

Whatcom County Business & Commerce Committee

1801 Roeder Avenue ■ Bellingham, WA 98225 ■ wcbcc@portofbellingham.com ■ (360) 715-5118

WCBCC October Meeting Minutes (10/14/24)

WCBCC Members Present

Dan Dunne, WCBCC Chair
Debbie Ahl, Healthcare Industry
Ryan Allsop, Other For-Profit
Paul Burrill, Food Processing
Clark Campbell, Recreation
Matthew Green, Higher Education
Mayor Scott Korthuis (standing in for Mayor Greg Hansen)

Troy Muljat, Other For-Profit
CJ Seitz, Higher Education
Tyler Schroeder, Port of Bellingham
Russell (RB) Tewksbury, Internet Technology
Whatcom County Executive Satpal Sidhu
Whatcom County Councilmember Mark Stremmer

WCBCC Members Not Present

Pam Brady, Energy
Pete Dawson, Commercial Real Estate
Casey Diggs, WCBCC Co-Chair
Mayor Kim Lund

Brad Rader, Agriculture
Sarah Rothenbuhler, Other For-Profit
Heather Steele, Public K-12 Education
Dana Wilson, Marine Trades

Non-Members/Public Present: Ann Beck, Chris Behee, Dylan Deane Boyle, Andrew Calkins, Lance Calloway, Barbara Chase, Hugh Conroy, Whatcom County Public Utilities District Commissioner Atul Deshmene, Von E.O., Jessie Everson, Bowen Fabb, Jasmine Fast, Rob Fix, Bill Geyer, Brady Gustafson, Hart Hodges, Mauri Ingram, Lindsay Johnstone, Rose Lathrop, Gil Lund, Blake Lyon, Virginia MacDonald, Guy Occhiogrosso, Kori Olsen, Scott Pelton, Margaret Reich, Andrea Ruback, Paul Schissler, Gina Stark, Tara Sundin, Kent Thomas

Call to Order

WCBCC Chair Dan Dunne called the meeting to order at 11:00 a.m.

Approval of the Minutes

Clark Campbell moved, seconded by Ryan Allsop, to adopt the meeting minutes from October 14, 2024.
Motion passed.

Whatcom County Business and Commerce Committee (WCBCC) General Business

Chris Trout, Whatcom County Business and Commerce Committee member, resigned from the voting position representing Manufacturing. The WCBCC committee vacancy list and application materials are located on [Whatcom County's website](#).

WCBC September Meeting Minutes (10/14/24) – cont'd

Economic Overview, Whatcom County

Hart Hodges, Ph.D., Director of Western Washington University's Center for Economic and Business Research

Dr. Hodges provided insight into recent census data regarding household income and poverty, highlighted in the [“Bellingham’s median income dropped \\$12K in 2023, poverty up 53%, new Census Bureau data says”](#) article published in the Bellingham Herald on September 14, 2024.

Dr. Hodges cautioned against drawing conclusions from a single-year American Community Survey estimate, as they are less reliable due to small sample sizes. He highlighted that survey response rates dropped significantly post-COVID, especially among low-income households, which introduced sampling and weighting challenges.

Hodges explained that the reported rise in poverty reflects a return to pre-COVID trends following the expiration of pandemic-related stimulus measures. The apparent decline in household income may stem from statistical adjustments rather than actual economic changes. Hodges emphasized using multiple data sources to interpret trends and provided reassurance that the reported figures do not indicate significant structural shifts in the local economy.

Joint List of Housing Policies – Climate Action & Business Commerce

Troy Muljat, Co-Chair of the Whatcom County Business and Commerce Housing Sub-Committee

Troy reviewed a joint draft housing policy document on behalf of WCBC Housing Sub-Committee and the Climate Action Advisory Committee, reflecting mutual agreement on housing priorities between the two committees for recommendation to the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan's Housing Chapter (2025).

The Housing sub-committee recommended approving the draft housing policy document as written and bringing it forth to the Climate Advisory Committee for final approval.

Ryan Allsop moved to approve, seconded by Paul Burrill for finalization as written. Motion passed.

Severe Weather Shelter Discussion

Dan Dunne, Co-Chair of the Whatcom County Business and Commerce Housing Sub-Committee

Dan Dunne provided a review of the memorandum of recommendations derived from a sub-committee of the WCBC Housing Advisory Committee tasked with providing recommendations to Whatcom County Council regarding the severe weather shelter. Members of the sub-committee included: Whatcom County Health Department, Lighthouse Mission, Lydia Place, DVSAS, Ferndale Community Services, Opportunity Council, City of Blaine, City of Bellingham, Lummi Nation, Northwest Youth Family Services, City of Bellingham Emergency Management, and community members impacted by homelessness.

The review of the memorandum was to solicit feedback specific to the winter shelter. Recommendations on general sheltering will be provided at some point in the next year.

Adjournment

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 12:34 p.m.