

Whatcom County Business and Commerce Committee
Meeting Notes
May 15, 2023

Voting Members Present: Debbie Ahl, Ryan Allsop (Committee Vice Chair), Pam Brady, Paul Burrill, Clark Campbell, Troy Muljat, Brad Rader, Sarah Rothenbuhler (Committee Chair), RB Tewksbury, Chris Trout,

Voting Members Not Present: Casey Diggs, Pete Dawson, Dana Wilson

Nonvoting Members Present: Small Cities Representative Jori Burnett, Port of Bellingham Executive Director Rob Fix, City of Bellingham Mayor Seth Fleetwood, County Councilmember Kathy Kershner, Whatcom County Executive Satpal Sidhu

Nonvoting Members Not Present: CJ Seitz,

Public Present: County Councilmember Barry Buchanan, Gina Stark, Kori Olsen, Kim Lund, Ali Taysi, Michael Lilliquist, Anna Robbins, Hanna Ordos, Ken Bell, Dan Dunne, Guy Occhiogrosso, Blake Lyon, Lance Calloway, Jennifer Noveck, Braden Gustafson, unidentified Zoom participant, Rose Lathrop, Scott Pelton, Derek Long, Jessie Everson, Whatcom County Director of Planning Services Mark Personius, Andrea Ruback, Pamela Jons, Darby Galligan, Dean Fearing, Brien Thane, Carryn Vande Griend, Louis Parr, Whatcom County Director of Health Ericka Lautenbach, Heather Flaherty, Barbara Chase, Amanda Hubik, Jon Hutchings, Eric Richey, Rob Lee

May Agenda

Introductions / Administrative business / Comments welcome from the Public (5 mins)

- Committee Chair calls meeting to order
- Committee Member Introductions
- Approve April 2023 minutes
- Invite all attendees to participate along with Committee members during Q&A sessions

Community Justice Project update by Whatcom County Councilmember Barry Buchanan (15 mins)

- Q&A (15 mins)

Insight and Discussion on Development in Bellingham – Barriers in Process and Strategies to Improve by Ali Taysi (15 mins)

- Q&A (15 mins)

Ordinance re: Committee Membership by Whatcom County Councilmember Kathy Kershner (10 mins)

- Q&A (10 mins)

Ryan Allsop: All right. We're just to get back to intros, Troy and I've gone.

Clark Campbell: Clark Campbell, Gear Aid.

Pam Brady: Hi. Pam Brady here. Industry position.

Chris Trout: Yes. Hello, everybody. Chris Trout with Wood Stone Manufacturing.

Debbie Ahl: Hello, everybody. It's Debbie Ahl with healthcare.

Seth Fleetwood: Seth Fleetwood, mayor of Bellingham.

RB Tewksbury: RB Tewksbury, representing Internet technology.

Jennifer Noveck: And we also have Jori Burnett for small cities. Are you there Jori?

Jori Burnett: I'm here. Jori Burnett, City of Ferndale City Administrator. Thanks. All right.

Kathy Kershner: Kathy Kershner. Whatcom County Council.

Rob Fix: Rob Fix, Port of Bellingham.

Ken Bell: Ken Bell, Port of Bellingham.

Barry Buchanan: Barry Buchanan. Whatcom County Council.

Gina Stark: Tina Stark. Port of Bellingham.

Kori Olsen: Kori Olsen, Port of Bellingham.

Kim Lund: Kim Lund, Whatcom County Planning Commission.

Ryan Allsop: Michael Lilliquist Bellingham City Council.

Dan Dunne: I'm Dan, CAZ.

Guy Occhiogrosso: Guy Occhiogrosso, president and CEO of the Bellingham Regional Chamber of Commerce.

Blake Lyon: Blake Lyon, Planning, City of Bellingham.

Ali Taysi: Ali Taysi, I'll be doing a presentation today.

Ryan Allsop: Did everybody get a copy of the minutes? They should have.

Gina Stark: Yeah, they were sent out this morning.

[Break in discussion to fix webcam system]

Jennifer Noveck: The video and sound just disappeared from the room. I'm trying to see what's going on with Port staff. So thank you for your patience, everyone online.

[More efforts to reset webcam system]

Gina Stark: All right. How's that, guys?

Jennifer Noveck: Looks and sounds better.

Ryan Allsop: Okay, great. Sorry about that.

Gina Stark: Little technical difficulty, but we're online again.

Ryan Allsop: Nobody had any feedback on the minutes from April. So I think I'd like to approve those as produced.

Clark Campbell: Second.

Ryan Allsop: All right. All in favor. All right. Approved as such. Thank you. Then I'll have Sarah take over.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: Thank you, you're doing a great job. You did awesome. Thank you so much. Okay. Sorry for being late, we'll get rolling. We did minutes. We did intros, so we can get started with our Community Justice project update. When you're ready.

Barry Buchanan: So Gina is handing me the keyboard, so I'm not going to guarantee what the tech is going to do from here. My name's Barry Buchanan. I'm the chair of the Whatcom County Council and I've been the leader of the Justice Project that's been going on since about 2018. Your agenda has Peter Frazier listed as a co-presenter, but our planning group got together, and we talked about that. This committee is a county resource. Therefore, having someone from the actual campaign might be over the line as far as the law goes. So Peter will not be speaking today because he is the chair of the Yes Campaign Committee. So this is not a campaign committee or a campaign issue at all today. It's just an update on what's been going on with the Justice project. There's three things that were evident that came out of the needs assessment, overarching and overlapping categories of system services and the facilities both in the community and the jail. Our scope of work in the implementation plan has been to take the needs assessment that was created by the Stakeholder Advisory Committee and come up with a

project list, actions and projects to advance these needs in a 1-to-3-year timeframe. So we had proposed systems and services. We had proposed facilities concepts, including costs, jail facilities, again, including costs, identification of departments and leaders throughout the organization that would guide the implementation and then a funding approach to make sure that there is a balanced measure that does go to the ballot.

Barry Buchanan: The planning process - we had our needs assessment report that was issued in February 2023 to the council. We started the implementation plan in March. The county executive's department and the council are leading the implementation plan in conjunction with the Incarceration Prevention and Reduction Task Force. They are providing guidance as they're acting as the Law and Justice Council. In this case, they're the same body. So we have five workshops in March. We have seven focus groups in April including some survey work. We have a town hall listening session coming up. I'll talk a little bit more about how we have several check-ins and workshops scheduled with the council and the IPTF. We had a substantial update this morning at our meeting and our council meetings now have a justice project workshop at every committee, the whole meeting for every council meeting day.

And then obviously we're going to be looking at financial priorities for actions. We have some of our locations and scenarios have been put out to an estimator to give us an idea of what the costs are with facilities at various locations, which you'll see in a moment. Uh, some of the projects. There were 17 specific action items that came out in six categories. And these categories are increased access to behavioral health services goals, bolster reentry, make system changes with our local, regional and state partners — that's important that we include our partnerships regionally and statewide. Expanding support and housing for people at risk of incarceration and building a safe and humane jail and behavioral health facilities with services to help people stay out of jail.

