean, that's what people are asking for over the last couple of years. And there's a lot of groups that have developed and are growing that help out with those behavioral health issues. I think that's where a lot of that money is going.

Casey Diggs: But when those fail, you guys are still called. It'd be nice to see a percentage of that help you guys stay safe as well, because once it's escalated to that point...

Police Chief Rebecca Mertzig: We have programs, the behavioral health officer program is amazing. I wouldn't staff it with less than two people because the one guy that did was completely overwhelmed and we had way too many cases to manage. He loved doing it, but he got burnt out real quick, so I wouldn't staff it with less than two just start.

Clark Campbell: What was that role again?

Police Chief Rebecca Mertzig: Behavioral Health Officer. It was a co-responder unit. We already had on staff... (turns away from camera, hard to hear). They're already ready to go and working with our officers. But to have that co-responder unit back in place is going to be, I think, very impactful.

Clark Campbell: And what's the funding source for that?

Rebecca Mertzig: Well, then we contact, I believe, our behavioral health, the non-commission side of that. Those responders are from Whatcom County...

Whatcom County Health Director Erika Lautenbach: Those are our staff in the health department. They're funding through our behavioral health funding.

Ryan Allsop: Which is great. We do have two people full time in the police department and they do a ton of work. You were saying sometimes there comes a point where you need uniformed officers.

Clark Campbell: But, I'm hearing correctly that there's two for the entire county.

Police Chief Rebecca Mertzig: I don't have any right now.

Clark Campbell: What I'm trying to understand is, we have a policing issue, no doubt. This other alternative that can augment and maybe do those first calls. It sounds like there's a major capacity constraint there. If two is what we have for the City of Bellingham and they're co-funded through health department and police departments. This is my understanding.

Whatcom County Health Director Erika Lautenbach: We are hiring two co-responders for the sheriff's office as well

Clark Campbell: I have a daughter who works in homeless outreach in Salt Lake City before a clinic, and that clinic is just the city of Salt Lake City. Obviously, it's a bigger city in Bellingham, but significantly more staffing. And they work in conjunction with both the hospitals and the health department and the police department. There are other models out there, but it seems like funding is where it all kind of kind of comes down to here.

Senator Simon Sefzik: Can you touch on the situation behind Walmart too? I have a lot of people that ask me, can you just maybe explain briefly what the problem is?

Police Chief Rebecca Mertzig: From my understanding that is a privately owned piece of land. There's an entire infrastructure in terms of a homeless encampment. We got to see that after an incident occurred. There's a lot of body camera footage back there, but it's going to be up to the property owner themselves to clean up because it's private.

Lyle Sorenson: But what about municipal code enforcement in that area? I mean, if I had a piece of property and I built in the wetlands and I put up structures without permits, your code enforcement officer be right over, slap a red tag on me and start charging per day. So why isn't the city using code enforcement as a tool? Those things are obviously in violation.

Ryan Allsop: I would say, as a property owner who had those enforcements placed on us at \$500 a fine a day and we've sent letters back saying we're the victim, not the actual problem, when it's not our fault, the responsibility, if we want to fund fencing, I mean, ten acres to fence, probably \$250,000 to keep homeless out. I don't think that's fair to the property owner. So that's something that actually happened to us. How many have you been to the same spot over and over and over, I assume it's probably one of those things.

Lyle Sorenson: I wouldn't necessarily say the property owners, but people building structures.

Ryan Allsop: Yes

Police Chief Rebecca Mertzig: Ultimately, at the end of the day, it's a jail issue. If we come back multiple times and we can't book them, they don't care if we say they're going to be fined.

Ryan Allsop: We've had every kind of example you can have on our Meridian property, it's really challenging as a property owner and the police come and try to help. It's just for our own safety that I walk out there and try to deal with them as property owner. It's not necessarily to enforce the law, it's more for our own safety. One of the guys ended up dying because of a fentanyl overdose right in front of our building on Meridian. It's a tough one. That's why we're having this discussion, this conversation, Erika and I have met, she's going to speak a little bit later, but it's really challenging. But I think we're at the point where we're kind of getting desperate as a city. That's what Erika's hoping to help with

It's truly impacting business here and people's lives. I've grown up here my whole life. I'm from Bellingham, and if I can't send my kid down any street in this town, then I don't feel like we're doing our job. And there's multiple streets right now that I would never send my kid down. One of them happens to be part of the port. I would not send my kid down Cornwall. We've gotten to the point we've let it go. And that there's a lot of obviously legislative stuff. There's a lot of hiring, staffing. But that's what I think our goal is to kind of start talking a little bit outside the box. And if we can help as businesses, please ask us, please, let's love to be able to help in any way we can.

Ted Mischaikov: Ted Mischaikov, welcome to Bellingham. Are you planning to present a plan to the council.

