

Whatcom County Business & Commerce Committee

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WCBCC December Meeting Minutes (12/16/24)

WCBCC Members Present

Dan Dunne, WCBCC Chair
Debbie Ahl, Healthcare Industry
Ryan Allsop, Other For-Profit
Pam Brady, Energy
Paul Burrill, Food Processing
Clark Campbell, Recreation
Casey Diggs, WCBCC Co-Chair
Pete Dawson, Commercial Real Estate
Matthew Green, Higher Education

Mayor Greg Hansen
Gil Lund, Manufacturing
Troy Muljat, Other For-Profit
Brad Rader, Agriculture
Sarah Rothenbuhler, Other For-Profit
CJ Seitz, Higher Education
Russell (RB) Tewksbury, Internet Technology
Whatcom County Executive Satpal Sidhu
Whatcom County Councilmember Mark Stremmer

WCBCC Members Not Present

Mayor Kim Lund
Tyler Schroeder, Port of Bellingham

Heather Steele, Public K-12 Education
Dana Wilson, Marine Trades

Non-Members/Public Present: Ann Beck, Chris Behee, Lance Calloway, Barbara Chase, Anna Dealy, Atul Deshame, Andrea Doyle, Jessie Everson, Jasmine Fast, Peter Frazier, Brian Heinrich, Lindsey Payne Johnstone, Pamela Jons, Todd Lagestee, Erika Lautenbach, Troy Lautenbach, Meredith (last name not provided), Guy Occhiogrosso, Emily O’Conner, Kori Olsen, Hannah Ordos, Margaret Reich, Andrea Ruback, Sarah Simpson, Dann Mead Smith, Tara Sundin, Rebecca Xczar

Call to Order

WCBCC Chair Dan Dunne called the meeting to order at 11:03 a.m.

Approval of the Minutes

Paul Burrill moved, seconded by Casey Diggs, to adopt the meeting minutes from the November 18, 2024 WCBCC meeting. Motion passed.

Review of Vacant Committee Positions

WCBCC is seeking committee representation on: Childcare, Recreation, Agriculture, and Other For-Profit. Additional information can be found on the [Whatcom County website](#).

Motions – WCBCC Sub-Committees:

- Remove “Childcare” sub-committee
- Remove “Community Safety” sub-committee
- Add “Transportation” sub-committee - Sarah Rothenbuhler (sub-committee chair) + Paul Burrill
- Add Pam Brady to “Policy” sub-committee

Motion for all bulleted items above by Troy Muljat seconded by Paul Burrill. Motion passed.

Whatcom County Business and Commerce Committee (WCBCC) General Business

Dan Dunne, Whatcom County Business and Commerce Committee Chair

Key Points:

- **New Committee Member Introduced:** Gil Lund, representing Manufacturing
- **2024 Review:** Provided overview of WCBCC annual accomplishments
- **Quorum and Voting Member Structure:** Whatcom County changed the rule on quorums. Quorum is now defined by participating voting members and excludes any vacancies. Quorum is defined as over half the voting members only. Quorum based on how many members rather than how many vacancies.

Healthy Children's Fund Update

Erika Lautenbach, Sarah Simpson, Ann Beck, Whatcom County Health and Community Services

Balancing program reach with support levels and focusing on a mix of high-reach, low-support programs and targeted-higher-support services. Targeted services include behavioral health, developmental disabilities, speech therapy, and doula services aimed at improving health outcomes. Currently have \$10 million in the fund.

Innovation Fund: Implementation team created to develop the next two-year plan. Team consists of contract expert and representatives from domestic violence services, childcare, early learning, and parents. Will continue to meet every other week until March and will also meet with taskforce members. Innovation Fund Award letters distributed for \$1.8 million+ for: Expansion projects, pre-k curriculum + behavioral and mental health support services in childcare centers.

Drop-in care program – Finishing up a contract to create a drop-in care in Whatcom County. Services will be available for low-income families, with a pay-for-service option for others.