And then, of course, measure and share progress for accountability and transparency in the entire process. So our focus groups were asked which of the proposed projects seemed like they would make the biggest difference and why. Where should the other facilities be located and how can we ensure that the systems really meet the needs of our community? How important is it to take these actions? These percentages are from the very important or important category of how people responded to the survey. Ensure existing supportive housing was high. Very high. Housing is a very important need in dealing with the criminal justice system. Address shortages of behavioral health services that came in at 92%, increase community communications and coordination between organizations and provide services to people with those kind of behavioral health challenges. 92% a jail based, community-based locations where people can receive coordinated reentry support 92% and build a behavioral care center. And that's something that we saw when we went to Nashville. It was a facility that was attached to the jail in which there could be some folks, if they had behavioral health issues during their arrest. There was a meeting that took place every morning at 8 a.m. We were able to attend one of those in which a public defender and a prosecutor and a representative from our behavioral health cooperative would review the case and kind of disposition it whether they should go through the behavioral care center program, which was a 30-to-60-day treatment.

They had 60 beds, 30 male and 30 female. And upon completion, their charges were dropped upon successful completion of that program. The research, feasibility and desirability for building a secure detox facility in the region. We have a big issue with almost impossible to do these involuntary holds. How important is it take to take these actions continued increase increased capacity of existing programs like our Grayson lead program? You can see all of these ideas had high, high scores with the survey. Advocate for state waiver to allow use of Medicaid funds to pay for things such as jail based medical and behavioral health services and all these other things. One thing that's important at the bottom here is leading the folks that are exiting the jail, that they have some sort of transportation for a warm handoff and a safe destination. Outpatient competence restoration. That's something that has come to the forefront as a big problem with our system statewide. There's folks waiting in jail to be deemed competent to stand trial. They have to go through a treatment center, a treatment process called competency restoration. If they are deemed incompetent to stand trial. And there's a big almost a one year waiting list for people to get into that program. So they sit in our jail waiting for restoration.

It's a horrible situation. Building a safe and humane jail that is right sized, well-designed, affordable to build and operate and that is important. The operating side is a huge amount of the money that goes out for this effort over, you know, over the years. So some of the criteria that the Stakeholder Advisory Committee had was: correctly sized based on a fair analysis, size and operations ensure that we don't have booking restrictions like we've encountered for the past couple, three years. Designed to reflect the best practices. Safe for those that are incarcerated as well as work. They're designed with spaces and equipment to provide individuals with dignity and needed services. Have to be versatile to accommodate changes in the population. Built to last. That's very important. Easy to maintain, feasible to fund and build. Our current facility obviously was not built to last or easy to maintain as we're finding located near to adjacent land to be purchased or developed if needed, if we need to expand in the future. And located in proximity to resources and accessible by all of our jurisdictions served throughout the county. Kind of a wish list that came out of the direction of these one of the corrections lieutenants in our in our jail right now. Trauma informed design uses natural light, use of color, natural beauty and spatial layout. That's just a lot less institutional and much easier to work in, much easier to for the inmates to be served or to be held in. Individual cells, so people have a space of their own to go back to. And integrated medical and behavioral health services throughout the facility. The thinking there is it's better to take the services to the inmates than moving inmates to the services because moves are very one of the staff consumptive things that take place in the jail are moves.

Some key questions that came out of the workshops: Important design quality services that are needed in or near the jail. Arrange for the size that's under discussion all the time, it seems, as well as location for the jail and some of these accessory services. Where do we have the potential to make the biggest impact? I think that's what we all want, is the biggest impact that can get out of the dollars, public dollars we spend. And where can we get funding leverage that could go outside of a ballot measure and we could leverage behavioral health funds or state grants or other opportunities that could come along the way. These were important things to have proximity to: a bus line, the courthouse, public defender's office. As you can see, crisis stabilization center goes down, freeway entrance and work center were low

on the list for the folks who weighed in on this. There was 35 people, as you can see in this particular set of questions that were that were asked. This just shows you a little bit about the average population from 1986 until 2023. You can see the curve as we hit 2020 and 2021 where we had COVID, again, where you have a dip and then it comes back up as we climbed out of COVID.

Our current capacity is 359 beds in two facilities. We have roughly 200 and change at the main jail and 150 at the work center. These are the sites that are being considered. This is the Civic Center south parking lot and adjacent properties to the courthouse. This is the Irongate facility shown. But that's the work center. That's the work center. And this is the Ann Deacon Center for Hope. This is the property that we own currently here in red. This is the property that we were hoping to get. And we are still negotiating, but we haven't gotten movement yet. But it's five more acres on the back side of this property. Then, of course, here is Ferndale. This is 40 acres of undeveloped property. There's some wetland areas, but it's got a lot of room on it. This is where the poll was close was 52% as their first choice said a horizontal facility on LaBounty. And when you talk horizontal, that's when that trauma informed design can be utilized, with the natural light because you're not stacking stories on top. And it's much more difficult to get that natural light in if you are stacking pods on top of pods.

44% for Irongate and 4% for the Civic Center. That represented one person, by the way. So there wasn't a whole lot of interest by the committee in downtown. So kind of some of the scenarios: This is LaBounty. This would be booking reception and transportation for reentry support and the jail, horizontal jail and a behavioral care center at LaBounty. Iron Gate would have the Ann Deacon Center for Hope and the newly funded— we just got \$9 million from the state to start work on a 23 hour crisis care center. We need a little bit more money than that, but it's a great start. And then remodel and repurpose the current work center, this civic center, we're thinking about having a holding space for attorney visits and et cetera that are especially related to court and court operations. And then State Street, which is the property right behind Walton Place. It's a little skinny parking lot there. Could have a resource center that would could work in conjunction to the Way Station which is going right on State Street at that health department building. So they could work together as a resource center. There's another scenario that shifts all that around and has the jail at Division and some of the other resources downtown and then a sale or repurposing of the LaBounty property. So there's other scenarios that have been developed and just didn't get into this presentation. And they are the scenarios that went out, as I mentioned earlier, for cost estimates.

So we can really have a clear look at each scenario and what the costs are and the council will be able to then prioritize. This is again just another shot of average daily population over the course of those same years, 86 to 23. This is a snapshot of the who's in jail. We've been asked that question a lot. There's 325 average daily population, 191 in the main jail, 103 in the work center. Those numbers won't add up, and they never do, because there's people that are being managed on electronic home detention and other monitoring programs that the district court provides. The classification of those crimes are. We have 28% are what they call a felony, which is a violent, violent felony. As you can see, B is violent. So A is even more violent. So that's your first and second degree murder. And then you can see it goes down to gross misdemeanor and the population kind of rolls out this way. Next steps. We have the town hall listening

session on May 24th at 6 p.m. That'll be in the Whatcom County Council chambers. We hope to have a great big crowd to give us a lot more input. We'll have, I mentioned the workshops we're having with both the Incarceration Reduction Task Force and the Law and Justice Council and the Council itself, and then that final implementation plan will be crafted and ready for prime time in June. So that's everything I have. Thank you.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: Thank you. We've got about just over ten minutes for Q&A. Thank you for the great presentation.

Barry Buchanan: Okay. You just tell me when we're done.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: Anyone have a question? Let's start with Lance.

Lance Calloway: Hi Barry. Kind of curious. You know, we're you're talking about still rolling this out. Do you think you're going to have enough time to truly lay out what the game plan is to the community to get the buy-in? Because I think the worst thing that can happen is a jail measure fails again. And that's a real strong concern because some people have already heard saying, you know, we keep talking about this jail and everything's supposed to be going to council by July to get on the ballot. And some people are feeling it's half baked. And, you know, that's a great concern. We're better off pushing it— I don't want to do it, but push it out one more year to have a fully good plan in place with dollars and plans and a whole project laid out.