Police Chief Rebecca Mertzig: I haven't been asked, but I certainly could.

Ted Mischaikov: And when you were interviewing with the city, I'm sure you've met the mayor, the council, you've met other leaders. Was it drawn out with a response to this critical issue that our city has gone through over the last 5 to 10 years?

Police Chief Rebecca Mertzig: I think, again, it comes down to that jail. That is a huge part of all this, because if you want a public safety solution, a lot of my solution has to do with holding people accountable by taking them to jail. And then we can talk about that compassion piece. When they're in jail, they're more likely to listen to hey, how about you get into treatment? How about you get these services? Those are a lot of the conversations they're having with Safety Advisory Committee. I just left the Incarceration Reduction Taskforce meeting and all those conversations are about that. Regarding the

jail, we're what, five years out if we break ground tomorrow. And if I could offer solutions for a temporary jail. Who is going to staff it? That's what it comes down to.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: Build it and they will come. Maybe Mayor Seth or Executive Sidhu could talk to us about the jail and what our best timeframe scenario is, what we can do to support.

Bellingham Mayor Seth Fleetwood: I'm happy to start. Before I answer that, Ted, could you restate I'm having some problems hearing things today. Next meeting, I'll try to come in person. What was the question you asked about five, ten years?

Ryan Allsop: Ted, can you get in front of one of these owls?

Ted Mischaikov: My question was, is part of the process of coming to Bellingham and recognizing the state that city is in, what is the plan for a three-point plan or something of that sort? And was that a request by the hiring committee of our new chief as to how you manage this situation, when we know there's implementation lag, there's political lag, there's funding lag, there's all sorts of inertia that we've already recognized and dealt with as a community. So how do we cut through that, recognize it and deal with it in a timely manner? There's apparently \$25 to \$40 million spent on this issue in our county annually. I can't imagine that's not enough money to effectively produce results. And so that is the questions, Seth. Thanks.

Bellingham Mayor Seth Fleetwood: If I may, is people know Chief Flo Simon, Chief Mertzig might have mentioned this, retired in June. We had a robust hiring process, the quality of which included questions that related to the candidates, the challenges that we face here in Bellingham. So they were certainly aware and had opportunity to speak to it. Chief Mertzig was very aware of the nature of our staffing problems. She alluded to that being a problem in law enforcement recruitment that's felt nationwide and very much in our region. We have been responsive. We care enormously about that. I know that there's often I think, a view from some that the nature of Bellingham left leaning politics is such that we either play a role somehow in creating the problem or there's a reluctance to address the problem. And I take issue with both of those claims. We have a very capable and caring staff that has been all hands on deck working on these problems from the beginning of the pandemic. We've tried to be as responsive as we can. We set up, I think, as has probably been shared before, a new sanitation division that is doing the best they can to be responsive to the problems that we've had with increased trash and needles cleanups generally around the city.

Problem is, the inputs from this whole destabilized system has seen such increases that it's overwhelmed our system across the board. We're trying to get back to a coherent criminal justice system that includes, among other things, being able to book people, lifting the booking restrictions so that we can start arresting people and holding people that need to be held. I agree with the observation that so many make that there are a lot of people with either drug issues or co-occurring mental health who need the force, frankly, and the threat of jail time to accept as a condition treatment. We need to get the jail component working. We, the mayors in Whatcom County, all of us signed on to a letter urging that that effort commence it all due speed. I know that that message was heard by the county council. In their defense, there was a number of efforts that are afoot right now working actively this fall. They're going to put recommendations forward. We're going to, I'm confident, have a proposition on the ballot next November. Too early to...

Sarah Rothenbuhler: November of 2023?

Bellingham Mayor Seth Fleetwood: November 2023. So all have, of course, observed that that means we're not going to have a jail built and ready to go for at the soonest several years. The question becomes, what can we do in the interim? Chief Mertzig made reference to this, but we are actively trying to contract. We thought we had something in Snohomish County that fell through for issues having to do with Snohomish County politics, but we're looking at the first of the year with hope being able to find a facility with whom we can contract both Whatcom County and Bellingham so that we can start arresting people at a higher rate and get the system working as it's supposed to. We're going to have a process in

the coming weeks, actually discussions not only with the City Council but with our peers, the court and the county as it relates to coming forward with a legislative agenda and an ask that we're going to be seeking. That's going to include possibility of not only criminal justice reforms as needed, but increased funding for mental health treatment, addiction issues so that we create a coherent system whereby people are arrested, they go through the criminal justice system, and if conditions are imposed as a requirement of sentence for either mental health needs or addiction services, that we've got the infrastructure to send them to it. We're doing a whole series of things. Chief Mertzig, the moment she came on the job actively looked as the highest priority issues relating to staffing and creating creative responses that address this challenging dynamic that we have in the entire region. We're looking at all of the above.