Subsidy program: Resolution passed in Dec. 2024 to establish the Whatcom County Subsidy plan.

Key goals include:

- Providing tuition discounts (up to \$300/mo.) for families earning up to 85% of the state median income.
- Offering up to \$300/mo. per child for providers serving children ages 0-3 on WA State Working Connections Childcare Subsidy
- Launching outreach campaign to encourage families to enroll in the WA State Working Connections Child Care Subsidy.

An RFP was issued to recruit mental and behavior health workforce and expand available services to children ages 0-5 and individuals in perinatal period.

Overview of Assessed Value and Property Tax

Rebecca Xczar, Whatcom County Assessor

Assessor Office Functions.

- Responsibilities
 - Values property for taxation purposes, at 100% of its true and fair value
 - Maintains a listing and description of property accounts, maps, and ownership

- Administers exemptions for senior citizens
- Provides public information/assistance

Whatcom County Assessor's Office (Cont'd)

Rebecca Xczar, Whatcom County Assessor

Assessor Office Functions (Cont'd)

- Exclusions
 - Sets or determines property tax policy
 - Raises assessed values to raise money or taxes
 - Determines how much money taxing districts need

Provided overview of assessed values. Assessment date is January 1 each year, with new construction assessed by July 31. Properties are revalued annually as per WAC 458-07-010. The 2024 inspections will include Everson, Nooksack, Sumas, Maple Falls, Glacier, and northeast county areas. The 2025 inspections will cover Acme Valley, Lake Samish, Glenhaven, south Bellingham, and Lummi Island. Market areas are analyzed by comparing assessed values with sale prices. Adjustments are made to similar properties based on calculated median percentages. Changes in assessed values reflect analysis of prior year sales rather than current market fluctuations.

In 2023, the Department of Revenue flagged Whatcom County for its low real property ratio, which compares sales prices to assessed values. The ratio was adjusted to comply with state requirements. The 2023 ratio was 95%, with a preliminary 2023 ratio of 94% aiming to keep it in the mid-90s.

Property tax is based on budgets set by taxing districts. A 1% limit is applied to the amount of property tax each district can collect. Assessed values are mainly meaningful as a percentage of the total value of the district. Property tax increases for many residents are primarily due to voter-approved measures and the state school levy.

Public Comments

Todd Lagestee:

"I want to give a shout out to the Assessor's office. I think they do a really good job at being responsive. One thing Ms. Xczar didn't mention that I think is really important for everybody in the room to be aware of is the Whatcom County tax book – and you can Google that. That's produced by the Assessor's office and it is really valuable for understanding taxes in Whatcom County. I had the opportunity to explain to a couple of county councilmembers who weren't aware of that at some point. If you just Google Whatcom County tax book, it comes up. One thing I would like to hear from your office in the future, Ms. Xczar, is the impact of the multi-family tax exemption on the overall tax rate: How does that work? How does that impact other tax payers? Is it a shift? That might be worth looking at as that tool potentially gets used more in the future."

Atul Deshame:

"[inaudible] We are very excited to focus on storage this next year. When you have an unreliable supply, we need storage. This applies to both water and energy. Reliable supply is essential for all of us. Water adjudication summons are now expected to print in February. This date has slipped five times. I will discuss adjudication and opportunity for the business community to weigh in in this forum. Let me know if you are all interested. I would

like to thank Todd for his brief but extremely competent service. I don't think anyone else could have done a better job. I hope you continue to participate, Todd, in our community and its governance. I am termed out of the planning commission. We need someone who understands industry: manufacturing and technology, on the commission. I certainly wouldn't want to single out anyone like Pam, Gil or Todd to help me with this. But, anyway, we need somebody. We had another important commission planning meeting last week related to growth projections and I think it is very important to accurately project growth as unplanned growth results in poor land use. Having said that, the planning commission is still an extremely [inaudible] experience. The Business and Commerce Committee – in my opinion, you guys really matter and I hope you continue to – you know, matter. Thanks.”