Barry Buchanan: I think by the end of May or the beginning part of June, we're going to have a lot more clarity. There's a lot depending on these cost estimates on where the council thinks the priorities go. I think it's not a half baked plan in the ingredients to the plan. And they aren't quite all in the pie yet. And that's, I think to your point, but I think it's going to come together quickly once there's some clarity around that and the process that we've used throughout the past for sure, 18 months or 16 months, has been very public and very transparent to do the best we could, anyway, of getting the public engaged, because that's something that we lacked in our ballot measures that we've done before. We just didn't engage the public enough. So we just made a big point of trying to almost overkill that.

Lance Calloway: I guess my only comment I'd say to that is the people that are really engaged and the people that are in opposition to the jail in more often than not. And so and that's a concern because a lot of people that are in support of the jail are the ones that I'm hearing these comments from. So I mean, these are the comments that I'm hearing and amongst the community I'm around.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: Is that true, Barry, do you feel that way?

Barry Buchanan: There's a lot of communication going on that's on the actual ballot side, the Peter Frazier side? I just got an email from him yesterday because I'm on that team as well, but I'm not on that team today. Okay. But Peter, as you see the list of people that he's meeting with and presenting to, he's

really getting out into the community and trying to address these needs, because I agree with you. You know, communication is key to getting this to happen.

Lance Calloway: As is the property. The property on LaBounty is fully owned by the county, correct.

Barry Buchanan: All properties that I went through today are fully owned by the county.

Lance Calloway: Except for the five acres at Division Street, which they don't want to sell and take up our, you know, and some of our industrial plants. Right. So that's a problem.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: Michael?

Michael Lilliquist: So I do think communication is key because what you just saw in the presentation is a heavy, heavy focus on all the systems that would prevent crime and reduce people returning to jail and why faith communication is those who are still agitating against the jail are ignoring the fact that it isn't. It's no longer the proposal from years ago. I think that most of that opposition would go away. If we can adequately explain that we're building a system to prevent crime, prevent people going back to jail, that I think will be get on board with. And that I think we're here seeing across the political spectrum. So there's a winning story for just stop using the J word, right? Because I think then everyone agrees.

Barry Buchanan: Yeah, it's a holistic system revamp. Is that what we're looking at? And the stakeholder advisory committee, we decided very early in that process not to just focus on this one issue, although this issue needs to be focused on, but it had to have a larger context around what we think we need as a complete criminal justice system.

Clark Campbell: On the needs assessment, you said it was completed. Were the numbers that you were using based on the trailing three years or that sort of 2008 to 2018 period? Because when I look at the curve, it was sort of averaging about 420 per day. And then of course, under the restrictions, you've artificially kind of got it down. Like if I put an 8% growth rate on that from 2000 on that 4 to 20 number over 2019 to 2023, you'd be at like 615 today. Now, I'm not saying those are the right numbers, but what kind of, what was the basis that you guys came up with in terms of that needs assessment?

Barry Buchanan: Well, the first numbers were just the data that over the course of those years, that 86. The other numbers were a snapshot in time. It was a day, it was a one day look. So that was in April, I think. So it wasn't trying to look at any projections either forward or backward. Looking at that, it was just what's the snapshot today? And we wanted to get that framed up.

Clark Campbell: Yeah. But I think because we were under restrictions during the pandemic period, it's almost like you have to— just like in a lot of our economic forecasts, everyone's like, Yeah, forget those numbers. Go back to 2019 or 18 as your base year. I don't know if you've come to the point yet where you've made capacity estimates of what you would need in terms of facility and then projected out into.

Barry Buchanan: I think we're getting into a range and we're trying to work on narrowing that single location. We're trying to get the, you know, the attributes of each one and the discrepancies or the weaknesses of each one.

Michael Lilliquist: So I thought I heard that it was told that said that they were not going to rerun the projection projections specifically because they felt they had to ignore the last three years. So there's no new data.

Kim Lund: Barry, I just had a comment, technical comment, really. When you were showing the slides that had the focus group participant responses that were stacked ranking the actions, you know, very important or important. I didn't see how many— you had a second set of outcomes where you had N equals 35. But in that one, do you know how many people responded?

Barry Buchanan: The focus groups were 70 people. And the one of the biggest groups that we had, we actually had to divide it in two because they were population based BIPOC workshops. And then we had one for the formerly incarcerated and their families because we thought lived experience was super important. And there was over 28 people, you know, 29 people, I believe, that signed up for that. And so we divided it into two workshops. So we were pretty pleased with the participation of, you know, just short 1.5 hour workshops or a focus groups like that.

Kim Lund: That's very helpful context. Thank you. And to the point of the discussion earlier, have you considered officially calling this a Community Justice Center? It does seem like 'jail' has a problem.

Barry Buchanan: Yes. We have kind of a standing joke that we have a contest or something. But yes, you're right. We need a better, kinder, gentler name.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: Debbie. Did you want to ask a question?

Debbie Ahl: Yes. Thanks. Hi, this is Debbie Ahl. And my background is business as well as health care. And I just I wanted to say it sounds to me like it's been a very good process, very thoughtful, with a lot of input. Having seen the past votes before, I think that so much of this probably has to be won almost before the election, before the ballot takes place. And I'm pretty good at keeping up on all the news, but I have traveled quite a bit lately and but I honestly haven't seen anything about this process going on. And it seems to me that it'd be very important to share with the community very broadly about what the process is, how many opportunities there are to get involved and to talk through. As I think about opposition, you know, I would think that a lot of our community is really fairly centrist focused. So that understanding that, yes, we need some huge investments in mental health and some of the other systems work that we need. But we also can't have deplorable conditions for those people who are in jail. And so it's my thought is just how can we strengthen the work that you're doing by increasing that level of communication?

Barry Buchanan: So we have a consultant that is working with the Incarceration Prevention Reduction Task Force, a communications specialist that is really focusing right now on the work that task force is doing on this implementation plan itself. So what we're trying to do is to just put out facts about the project continually, and that's underway right now. So you should start seeing that develop on your social media screens. And they're doing op-ed opportunities. We've done one in the Seattle Times and the Bellingham Herald that was, I believe, back in March. I think they planned some more of that. So I totally agree. Communications is so important. And like I said, we have hired professionals to help us do that, you know, to get these facts out, to dispel some myths that are out there, too.

Ryan Allsop: Barry, couple questions. One, the polling, are you guys going to repoll once you have costs by unit? Because I think that's something that'll be interesting to see what people's opinion change, like location costs, what the services are. Are we going to poll for that. Is there a plan for that or no?

Barry Buchanan: I think that's important. Yes, because I think there's a lot there's a lot more clarity going to be there once we get that.

Ryan Allsop: And then being a City of Bellingham member and voting member and resident, are the small cities heavily involved in trying to promote this as well within their communities? Because I mean, this is a county jail and most of the problem area tends to be— you don't walk downtown Ferndale and see the problem like we do here in the city of Bellingham and the and the crime and stuff we have here. And so are the small cities being enlisted to help market this to their own communities? Because we need their vote to get this through. And I think it's going to be really important.

Barry Buchanan: The answer is absolutely on several fronts. Number one, they're having a you know, our administration, the city of Bellingham's administration, Mayor of Lynden is representing the small cities. They're talking about the jail use facilities agreement that would come later, how you split the tax, you know, the ratios between the cities and the county if a measure was approved. So they're working on that front. I know Scott is on our team for the campaign. So Scott's heavily involved and he's taking out to his small city counterparts.

Ryan Allsop: Okay.