Salaries is one of them. We've got a pretty good system with steps that get you up to over \$100,000 as a new recruit within several years, but so do people down south. And so we're actively reviewing that to be as competitive as we can. There's still a great deal that's very appealing about that. We've seen the pendulum switch back two years ago, of course, with the at the height of the pandemic and the height of the marches and the reaction to the death of George Floyd and all of that when there was a lot of criticism of our police force that was so unfair. And yes, it did have an impact on morale without question. But we've also seen the pendulum swinging back. It's always been the case that the great majority of people in Bellingham support our police. We have an excellent police force. The reference that was made by how some years ago we've got a lot of officers who are around 50 when they applied in the mid to late nineties, we'd get 250 to 300 applications for a job. There was one call out sometime earlier this year where I think we got eight and we're starting to see that tick back up. I think the last one since you lifted the college requirement, Chief Mertzig, I think we got back up to 40ish, as I recall, and I'm hoping that number is just going to increase. So anyway, I forgive me, I'm talking too long, but there's just a lot of work that we're doing.

There was a question asked about RSU. I remember or recall that that was at the height of last winter when there were so many challenges downtown with homeless people. Omicron was on the uptick. We had a really, really difficult winter and we were trying to create some things that increased assurances amongst downtown business people and reduced anxiety and de-escalated concerns. And that was the context in which we hired security and RSU. We've increased that. We've seen good positive feedback, but of course it's limited, even though they're doing an exceptional job. Initially the idea was that that was going to bridge the gap until we got the Ambassadors program working. They're doing a great job. We'll keep working on staffing and then get some buildings built downtown with workforce and market rate and just get more people enjoying all the potential that downtown has. We're yeah, I'll let it go with that. We're everyone's doing their best. Funding is not the issue. My budget that I've handed off to council has increased positions in police. But of course, as we all observe, it's not a budget issue per se, it's a staffing and recruitment. And if we have to increase salaries, retention bonuses. You go right down the list. We're looking and examining all of those things. We've recently hired community resource officers. Rebecca I don't know if you want to talk to that or not, but we think that there's going to be benefit from that. In fact, why don't you just give a briefest comment from the community resource officer positions that we've created?

Police Chief Rebecca Rebecca Mertzig: So those four positions are we have approval for them that we're just kind of in the middle of a labor issue that's kind of put the brakes on it. But once that's been resolved, we're hoping that we can move on it pretty fast in four weeks. But there's some pending labor items we have to deal with first.

Bellingham Mayor Seth Fleetwood: It will. I'm confident we can work those things out, but just give an overview of what that's going to do.

Police Chief Rebecca Rebecca Mertzig: Yeah. So those folks are going to be they're going to be doing anything in the police department that doesn't require a badge and gun. If I could sum it up in a sentence. There's investigative stuff that needs to be done just to kind of help patrol out. And if you need to make a report and you don't necessarily have any suspect information or things like that that can help augment some of our technology demands that we have. We're becoming more and more technology heavy just in

order to do our job more effectively. We're hoping to recruit in some who are retiring because our retirement age is 53. That allows them to draw their retirement and work basically and be still be part of the Bellingham Police Department family and have the special skills and knowledge and experience they've had over the last 30 years of doing the job. So that we're hoping to wrap in a few folks from that. Plus, it can be a great stepping stone for somebody who wants to be in law enforcement isn't quite there yet, but wants to be part of our department.

Clark Campbell: And that's four positions?

Police Chief Rebecca Rebecca Mertzig: Four this year.

Clark Campbell: On a base of what, did you have any of those positions previously?

Rebecca Mertzig: We did not.

Clark Campbell: Whole new program. Okay.

Casey Diggs: So will they be going to fender benders so that KJ doesn't get pulled out of service or what? Or what is the Community Resource Officer?

Police Chief Rebecca Rebecca Mertzig: Yeah. So in a fender bender, you could have a crime. So we probably wouldn't send them to that. But anything that's or again, you're just you're more reactive somebody they can take an additional report or something that maybe a detective needs to follow later. Anybody that comes to the station there is probably a full time job and certainly managing our body camera stuff. I can imagine someone doing that work or actually hoping one of our retirees is going to take that over because he's very knowledgeable, would require no training. So just kind of the odds and then stuff again where you don't need a commissioned officer to be there.

Bellingham Mayor Seth Fleetwood: And Sarah, can I just respond to one thing you mentioned?

Sarah Rothenbuhler: You bet.

Bellingham Mayor Seth Fleetwood: I don't know if I mentioned this or not. You mentioned that there's 1000 people on the streets. That's the annual point in time count and that's conducted, I think it's in January, and there were around 1000 homeless people identified in Whatcom County, but about two thirds of those are couch surfing, if you will, for lack of a better term. So the actual number on the streets is considerably less than 1000. And then, of course, we've got a robust social service universe in Bellingham who actively engage, including the Opportunity Council's hot team, helping people get into services. So the people we're seeing on the streets are the hardest to serve. They're the low barrier group that doesn't want to go into facilities to a very large degree. And they're the hardest to serve. And they are our primary challenge.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: Thank you. And the population in the woods off of Meridian, what's the estimated population count there?