Gina Stark: Jori Burnett, who represents the small cities, had his hand up.

Jori Burnett: Hi. Thanks. Jori Burnett, City Administrator, City of Ferndale. Yes, I was just going to echo that and maybe go one step further. About this time last year. Each of the small cities signed on to a letter to the Whatcom County Council. Which is a fairly aggressive letter, kind of demanding that the jail be built as soon as possible. So I think that all of the small cities are in support of the efforts that are going on right now and do expect to support in one way or another the jail use agreements and this getting built.

Barry Buchanan: Thanks for that, that was the last point I was going to make. Yes, we did have a letter from the small cities.

Kathy Kershner: And Seth signed that, too, didn't he.

Barry Buchanan: Yes.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: Barry, is there any way this committee can help?

Barry Buchanan: Yes, go forth and talk to your networks and tell them how important this is. And be looking for more information to come. We'll try the best we can to get as much information out to the public as we can, because I feel that's the most one of the most important things right now.

Ryan Allsop: One last one last question I was going to ask on that. From a strategic standpoint, what else is going on the ballot in the fall that has a cost increase to the taxpayer? Does anybody know? Because I mean, last year was the child care was a big cost increase. We also all got our tax bill that month the same time. And the amount was a 25% increase. You know, we all had panic attacks as property owners in the city and county. And I think it resonates. I'm concerned that we put this on there, you know, it's going to be a big bill. I mean, there's no question. You know, I think everybody or most people are in support of this, practically speaking.

Barry Buchanan: I don't think there's anything the county's doing. What about Guy?

Guy Occhiogrosso: So there is some political strategy concern that the initiatives, those two City of Bellingham initiatives will consume the jail. So the high probability we'll actually lose both.

Ryan Allsop: And what are those two initiatives?

Guy Occhiogrosso: So the one initiative is the rental relocation assistance, basically the rent control. And the other one is the essentially a \$2 an hour minimum wage increase above the state level in two years.

Ryan Allsop: Okay. Yeah.

Guy Occhiogrosso: So I mean, it's not tax, but also there's a Greenways levy up.

Ryan Allsop: That Greenways levy back on the ballot, for I think it's a renewal year this year? That came up. Maybe Satpal knows.

Seth Fleetwood: I believe I can comment on Greenways. Greenways is going to be up this year. It's a reallocation of property tax.

Ryan Allsop: From a timing standpoint, this seems like we're putting some hurdles in front of ourselves.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: One of the things that would eliminate those hurdles is accessing the cannabis taxes.

Ryan Allsop: So I know we're running out of time, so apologize. Just wanted something to think about, Barry.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: One more comment from Satpal, and then we're going to move on to our next presentation.

Satpal Sidhu: My comment is that the jail measure always have been .02 percent on the sales tax. It's not a property tax and that's how it was presented the last two times. This is exactly the same. There is no increase in the asking for public. It's again going to be a sales tax measure of 2/10 of a percent.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: Well, maybe we can just do 5% on the cannabis purchases.

Satpal Sidhu: There is a limitation from the state, RCW something. We cannot do more than 0.2 on the jail or these facilities, so we can't even go to 0.3. So it has to be 0.2 or less.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: Okay. Thank you.

Barry Buchanan: Still a lot of revenue on that marijuana tax.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: Maybe we could talk after if there is a possibility on how we could help there.

Barry Buchanan: Love to.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: Okay. Thank you so much.

Barry Buchanan: Thank you, everybody.

Ryan Allsop: Good luck. Thank you.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: And we are on housing. The Housing Subcommittee has invited Ali to talk about insight and discussion on development and building. Thank you for being here.

Ali Taysi: Thank you for inviting me. I don't have a PowerPoint. I'm down my admin assistant, and my PowerPoint skills tapped out in 2002. So I'm going to talk. I would be happy to share my notes with you if you want to distribute them, that'd be great. Just as a follow up. So I apologize, I don't have like a visual reference here. My name is Ali Taysi. I have a small business in Bellingham. I know many of you, but just in case I don't know everybody: AVT consulting. We do planning work in Whatcom County, so we help people, individuals, homeowners and developers facilitate navigating the process to develop their land. I've been doing that for about 20 years. I was born and raised here, left for school, came back and started

my business in 2004. We probably permitted thousands of housing units in Whatcom County over my career, hundreds of projects. I served nine years on the Bellingham Planning Commission, chaired that commission for five years, participated in Waterfront District Urban Village Plan, Downtown District Village Plan, Samish, Fountain Urban Village Plans, Infill Toolkit Ordinance, Subdivision Ordinance, our 2016 Comprehensive Plan update. And so I really benefited a lot professionally, but also the community member from that experience of working on the legislative side, kind of wearing a different hat than I wear when I'm working on behalf of a developer. And I also participated last year in some of the housing subcommittee meetings with this group, Sarah invited me to and I'm a steering committee member for the Whatcom Housing where we focus on policy.

So that's kind of my background in all of this. I'm going to talk today about some barriers that we see. I'm going to focus on Bellingham because the majority of our housing is occurring in Bellingham, and that's probably where we should put a lot of our residents. But a lot of the things I'm going to talk about could be extrapolated out to our small cities, more so than the county. But we work in Ferndale and Lynden and Blaine and other small cities as well. And some of this stuff could be broadly applied, some strategies to try and improve processes. Before I get into the details, I want to say that I'm just like one voice. I'm not the answer. I don't have the answers to all this. A lot of the things, there's no silver bullet. You know, we have to do a lot of things. This is like a "yes and" approach to solve our problems. We're all kind of what I found working with disparate groups and organizations and government is that we're all kind of trying to achieve the same goal. We don't always agree on how to get there, but we really are kind of focused on the same things. And I think everybody knows that there's somebody we can't influence and there's things we can't influence. And so focusing on the things that we can influence is really important.

I'd also like to note that in Bellingham in particular, we're already working on a lot of the things I'm going to talk about. I don't have like a new idea to present to you guys. We all know probably all these barriers I'm going to talk about. But like last year when we were working on kind of a list of things— Dan can attest to this— the list was really long about strategies. And so what I want to do and what I tried to do when I was preparing for today is try and pinpoint maybe a smaller list of strategies that we could implement versus kind of tackling everything because there's a million things we can talk about doing and we can't do them all. So I would say one of the main things that I always push for when I talk is the pace of change. You know, things happen in government slowly. Committees, work groups, study sessions, debate, dialog, and then maybe action. And it's often like two or three years after we needed it or five years after we need it. And that's not a knock. It's just the way it is, both at the local, state and national level. So I'm a big pusher for dynamic change, ripping the Band-Aid off and trying to work through the consequences of that.

So one last note before I dig into the details is I think— and I always try to talk about these things when I talk about this— is the cost of financing and the outsized influence that banks have on development. 90% of projects I work on, whether they happen or not, the decision is made by bank. It's not made by the city. It's not made by the neighbors. It's not made by the owner of the property. It's made by the bank who's financing the project. And nobody builds projects with cash. They finance the projects. Even people I work

with who have a swimming pool like filled with money, you know, like Scrooge McDuck. They're not building it with cash. They're financing it. And so I think it's just super important to acknowledge that when we talk about all these barriers and strategies, that we have to be viewing that through the lens of like what is going to move the needle with the bank that is going to finance the projects. And, you know, I think oftentimes I hear people like vilify the development community. A lot of people I work with are not big developers. They're local residents or like a homeowner who's owned a property who's trying to do an infill project. And I hear suggestions like, let's just make people charge less rent. Or, let's just force them to incorporate affordable housing into their projects. And the reality is, is that margins are very thin, particularly now in development with the economic climate we have.

And we can we have to be careful about that line of reasoning because you can almost create like an opposite effect. If we make it too difficult to finance projects, people just won't do the projects because the banks won't give them the money to do them. We can actually create a problem or make a situation worse by killing projects that could otherwise happen. So I just I always talk about that because I think it's really important to keep the power that the banks have in mind when we have these conversations. It's not as simple as just saying do this or do that. We have to make sure people or WECU or whoever we're working with is in support of that on the financial side. So that's it. So there's four main barrier topics I want to talk about. Regulations is the first one, direct cost is the second one. Process or bureaucracy is the third one, and then NIMBYism is the fourth category I want to talk about. And I'm going to briefly talk about the barriers, but mostly trying to focus on some strategies. So our regulations, they're hard to interpret. We have lots of them. There's a pile-on impact from the layers of rules that we have to navigate when we engage in development and planning. They definitely create barriers to implementing our density goals.

Just as an example, the city of Bellingham last year passed a residential multifamily code update that eliminated density limitations in many of our zoned areas. So we have no maximum density now. And really that was presented and it's true as a way to make it easier to get more density on our on our existing properties. But we have height limits and setbacks and lot coverage and open space and usable open space and all these other regulations in our residential multi codes that limit the amount of density you can fit and you can give me a million densities, but if I can't fit them on a site because all of the other regulations we have, then that gift of unlimited density really doesn't do a lot for me. It's something we talked about on Planning Commission when I was on Planning Commission, this move forward, it's a bigger lift to change our rules, but it's something that we need to talk about doing. Streamlining our regulations will help.

The second topic is direct costs. It's really expensive to build stuff, as we know. It's probably the item that we can have the least influence on with government because there's so many other factors that go into cost, you know, national trends, labor, material costs, all these things that we can't control. But through incentives and subsidies, we do have an opportunity to move the needle a little bit.

Ryan Allsop: Cost and time, I will just say.

Ali Taysi: Time is part of the third barrier, which is process. So the biggest impact we can have on cost is time and that is where processes and regulations with processes such a huge component. We have lots of rules. Just like with the regulations, they lead to a lot of process. It slows the private sector design. It also slows government review because navigating all those rules just takes more time. In the past decade I've seen permit timelines go— from like the idea to construction start in Bellingham— probably from 6 to 9 months to 14 to 18 months. So we've effectively doubled the amount of time it takes to get a permit. And there's lots of trickle down implications from that impacts financing and impacts labor. It impacts just so many different things. So we need to trend in the other direction. Process is very complicated, lots of neighborhood involvement. We'll talk about NIMBYism, just to let everybody understand this. In Bellingham, the same process exists for a triplex as a 40 unit apartment building. Anything with three units or more requires a design review process, which is not an administrative. It's an administrative process. But it goes out for the same public consumption. Same time frames, all those things. And so that disparity between product type and process discourages small nonprofessional developers from engaging in the process. Someone who wants to put four units on their property looks at that process and says, 18 months and all this time, and I don't know if I can handle that. It's just very intimidating. So it also increases the cost relative to project size. So smaller projects are more expensive per unit because of that. And a lot of our strategy for accompanying growth is infill. So you guys are seeing lots and lots of big parking buildings being built day to day. We're working on tons of small projects as well. You don't see them, but they're happening every single day.

And then the last item is NIMBYism. I would argue that— this is not just from my professional experience, but planning commission and then just being a community member my whole life— is that we have a very vocal minority in our community who has an outsized influence on policy and they drive dialog on growth. In housing in particular, we heard from the same people over and over and over again at Planning Commission, the same small group of people. And I'm not knocking those people's opinions. Everyone's entitled to their opinion on this, but we tend to hear more from fewer voices. It's a very protectionist attitude. This is my personal opinion, and I think that we need to change the dialog and the tone of the conversation around growth and how do we protect what we have, but also acknowledge that sacrifices need to be made in our community to benefit everybody, to lift up the whole community.

So those are the four barrier areas. And I want to talk a little bit about some strategies that that come from discussions with my staff, with other developers, design professionals, other organizations in our community who work in housing. These are not just my ideas. And I was talking to Lance beforehand. One thing that influences this is that the state just passed two pretty significant acts of legislation, the missing middle housing bill and the housing bill. And we're in a little bit of a limbo land because we don't want all those are going to influence all of this conversation. And so you have to like caveat some of the things I'm going to talk about with that and acknowledge that in a few years the landscape might look dramatically different in some of these things as local jurisdictions find ways to adopt these state laws. And we've got about two, two and a half years to get that done because we have to adopt those within six months of our most recent comp plan update, which is starting this summer basically, and it's probably going to take a year and a half. So, you know, a little bit of window of time here.

So some hard things that I would like to talk about looking at. And I think that organizations in our community should be advocating for. First thing is the state law on ADUs. We have effectively two and a half years to implement that. But Bellingham is in the process of updating their ordinance today, and I think that we should try and incorporate that state bill into our current update and get that done. Now that is not a huge needle mover, but one of the things that that state bill included was a removal of the owner occupancy requirement and the ability to condominiumize the ADU and that single thing right there might be the biggest thing that we can do to affect housing affordability, in a code, because if you have the ability to condo that ADU and sell it, it's going to come in at a lower price point than a new single family home. And it also helps that homeowner who might need that money for maybe a home improvement or moving, moving up, doing something different. And so I know it's a big lift to try and stuff that in now in the current process. But I think trying to implement that ordinance now while we've got the book open, so to speak, is a really important thing that we should look at.

Clark Campbell: So that bill is now law, you said.

Ali Taysi: That bill is law and we have like two years to adopt it. Right. I'm saying, let's not wait two years. We've got the book open. Let's do it now. The other the other big code change or one of two is our residential multifamily regulations, our Title 2032 in Bellingham, I mentioned that Bellingham adopted kind of unlimited density in a lot of areas, but we're still restricted by all the other rules. When I talk to people in the development community, the number one thing that comes up is updating our standards. They are a huge barrier to achieving the density that we've allocated to our properties. And so it's a big lift, but tackling a RM code update, I believe is an important strategy that we can take to kind of make it easier to achieve the density that we've allocated to our properties. When I ask my staff to name one thing, all three of them said, Update the RM code, because it's the thing they struggle with the most.

Dan Dunne: And Ali, probably just for folks who aren't in the same verbiage, RM being residential multi.

Ali Taysi: Yeah. So the codes that apply to all of our multifamily development except in our urban villages. So all the rest of Bellingham, which is a lot of land. The third kind of regulatory change is parking. So parking is the elephant in the room. Parking regulations remain the single greatest barrier to achieving density on the on the projects we work on. You can give me all the density in the world. If you have a parking requirement, I have to fit that parking on my site and that becomes a hard cap on how many units I can fit.

Code parking in Bellingham and Ferndale and other communities in our county outpaces national trends studies by the Institute of Traffic Engineers that are national. We require more parking, per code, than those trends are showing is necessary. I think we need to be forward thinking. I have lots of neighborhood meetings. Parking is the number one discussion topic. It's always about protecting what we have. Everybody comes to our neighborhood meetings and talks about parking, says I want to park in front of my house. You know, I don't want to have to drive around the block downtown or ride my bike to go to the business I enjoy visiting. It's all about convenience. I am a huge proponent of thinking about what we want Bellingham to be like in 50 years and building for that. If you force change. If we build big parking

lots now, people will bring their cars. It's pretty simple in my mind. So I'm very much a proponent of market driven parking approach. Doesn't mean— it's important with messaging with this— it doesn't mean projects are going to get built with no parking. A lot of the people I work with still want to provide parking. They just want to be able to make a market decision. In certain areas, less parking is okay. Other areas, maybe they need more. So I think continuing to push for progressive parking policy and changing codes to reduce parking requirements is an important thing we can do, and that's going to generate the most pushback.