Police Chief Rebecca Rebecca Mertzig: Back behind Walmart.

Marty Gray w/PUD: Oh, I don't know exact, but a lot. There's probably there's probably 60 or 70 folks behind Home Depot, that camp is growing quickly. And Walmart's probably got 100 back there at any given time.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: There's a couple hundred right there.

Ryan Allsop: I think those numbers are low. I think it's two thirds, maybe of a thousand are on the street. I think it's probably a low assessment based on my personal experience of having to deal them all the time.

Police Chief Rebecca Rebecca Mertzig: The whole idea is that you don't have people back and just throwing them in a horrible facility isn't doing it. So when people need to be have their adult time out, that's what I'm calling it, then let's give them the best possible outcome after that. So we're probably not going to see that very well. I may not change somebody's life in the five days or but we're giving them every tool and opportunity.

Voice from Audience: You mentioned that the officers are encouraged, or forced to retire at 53...?

Police Chief Rebecca Rebecca Mertzig: It's not forced. The financial advantage of retiring at 53, that's where you maximize your benefit...

Ryan Allsop: Be officers that are retired at 53. Those are the most experienced.

Eva Schulte: 100%.

Ryan Allsop: And also probably the most physically fit for the most part.

Eva Schulte: Debatable.(Laughter and voices talking over each other)

Police Chief Rebecca Rebecca Mertzig: Yes. We're working on some sort of incentivizing retention. And when people look at our agency, especially the younger folks are very interested in 'what are you going to do for me? How are you going to help my well-being and my mental health?' Because let's be honest, the average person sees about four critical incidents or has a close relationship with a loss of a loved one, a traumatic car wreck. Officers in a 20-year career see 188 critical incidences and they're close to them. We have to do everything we can to protect their mental health, physical health. I'm doing as much as I can, Bellingham is an amazing department to work for. It's family and you're going to be taken care of there.

Don Goldberg: So we're seeing a lot of changing hands between the city and the county, right in your department, because we only have a limited number of officers within the whole region. Right?

Police Chief Rebecca Rebecca Mertzig: Right.

Don Goldberg: And everybody's looking for officers.

Police Chief Rebecca Rebecca Mertzig: That's right.

Cary Clemenson: Cary Clemenson, Matrix Services, and you've got quite an uphill battle in your hands. Just to you give you an idea. In 1986, when I graduated from Ferndale High School, I had to go to a County Council meeting for an economics class. What were they talking about in 1986? We need a new jail. It was two years under when I think the other was built.

Police Chief Rebecca Rebecca Mertzig: Yes and it's still going to be a challenge. But I agree with the mayor. I think for the first time in a long time, you have a lot of people wanting alignment and people collaborate and understanding. Right now we're driving a Honda from the 90's that's barely running. We just I just want something reliable. Give me even a Subaru

Sarah Rothenbuhler: Is there any way to expedite so we're not waiting a year and how many months until we even vote on this?

Bellingham Mayor Seth Fleetwood: I don't think there is, sorry. First off, in order to get it on the ballot for the general election in November, in this case, County Council has to vote on a resolution to place it on the ballot. And that would have to happen by August 2nd, I think was the date this year. It's the first week in August to get everything to the auditor's office so that it can get on for the ballot. It's too late to put it on, for example, this year. So that's the issue we're facing.

Ryan Allsop: How do school bonds do it? They don't always do it in November or they do it when you get the special election come February.

Bellingham Mayor Seth Fleetwood: You mean like a special election? That's going to be up to the county.

County Executive Satpal Sidhu: That's just what an ordinance, we cannot use special elections like people propose, like what we do for school districts. It's not the same.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: We're running out of time here, maybe we can get your advice on the best people to bring in on the jail, status and what we can do to help expedite, step out of the box on how things have been done, time frame, etc.. Public Works, thank you so much for you all being here. Is there anything else you wanted to say or anything that we can do to help or any recommendations?

PUD Sanitation Solid Waste Manager Brandon Brubaker: Yes, a huge thank you to the police department, without their help and support, there's a lot of stuff that we aren't able to do. We've changed a lot of our process with the way things are reported. The way camping has been reported and the way trash has been reported and we try to be as responsive as we can with that. This is my entire department right here. These two are rockstars. We do have that extra help for labor and we're doing parks and (muffled) private property is, really is constraining some of the programs that we've started, though, downtown with the coordination of downtown business partnership with doing twice monthly cleanups down in downtown, cleaning up alleyways, bringing street sweepers, getting the catch basins pumped out, trying to capture as much as we with downtown business partnership. We're kind of trying to do it by location, kind of bringing people's spirits back. I know business owners downtown, like Casey, we can't always get there before they open their doors in the morning. But we are trying to show that extra presence and be that extra down presence down there.