But it's important. So those are the three main things for regulations. Adopt the ordinance now, continue to push to adopt the state legislation as fast as possible, update our RM code and reduce our parking requirements. And again, those can be applied, I think to parking particularly, countywide. So cost strategies, again, we can't do a whole lot with cost. Incentives are important. Bellingham offers a lot of incentives— traffic impact fee reductions, tax incentives, multifamily tax exemption. So these are all really good things. I think Bellingham is really on the cutting edge of incentives. My comment on cost is related to the multifamily tax exemption. For those of you who aren't familiar with this, you can have an eight year property tax exemption in targeted areas in Bellingham. Right now it's our urban villages. If you choose to do affordable housing at 20% of your project, you can have a 12 year tax exemption. It is a massive incentive. It is the single most effective incentive that we see in the projects we work on. Every project we do in an urban village where the incentive is available, people take advantage of it. It moves the needle on financing massively. It makes a difference on the pro forma that the banks look at. In a number of projects we've worked on in Fountain and Samish, it's make or break for the pro forma. If it was not available, the project might not proceed the way it was set up.

Ryan Allsop: So to give an idea, can you give an example? Like a 40 unit apartment building, you know, what would that say for a developer tax?

Ali Taysi: I probably can't give you that. I can tell you that on a 14 unit project, just because I have a recent example over the eight year term, it's going to save probably \$400,000 in taxes.

Ryan Allsop: That's significant. On a per unit basis.

Ali Taysi: That's a per unit basis. It also helps because there's a lot of cost in the beginning getting going. And so it helps you with a lot of a lot of commercial financing is on a 5 or 7 year adjusted rate mortgage. So it really makes that term look really good of that mortgage. So there's also a 20 year option that the state has. Bellingham has not adopted. None of our cities have adopted the 20 year option that requires affordability. We have done the math on the 12 year affordable housing option for a number of projects. The nexus, the gain between eight years and 12 years is not enough. The tax benefit is not enough to offset the rent decrease for those affordable units because they're in a fixed rate. And we've done the math. And so no one I've worked with has ever taken advantage of the 12 year and incorporated in the affordable housing component. That's not the only reason. But it is a factor. Are there other cities that have taken advantage of the 20? I don't know. But what I would advocate for and one of the strategies I'm proposing to advocacy for is twofold. Can we can we expand the eight year market rate, multi-family tax

exemption to more areas, more than just our urban villages? It was originally put into, I believe council's intention was kind of like attract development to our urban villages, but they're kind of cooking now and I think we should keep it there.

But are there other areas we could look at where it could benefit? Because it's working. And then also, can we look at getting the 20 year in place for affordable projects because the nexus between eight years and 20, the math looks a lot different. The four years doesn't get you there, but 12 years might get you there on that affordable housing component. And that's kind of a win-win because then we start getting some market rate projects with affordable housing in them, which is something we talk about with inclusionary zoning. Things that are coming up is how do we incentivize mixed projects. So I would really encourage the cities to start looking hard at the multifamily tax exemption and trying to get creative about ways to expand its reach and reach to the 20 area for affordable housing to see if that gets some people to buy in.

Ryan Allsop: What about TIFs? Have we ever looked at that?

Ali Taysi: We have. TIF is a traffic impact fee. We have great traffic impact fee credits in Bellingham. All our urban villages, all of our transporters get a reduction. The city provides a credit for redevelopment. So if you have an existing building, you tear it down, you get a credit for that building. So I actually think Bellingham is really, really doing well with traffic impact fee credits in general as enterprise zones. Yeah. So, I'll wrap up. We could talk about this for days. So that's kind of like the main strategy thing is the tax exemption. And then from a process standpoint, a few things. We should try and move as many permits to be by-right as possible. And by-right means you can just do them with a building permit. So we just did that with our shift in our infill toolkit where we shifted small infill toolkit projects to be by right to match up with our short subdivisions. That's a process barrier that people have. And it gets back at this idea of, Hey, a three unit is the same as a 40 unit. We should be looking at ways to increase the threshold at which we need design review, in which we need a type two process, which is direct public involvement that would help these smaller projects get going easier with reduce barriers and also reduce time significantly for these smaller projects. So looking to try and make permits by right as much as possible when we update codes. And then the other the other process strategy is related to staffing. We need more staff.

The reason it's taking 18 months is because our planning departments, our public works departments, our parks departments are overwhelmed by the volume of work we have. We're perpetually understaffed. And I know it's scary when I talk to cities about this. They say, Well, we don't want to over staff and then have to lay people off. That's a very government mindset. Private sector staffs up as needed. We're always like 2 or 3 years behind on staffing and it takes a long time to staff up. So I think it's really important. This is more a message to like the people in charge, the legislators. Staffing is really important. One thing we can do is be really staffed up when like what is the term? You make hay when the sun is shining. Make money, right? And then maybe have a surplus. We have a big surplus in Bellingham right now in our development account. I'm aware of this. Then if things slow down, you don't lay people off. You shift them to long range planning. Started accomplishing those tasks that don't make money with the surplus you

have. It's a different way of looking at it, but I think it's really important and staffing is critical. It's a business way of looking at it. Staffing is so important in all of this. Yeah. Then the last thing I'll say and skipping a few things here, but I'll send you my notes so you can see more detail, is the NIMBYism strategies.

And I've talked about this with people like Michael before, other folks. We need top-down messaging about all of this. We have really progressive staff members who want to push the envelope on these things. They want to move forward and then we go out into the community, and they tend to get their teeth kicked in. And I think that they need to feel support from the top all the way down. And the messaging in our community needs to be this is going to be hard, but in order to benefit everyone, we have to make sacrifices. And I think parking is an example. We need to be messaging to people. We're not planning for your parking needs of the day. We're planning for future needs. And it's going to be hard on you as a community member and it's going to force you to make change and accept change. But if we want to accomplish our goals, we have to do that. And so I can talk a lot about this topic, but just broadly, I believe that it is going to be critical to have top down messaging from our legislators, from our elected officials telling their constituents, I'm sorry, this is going to be really hard to accomplish our goals. We're all going to feel the impacts of this change. And we're not doing that now. We just need to reinforce that messaging over and over and over again to encourage some of these changes. So again, that was quick. I could talk a lot more, but I'd be happy to take questions.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: We have about four minutes.

Ali Taysi: I'm sorry about that.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: No apologies. This was incredible.

Lance Calloway: I had a quick question. On MFPE, is for that tax exemption, is that the entire project or just the eligible units that are reduced?

Ali Taysi: The whole project. So if you build a 40 unit building or can you build a ten unit building, when we did an affordable one, two of them would need to be affordable. But you don't pay taxes on the entire building. You only pay tax on the land for that whole term. So you don't pay taxes on the whole project.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: Anyone else have a question?

Ryan Allsop: Saw Blake making lots of notes. I appreciate that.