Ryan Allsop: What about fencing off common areas, repeat problem areas that ...

PUD Sanitation Solid Waste Manager Brandon Brubaker: Not a huge fan of fencing, to be honest. A lot of the tools that the community that fencing keeps the good ones out, the bad ones steal building materials. We've done split rail fences down some trailheads, and it's a constant fix, constant maintenance, the changing fences and there's other tools, tools. And so they'll use that. We are exploring other avenues and doing restoration type band-aid efforts. We're starting a hydroseed program to hopefully discourage people from going back into areas. It also informs people when they're on the trails...

Clark Campbell: So what sort of safety concerns do you guys deal with or challenges to deal with in terms of managing sharp items and things like that? Or is that a daily thing for your team?

PUD Sanitation Solid Waste Manager Brandon Brubaker: So our contractor, they're the ones that go into... (sound poor quality) What we're dealing with is more municipal. Touch it once, get in to get it into a truck and then dispose of it properly on the back end. Sorting through everything and trying to pull all those things out from a risk management side of things, we just got rid of that because, A, when we're on the site conditions change pretty rapidly, whether we think it's an abandoned site and it may not be. We just want to get in and get out. It's just way more efficient to get it and get out and be ahead of it. Instead of doing that front and sorting and having that extra exposure.

Clark Campbell: And what was the sorting requirement?

Brandon Brubaker: (poor sound quality) So the risk assessment and SSC and the transfer stations agree

Sarah Rothenbuhler: That makes sense.

Ryan Allsop: In the contract crews abatement crew, I see the vans and trucks basically especially abatement for same as this right and then there's certified and insured for the...(poor sound quality)

Brandon Brubaker: We've worked with them for three For reference, we've just the way we're capturing data. And when you say are you going back to the same spot all the time...how do we mitigate those sites? How do we get these sites restored so it's back to Bellingham that we want it to be for all the people who live here. We also have an empowering program that was Keith's idea and Public Works supported it. It's a program where we go and give these people, especially RVs and vehicles on the side of the road garbage bags and let them know, we'll pick this up for you. Make sure it's contained. Set it there. We did a pilot down on Cornwall and captured 150 bags so far since middle of July.

Ryan Allsop: I see them out there on the street and in the green land.

Multiple voices and conversation

Marty Gray w/PUD: It's voluntary. But I think for me, if we're going down to lower Cornwall now, we've done over 11 tons of waste removal on lower Cornwall since June 15. What we're seeing now is there's still a lot of waste, but at least there the community down there is organized enough to keep it in specific locations on the right way. So our crews from a safety standpoint, aren't having to navigate in between the RV's, behind the RV's not as much, which helps them.

PUD Sanitation Solid Waste Manager Brandon Brubaker: And that eliminates the conversation of don't take this, take this inside.

Police Chief Rebecca Mertzig: It's understood. That's all not right.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: You're essentially front line and so would you think we're escalating our numbers of people?

Marty Gray w/PUD (rough transcription far from the owl and muffled): As an example that I've seen going on ride alongs with the police department on Fridays and one of the things I've observed was the camp behind the parking lot behind Home Depot. I think I was with Lt. Murphey, she shared with going for shows the last time there was like that different size says we've been there and there are days it feels like it can be very overwhelming. I've seen removing 29.5 tons of trash a month just from the homeless camps. It's definitely growing. I agree, is the idea of trying to put some security fencing behind their building to try to fence the property and the homeless go back and stealing their fencing and using it protect their own structure. But we do have an outstanding working relationship with the Bellingham Police Department who help with some of the large clean up site done for city hall. And we have actually to work collaboratively with the cleanup plan. So it's not just the new solid waste division that we started the past year, but other main equipment operators from street storm sewer, water division, APL, we've basically taken dump truckloads down the street as the city, but we are doing everything inside the building. At least part has made us feel safe the whole time. So without them I don't think it would be successful.

Senator Simon Sefzik: Yeah, Simon Sefzik, and I'm not saying I know what the alternative would be, so I'm not going to say that this is an easy answer. But do you think there is a risk that when you know that essentially you have a state funded garbage service, that you're going to go and do clean out that area. Does that have an effect of encouraging and growing some of that population there? If they know that you are going to provide that service to them or that end up in building or growing these things?