Blake Lyon: I'll make one statement. Ali is a great partner in this and with city staff, and we've had and continue to have a lot of conversations about this. A lot of what he talked about is irons in the fire and things are in motion. One of the things that we're going to be working on is tentatively scheduled for the council's June 5th. But it's an update on this year's legislative session and some of the things that are

being brought forward already. We are anticipating the stuff going forward that will likely be at the end of the second meeting in June. So we're working on a few things.

Ali Taysi: And to that point, I said at the beginning, you know, I think that Bellingham is already engaged in a lot of this. None of this is new ideas. And that really strikes up this last comment I made about legislative support. You know, the staff is out there pushing this stuff. We need everybody talking the same language and everybody saying this is the right thing for the community, even though it's going to hurt a little bit. You rip the Band-Aid off. It hurts for a minute and, you know, you feel better. So I think that that just that comment strikes where I'm talking about when I say we need legislative support for this stuff.

Ryan Allsop: And so since we report to the county council, obviously, how do we also, because the county has its own issues and permitting and it's further behind in a lot of ways from technologically speaking. And so, what can we do to try to help encourage that improvement as well from, you know, as a community?

Ali Taysi: It's hard because a lot of our housing is intended to go toward our cities, you know, and really, we don't want to be proliferating a ton of housing in the county just from a climate action approach and just vehicle trips, jobs, all those things. So, you know, unfortunately, a lot of the recommendations I have are really targeted at our cities. But as it pertains to the county, staffing is a big deal. Of all the things I talked about, the one we started with the most in the county is staffing, I would say. And then to the degree that the county can try and incentivize development where it is appropriate, like in our urban growth areas, then incentives and things like that are things we could potentially utilize. But unfortunately, I know this is a county committee here, but a lot of what I'm talking about is really city driven.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: And I see Mark's on here and he will be presenting next meeting Thank you so much. Really appreciate it.

Kathy Kershner: All right. So I believe it was in February that we had a discussion in this committee about increasing your membership by two people, one in construction and one non-identified for-profit organization. So I wrote an ordinance and took that to the County Council. And during our discussion at the council, Councilmember Donovan motioned to amend the ordinance by adding three voting representatives, one from each of the three of the four largest employers in Whatcom County, based on the latest report of Whatcom County top employers by Western Washington University Center of Economic and Business Research. So we discussed that and asked the council if they could hold off on taking a vote to bring it back to your committee to get your input on that. Because my takeaway from our meeting in February was that you didn't want to increase your membership too greatly because you were having a difficult time maintaining a quorum. And so you thought taking two additional members would be something you could do. When we talked about where these three additional people would come from, and you look up the list of the largest employers in Whatcom County.

First of all, caveat that not all of the companies agree to have their numbers published. So the list is not in. You cannot say that it's inclusive of all of our businesses or employers. And also it's not timely

information. Many of the data points are from 2019, 2020 and 2021. So the four top on the list right now are Saint Joe's Hospital, which is a nonprofit. The Lummi Nation, which is a separate government. Western Washington University, which is a nonprofit governmental agency, and the Bellingham Public Schools, which is also a nonprofit government agency. So I do not support this ordinance or the amendment to the ordinance because I took the comments that I received from this group seriously. You guys are a Business and Commerce Advisory Committee to the Council, and this felt very much like outside of the realm of what the Council was asking from the city. So I'm bringing it back to you to get comments, feedback from committee members on this amendment, and I'll take it forward to the Council with your.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: Quick note on Quorum. 2020 & 2021, we really struggled with quorum, but I think all throughout 2022 year to date, we've maybe not had a quorum, maybe one meeting? Maybe two. So we could maybe move that out of the conversation. But all the other points they said were excellent.

Guy Occhiogrosso: Quick question. So Kathy, was that Todd's recommendation? Specifically?

Kathy Kershner: Yes.

Guy Occhiogrosso: And I think that aligns with some of the comments he's made in the past about the differentiation between employers and, let's say, private business. Right. Okay. So I just wanted to clarify that I would welcome Todd to come and meet us. I mean, I've never met Todd. I'm happy to go meet him one on one and kind of explain to him.

Kathy Kershner: May need to come to the council meeting for that to happen.

Guy Occhiogrosso: That's fine.

Ryan Allsop: And the other thing I think, source of funding is important. I mean, I think that if you think about it logically, the only one that fits closer to the private sector is probably the hospital. The other three sources of funding is completely different employment structures, completely different hiring, all of it. And so I don't think there how they build a building is very different than how we would possible, probably closer. But I also think the hospitals represented there and they have the ability to we've tried to open it up. They're all invited, by the way, and we're happy to have a non-voting seat. Our vote, let's be honest, is about minutes. So I think it would change kind of the dynamic of who we are potentially as a group. That's just speaking for myself, just so we're clear.

Clark Campbell: Just to clarify. Currently, voting members, do we have any nonprofits?

Ryan Allsop: It's all for profit private. And they have lots of other committees and are on lots of others that they speak directly to the government. The council set us up as there as an underrepresented group.

Kathy Kershner: Yes, let me just also say that this amendment was passed in committee. So there were just three council members that that this amendment got passed. So it has not been discussed or voted on at the full council.

Clark Campbell: So is going to be brought to council.

Kathy Kershner: It will, but I ask that I be able to come back to you first before it goes to full council so that I could get any more input and then also encourage you to come send a representative to come.

Ryan Allsop: I would encourage Western, the technical school, they've been involved. If they feel differently, feel free to speak your mind. Or also if you feel that we're right and kind of how we're thinking of this as a group, feel free to reach out to a council member.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: We also have health care represented with Debbie and we have tribal representation with Dana. It's just so interesting how diverse our group is, and there was a lot of comment about just having one female. So I think we're the targeted token female, that was very much a lot of belittling...

Kathy Kershner: I hope that's not true, Sarah.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: Well, that is what was stated and, you know, we deal with that enough. And why is this underrepresented group such a threat? We are working so hard. We are fully volunteer. None of us are compensated for our time. A lot of the groups that are being suggested, they're already involved and are also dealing with budget issues and staffing issues. It's pretty disgusting and disappointing.

Jennifer Noveck: Sarah, would it be helpful for me to share some of the data that I shared with you? We're basing this conversation off of that one piece of data, which is the top employer study, but there are many other pieces of data that give us a better picture of what the Whatcom County economy actually looks like.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: That would be great.

Jennifer Noveck: Thank you. So first of all, the data from Washington State Employment Security Department, which is publicly available. What they tell us is that for Whatcom County, the total non-farm employment is 97,700 jobs. Of those, 79,200 are from the private sector, so only 18,500 are considered government. That includes all federal, state, local, tribal government and K through 12 education. So while the county, COB, Lummi Nation and K through 12 are top employers, in terms of total numbers of employees at a single agency, when you compare them to the overall private sector numbers, they're a small fraction of the jobs that actually exist in Whatcom County. So one thing to consider there, that means that the private sector is responsible for 81% of all employment in the county. As for payroll, the government payroll is also 20%. And if we look at the current composition of the committee, seven of the 20 positions are government. So you know, if it was reflective of payroll, the government positions are

already more than reflects the economy by two. Manufacturing payroll is 15 to 12% of the county's economy and only has one position which is currently occupied by Chris Trout. Health care and social assistance is the next biggest pool for payroll. 13 to 14% also only has one position currently, Debbie Ahl. Construction payroll is 10 to 11%. The committee currently has no explicit position for construction and only one of our other for profit positions is covers construction, which is Sarah. Then retail, which is 8 to 9%, also only has one position represented by Casey Diggs. And then we have a real estate payroll, which is only 1 to 2%. I'm not sure if that includes commissions or not, for example, but the committee does have one real estate position, which Pete Dawson currently occupies, and one other for profit, which is real estate, and that's Troy Muljat. So just wanted to give you all just some different ways of looking at the economy. I think the top employer study is great and super helpful, but in terms of job creation and payroll, we get a little bit of a different picture if we look at that.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: Thank you, Jennifer. That was awesome. Appreciate it.