Marty Gray: Sometimes we are frustrated by some of the services around town. And one of the things we try to discourage, like realizing that Domino's Pizza, will take their leftover pizzas to the camps to get rid of them. People are donating clothing, and they think they're doing good they don't realize the clothes end up in a pile that people trash within a couple days. I felt sometimes if you put a bird feeder out and birds are going to come but at some point the squirrel is going to show up because of the way it is and sometimes I think these services are out there doing more damage that are doing good. I think that they see us as part of the police force. Well, we're no but it is it's a problem that's getting worse and we're

having to branch out to build in the assault waste division so we can be proactive and safe in some of these communities. But quite frankly, we're one step forward, two step back, driving out the Guide North behind Olive Garden all the way to Walmart and all through the woods....

Whatcom County Health Director Erika Lautenbach: I just want to add, I would hope that everyone and I just want to add that we've doubled we've requested of our additional doubling of our contribution to the salary side of it. And I do just I think in some ways. (multiple people are talking over her because of something with the camera)

Sarah Rothenbuhler: Sorry, everyone on Zoom. Technical difficulties.

Whatcom County Health Director Erika Lautenbach: I do talk about it could be creating more clientele. But we also see, especially around the waterways, if we don't clean it up, it gets in the river, there's solid waste, contamination issues and things like that. And we're in the downtown core scene, seeing folks along those creeks. And it's great to be able to clean up, especially in those critical areas. So yeah, so we're from our health department perspective, our solid waste funds helping to support these programs and we're looking to add more.

Marty Gray: The community does not end there. And I'm going to say and like I said, thanks for all those who work and hope to feel safe. That's the most important thing here. We have a great representative police department. I'm grateful for that.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: I wish we could hear more, but to all of you, thank you so much for the work you're doing and the realities you're sharing with us. In regards to our subcommittees the newly created Public Safety Subcommittee is headed by Ryan and Erika. Do you mind taking 5 minutes to give us a brief?

Whatcom County Health Director Erika Lautenbach: Okay, I'm not a public safety person, But, Ryan and I have been talking about convening a subgroup on homelessness and this would be a fixed number of meetings and time limited. It's not we're not going to replicate some of the other failed workers that we've had around homelessness. That's the goal anyway. And I can just give you a sense of what we're thinking in terms of probably starting sometime by December, having six sections, the first being kind of a one on one, the second being going through the various funding streams, how we're spending the money, what's available, what's not, what would happen if we allocated funds in different ways and what implications of that would be. The third would be kind of the big picture, all the Whatcom County. So data challenges revisiting our strategic plan and homelessness, looking at the overview of where we're seeing homelessness, etc. And then session four would be really kind of digging into the folks that are actually homeless, so who have comorbidities like substance use or mental health. What are the folks that are homeless families with children? It's chronically homeless. It's youth and it's folks that need workforce housing, that are that are working, that are working poor and can't afford housing in county, and then thinking about what are the gaps in services. And I know we're also I'm on the state advisory committee for the jail project, and we're also thinking about, especially as it relates to the jail population, how we're supporting services and what those gaps are, and then understanding the needs of various folks.

And they're pretty significant. I think you mentioned we've all talked a lot about the jail, but over 80% of people in the jail have significant profound mental illness, substance use disorder. We're seeing that a lot in the homeless population, too. So, this session will be about current strategy. What are the best practices and models that we know and that what's emerging, what are promising practices and how do we potentially implement some of those and in the community and also come together around what our shared strategy is for asking for funding and grants, etc.. And then I think such sessions will pull it all together. And we're hopeful that this will also include all of our city partners and be able to have our region congeal around a set of strategies, priorities and activities that we want to move forward. Because I think that has been one of the challenges is understanding where are we all headed? We have a good grounding and where we need to go. How do we want to prioritize and how do we ask for what we need from our state and federal partners? So that's the that's kind of the landscape. I understand that we do have a quorum limit as far as business and commerce committee members go in order to be the subcommittee, but really want to get that rolling in sessions.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: It won't be a problem with our other subcommittees as well. So we haven't seen it yet. Once you get those dates, we'll post the agenda.

Ryan Allsop: And so that whole excellent way of recruiting for people who would like to be out there looking at public works as somebody would be great to have a representative.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: Really, anyone in the room is welcome.

Ryan Allsop: And the goal with all these subcommittees it's really try to support action. Maybe we can't help expedite the jail, but we can try to come up with any ideas, alternatives, ideas that there's a lot of case there's been a lot of research. It'd be great to bring back to community to make change sooner than obviously the time frame we're all working under, which is especially when recruitment to police or jail or mental health facilities that we don't have the beds, we don't there's a lot of limitations that we're working with. We're just trying to make change.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: Okay. Thank you so much Erika and Ryan. Executive Sidhu. We probably are going to run 5 minutes over again, my apologies. Executive Sidhu, did you want to talk about the Whatcom County Budget?

County Executive Satpal Sidhu: Yeah. Thank you. Thank you for the opportunity. Good afternoon, everybody. First, I want to let all the people who are attending in person know that all the sound is very muffled for us people. It's pretty hard to make out what is going on. Either we should all start attending in person or I think that if you have individual mikes or some of some, something needs to be done because half of the conversation is lost.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: Agreed. We're hoping to get some improvements going.

Don Goldberg: Our IT department basically said it needs to be near the Owl when you're talking.

County Executive Satpal Sidhu: We are getting ready as an administration to present our budget to the council which we should be doing next Tuesday at the council meeting. And I can just share with you some highlights or a sneak peek of this. The major thing is that our general fund, our revenues, even throughout the COVID, have not been down as we all expected. In 2020 we were asked by the Council to cut the budget by 10% and prepare for a 20% budget cut by before the end of the year. We did furloughs. We did so many things. But the federal help this is very rare that in this time of crisis the federal government was very proactive. In 2020, the CARES Act dollars came directly recognizing the governments need help. And then we had the American rescue plan funds. So what this has done that our general fund, which has been more like in 2018, 19, was \$15, \$16 million. It rose to \$19 million at end of 2020 and end of 21 we rose high as \$24 million, a little bit less, but in that range. And in 2022, we still maintaining at \$24 million. And what we are projecting for 2023 and 2024 the ending balance of general fund to be 22.3 million to 19.3 million. So we have. I've been very cautious about all the things we all hear about the economy. Next 2023 or next two years recession is being talked about.

Stock market has been going up and down and everything. We wanted to be very prudent about it. And we have kept enough of our general fund reserve so that we don't get caught if there is a hard time. Now, this spike of \$24, \$23 million over a couple of years has been because of the infusion of federal government and state government funds, which have been used. And we saved up our county money because our county money doesn't have any strings on it. And we can carry on forward for as long as we wanted. Whereas the government money which comes in, it was only one time money and we had to be very prudent about it. So use that places that we can save our money. The second thing I want to share with you is that this year has been our main motto When vision is to maintain strong health of county's financial, maintain sound financial health for the county. And one of the things came up for us for last year and this year was the recruitment and retention. You have heard about it. It's so hard vacancies. We have almost 10% vacancies in county wide on an almost 1000 people organization, which is substantial, and it

is sometimes disruptive, especially in public safety, in engineering, and even in the criminal justice system. Hard to find attorneys and things.

So what we did, we did a special study of the all unrepresented people, how we compare with other peers and in the private sector to keep our talent. And so we have been discussing with the council all along, and we have made this budget as a recruitment and retention budget. So we are taking some special initiatives on that front and we want to maintain dedicated, skilled workforce the other community needs. I want to just share with you that what we are focusing on is the public safety. One is that we invested ARPA dollars in the criminal justice system means that both the prosecuting attorneys department and on the public defender's department, we have spent two plus million dollars or something to hire extra attorneys, and we even proposed an extra commissioner or a judge for that matter, to expedite. Of course, we just getting the COVID condition released by the Supreme Court and of this month. And because the Supreme Court conditions were still in place and we were not able to hold that many trials as we thought we would, but we had a lot of discussions with the judges, everybody. And I think that process is moving forward. We believe that 2023, with the help from prosecuting attorney's office and the public defender, we can really move the backlog out. We don't want people to be hanging out there and not knowing their fate of whatever the offenses they have done.

The other is child and the other is alternate response. If you've seen that the that we have made a special task force, or a team called alternate response team so that we avoid people sending to jail. We have implemented in City of Bellingham only our ultimate aim is to expand to all county, and we have county ourselves have committed over \$2 million to that program and it has started this year and will continue to work with that and city. We're working together and as we expand, we will have a little more finances and we are asking legislature for more finances into that. Of course, we have a stakeholder advisory committee. The jail problem we talked about, they are going through the final negotiations or discussions. We believe by end of the year we will have a report, stakeholder advisory committee recommendations to the council, the size, location, services to be provided inside and outside this safety facility and what would be our investments into the physical jail, which looks like more like north of \$150 million and which was \$50 million in 2011, 2012. So, this is we as a community, when we make these decisions on don't make any decisions. This is the consequences of that. And the other thing you probably see in that child and family initiative, there is a Proposition five buy put out by the citizens to do provide more services to the families, needy families and children, 0 to 5.

Those are the formative years. And there was a long discussion in the council and council approved that and it is on the ballot, and we'll find out in November how did it do? And then we will have a plan to deploy that money. It has a sunset clause on it, which I really very, very prefer. I think every tax should have a sunset clause on it and let the council at that time should decide to continue or not continue. And this has a ten year, it's around eight or some million dollars a year. So this is an \$80 million initiative over ten years to provide these services, these families. The other part is you heard about the emergency medical services, EMS levy renewal, and that is after the for six years of doing this first-time levy This is on the ballot now. And we are expecting, and this has increased in the in the funding from past because we want to revamp the training of paramedics as well as strengthen the basic life services throughout the county. The other initiative we are taking is the building climate resiliency. We are hiring a climate manager in natural resources. I mean, these are the highlights. I'm not giving you numbers. I'm promising you, Sara, that either in December or in the new year, once the budget is all done and through the council, I would be happy to have a session with the with this committee and take an hour to have this budget discussion and where we are spending money and why and have Q&A is about that.