Lance Calloway: I was just going to ask, what is the charter of this committee? You know, that really dictates a lot of what was also elaborated by Jennifer, that dictate, you know, business and commerce. Not the business, commerce and government committee.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: Yes. And again, just there was a lot of talk about lack of diversification in the group. And maybe we could have people attend the group before they criticize, or attend a meeting before they pass judgment on the membership. And we'll try to get involved more with the committee meetings as well.

Kathy Kershner: What I'll do is connect with you and invite you to invite whoever on the committee would like to come and present when this comes back.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: Okay. Yes, I think it would be great.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: Any other comments or any other input?

Clark Campbell: Is there any sort of motion that we want to bring to take back to Council based on the proposal from the working group?

Kathy Kershner: You could, if you want to.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: Maybe we wait and go to the meeting.

Kathy Kershner: Like I said, this is a three-person committee where this action was taken. It has not been brought to the full council.

Clark Campbell: What was the committee?

Kathy Kershner: Finance and Administrative Services. Council Member Frazey, myself and Councilmember Donovan.

Clark Campbell: Got it. Okay.

Guy Occhiogrosso: So just quickly, a little bit of commentary. One of the reference points that I find so fascinating about our community and it mixes with what I think kind of blends to your question of charter. I would use the word intention of the creation of this body is, looking over Rob's shoulder, this mug here that I think everyone can see. If you didn't know Rob was a Cougar, there you go.

Guy Occhiogrosso: There you go. So what university think arguably our community's biggest impact, especially if you can't really say from a purely employment state, but if you look at student employment. Third largest institution, state institution in Washington state as far as our university is concerned. That one right there is number two in the little teeny tiny town of Pullman, Washington. Washington University is the second largest employer in Whitman County. I think that's interesting. The first largest employer of Whitman County is a private business. We can go to UW if we want to compare Seattle private employers. I do think it's really important looking at that list when we look at the intention of this group is so many of our biggest employers are public entities. So maybe a possible proposal revision to that is to add the specific term private employers. So take the recommendation and say, no, you actually want the top private employers to get back to Jen's point. Pretty easy to pull that out.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: Yes. And when I was asked to join, the member needed to be private and needed to represent ownership. Also Pam Brady represents BP and industrial and per a previous discussion with Jennifer, she reminded me that BP and all the subcontractors working at BP, that probably is the largest employer in Whatcom County.

Kathy Kershner: It is the largest employer, BP Cherry Point is the largest private. Matrix Services second, LTI, Fred Meyer, People's Bank. Well, that's the list according to the survey. But again, we don't know that all employers are represented there. I do also want to point out that the committee does have two non-voting members representing the counties institutions of higher education. So Western Community College, Northwest Indian College already in place. We already have that. Okay.

Ryan Allsop: Yes. And that was my point of what we vote on is minutes and maybe a letter we send occasionally with our names attached to it. And I think they're welcome to keep that as a non-voting member on there. And to me it just seems like a non-issue this discussion but it's been brought up by a council member that doesn't know us. I read all the notes also online.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: Thank you so much. Is there anything else? Okay, one of the topics that we can review again, we did this earlier in the year and last year, subcommittees with this committee group. We have a child care subcommittee and that is headed up by Clark and Guy. We have a housing subcommittee and that is headed up by Troy and Dan, We have Public Safety Subcommittee and that is headed up by Ryan and Erika Lautenbach. We have Water, Agriculture and marine health- Fish

Subcommittee and that is headed up by Brad Rader, Dana Wilson and Paul Burrill. And we have a policy subcommittee, so we actually have five, sorry. And that is headed up by Casey and Gina. The subcommittee meetings are established by different committees as needed.

And then Kathy also asked me about staffing and if there's anything that this committee could recommend to help with the staffing challenges that we are all dealing with. What we can do is we can help eliminate the pressures on childcare. These are the reasons that these subcommittees were set up.

We can help relieve some of the pressure on housing and that AMI, really a lot of the employees that we're trying to employ go up to a 200% AMI and they're struggling to find housing. Public safety. We could maybe make it safe to walk through our downtown. It's really hard to recruit employees and it's really sad that you have to avoid Guide Meridian, downtown and so many other areas in this beautiful community, not to mention how much we're enabling those people that are struggling, with these open air drug markets and no consequences when one is breaking the law. The other thing that we can do that will help with staffing is the water, ag, fish. We have an abundance of rain and water a few months out of the year and then we have a drought a few months out of the year so we can learn from those amazing communities like Yakima. And that will help with our fish, marine health and agriculture. That'll also help with development in the area and therefore circle this back to housing. There are solutions. So does that help with the issue of staffing?

Kathy Kershner: It does, yes. The council asked to help me brainstorm ideas that we wanted to make sure the committee was working on. And so the staffing issue was one that came over and Sarah went through this and it was wonderful. You're already working on it.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: Okay, great.

Ryan Allsop: One last thing. So Erika Lautenbach did reach out to me. There's going to be an all hands open summit at the end of June that she's asking to get it out to the proper methods instead of me sending a reply-all. I think it's going to be put on by University of Washington, Peace Health, Whatcom County Health Department and a variety of others. Just the massive crisis we're under in Whatcom County specifically, and it's going to be June 27th, 28th. I looked on the site and I saw it this morning. Couldn't see a time and place yet.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: Okay. All right. Debbie had a question.

Debbie Ahl: Yes. Thank you so much. I'm sorry. I'm not there in person. I forgot the drive time thing again, but I wanted to go back to the membership conversation. And Jen, I so appreciated you providing us with the data in that. One of the things I tend to think about, though, is especially as we're trying to become more aware of a community about some of our population, some of our communities that don't have as much of a voice. And that's that, you know, if we had somebody, for example, from Lummi Nation on this committee, would we look at things differently and would the future of our business community actually look differently? And I think that's one of the things that we need to keep in mind is how we also shape the future. It's kind of like the conversation on parking with the ADUs and that how do we shape the future, you know, going forward. And Lummi Nation itself, you know, has its own little economy, but

yet there could be more that could be done and that we could learn from. So I just wanted to kind of call that out in the context of sometimes, you know, Kraken are playing today and sometimes we need to skate to where the puck is going and not just representing what we have right now.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: I agree wholeheartedly. It would be phenomenal to have some business members from any of our tribal communities involved, that would be really authentic and very appreciated.

Ken Bell: I think the chair of the Lummi Business Council would be the appropriate member.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: That'd be awesome. That's wonderful. Ken, do you want to repeat?

Ken Bell: The chair of the Lummi Business Council could be a great member.

Sarah Rothenbuhler: And that fits our business focus. That's excellent. Anyone else? Thank you, Debbie. Thank you, Ken. Okay, we're going to wrap it up. Thanks, everybody.

Ryan Allsop: Thank you all.

Debbie Ahl: Thanks, everybody. Bye now. Go Kraken!

Next meeting: Monday, June 12, 2023 11-1230pm
Hybrid Meeting - In-person encouraged and Zoom option available