Of course, the flood mitigation, it's a long process. We have done some work on the flood itself. Part of the call is split channel north of Emerson Bridge has been completed already where we scraped some gravel and other things inside the bed off the river and there have been designs to put berms around Nooksack, Everson and Sumas so that future floods, they are protected as well as we are working with Canadians that we have told them you will get our water no matter what we do. They cannot avoid that because they are 80 feet below. Everson Abbotsford is so water is going to go there, but it should be more a collaborative effort and they should be prepared. So we are working collaboratively with provincial government and with the with the local government in Abbotsford in that area. And our county and our

governor's office is involved so that when we do, they are ready for it. They have plans to handle that water when it does happen. So we are seeking funding this year, about \$20 million plus from the legislature in the coming legislative session for the some of the projects, the overall thing looks more like 200 to \$400 million to resolve this flood issues long term in the whole basin.

So we'll talk about affordable housing and homelessness. We are in addition to our plans we have we are making provisions in the money which we have talked about it and the 1590 money which council passed and city passed countywide, 1% of that money. And we have deployed a lot of money like we have built building, finishing up the way station, which will help the homelessness issue with public private partnership. Sammamish Commons, which is getting being completed as well as Forest and Laurel building, which county is give up the property of. Of this project and \$2 million. We have invested \$2 million, a little less than \$2 million in acquiring a property ten acres in Ferndale for Kulshan land trust to gather the money so that in a couple of years they can build affordable housing there. And we are looking at some projects in Everson as well. The behavioral health services, I think Crisis Stabilization Center is not enough. We are asking legislature to put more money in behavioral health services outside the jail. What happens is I would say one third of our jail population is ready to go for services and we don't need to keep them in in the most expensive Hilton in our county. And but we don't have a place that we can send them to.

And they are not getting better. And we are we are spending a lot of money on that. That's not a good proposition. But that is something we lost the Western states hospital because they lost their accreditation. And we as a community, we are proposing 500 beds between Blaine and Everett. A public private partnership, something that kind of capacity. We need to relieve all the pressure on our jails. This is not a problem. Only Whatcom County. This is a problem in every county. We have people. They should not be jailed, or they should be provided services and we are not able to. And we need that kind of solution there. Of course, Waterbury adjudication issue. We are reaching out again to the legislature to provide funding for the solutions table. This is another subject. I had a brief conversation with Sarah, and I would like to come and have that more open discussion about it. And we are continuing to follow up on that, that ultimately, we have to sit around the table and find a solution. Courts are not going to solve the solution. They can actually complicate stuff for us. So this is, I wanted to just stop here. If anybody has a quick question. We are already 7 minutes over for time. But I promise that myself and Tyler, we will come to this committee and spend a lot more time and answer all your questions.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: Thank you. We do have one question here.

Clark Campbell: Probably not so much questions that follow as a statement. If we're going to schedule a special or a session of this group to just talk about the budget, it might actually be good to have Tyler come in and also present on the ARPA dollars, sort of separate from the general fund. We did get a presentation from you, I believe was back in April where there was a big pie chart that kind of showed how those dollars were going to get allocated. And we are coming up on 2023 where some of those dollars need to be spent. So I want to kind of reconfirm that that original chart is still valid if it's not where it's changed and then kind of where you guys are at in terms of actually deploying the 2023 portion of that. So that may be something that we could do in advance of the meeting about a full county budget. But it's got a lot of aspects to it. But ARPA would be an interesting carve out and you see how that because over one time dollars for infrastructure.

County Executive Satpal Sidhu: Yes, our plan is once the budget is in the council it becomes a public document. And once the council discusses or passes, it is even more public document, and we will send all this information in advance. And the ARPA information, I don't want to come and present, and you guys hear that information for the first time, then there cannot be a meaningful discussion. We would like to give you two, three, four weeks ahead of time, give all this information to you so that you can absorb, form your questions, and then we can have a more meaningful discussion. We intend to do that. It's not for presentation's sake, it's really for discussion's sake. And we will provide all this information in in advance and answered questions so that when we sit in this setting, we have a meaningful discussion. We intend to do that.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: Appreciate it.

Ryan Allsop: Thank you. Thank you.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: All right. Thank you so much. And with that being said, we are wrapping up the meeting, Clark?

Clark Campbell: Motion to close the meeting.

(The rest of the comments are muffled)

Next meeting: Monday, November 21, 2022 11am

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