

Whatcom County Business & Commerce Committee

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WCBCC April Meeting Minutes (4/14/25)

WCBCC Members Present

Ryan Allsop, Other For-Profit	Mayor Kim Lund
Rich Appel, Agriculture	Kevin Mernard, Recreation
Pam Brady, Energy	Heather Powell, Childcare
Paul Burrill, Food Processing	Tyler Schroeder, Port of Bellingham
Pete Dawson, Commercial Real Estate	CJ Seitz, Higher Education
Dan Dunne, Construction	Whatcom County Councilmember Mark Stremmer
Mayor Greg Hansen	Russell (RB) Tewksbury, Internet Technology
Gil Lund, Manufacturing	

WCBCC Members Not Present

Casey Diggs, WCBCC Chair	Sarah Rothenbuhler, Other For-Profit
Debbie Ahl, Healthcare Industry	Whatcom County Executive Satpal Sidhu
Matthew Green, Higher Education	Heather Steele, Public K-12 Education
Troy Lautenbach, Other For-Profit	Dana Wilson, Marine Trades

Non-Members/Public Present: Barbara Chase, Andrea Ruback, Todd Rawls, Jessie Everson, Jason (last name not provided), Whatcom County Councilmember Tyler Byrd, Whatcom County Councilmember Kaylee Galloway, Port of Bellingham Commissioner Ken Bell, Mayor Scott Korthuis, Hannah Ordos, Lance Calloway, Lindsey Payne Johnstone, Blake Lyon, Peter Frazier, Mauri Ingram, Kendall Nielsen, Paul Schissler, Hugh Conroy, Darlene VanderVeen, Andrew Calkins, Andrew Reding, Chris Behee, Kiana Oos, Guy Occhiogrosso, Daniel Probst, Kori Olsen, Forrest Longman, Jasmine Fast, Margaret Reich, Bruce Tabb, Brian Heinrich, Tim Linderman, Randy Gray, Tom Bajema, City of Bellingham Councilmember Michael Lilliquist, Kyle Gebhart, Elizabeth Boyle

Call to Order

Tyler Schroeder, on behalf of Casey Diggs, WCBCC Chair, called the meeting to order at 11 a.m.

Motion: Approval of the Minutes

Motion to approve March 2025 minutes by Paul Burrill, seconded by Ryan Allsop. Motion passed by unanimous committee quorum vote.

WCBCC Chair Updates

Welcome new voting committee members:

- Rich Appel, Agriculture
- Kevin Menard, Recreation
- Heather Powell, Childcare

WCBCC Chair Updates (Cont'd)

WCBCC Vice-Chair Appointment

Motion to approve Troy Lautenbach, WCBCC voting member, as Vice Chair of the WCBCC committee.

Motion by Ryan Allsop, seconded by Pete Dawson. Motion passed by unanimous quorum committee vote.

Economic Development Investment (EDI) Board Seat Nomination(s)

Tyler Schroeder, Economic Development Director, Port of Bellingham

The EDI Board, under the Whatcom County Council, administers funds from a state-rebated rural sales tax to support public infrastructure and economic development. The Board reviews financials, monitors funded projects, and evaluates new project applications.

Recent funded projects include:

- Infrastructure for All American Marine
- Regional stormwater facility north of Bellingham
- City of Blaine redevelopment (former airport site)
- Multiple projects in the City of Lynden

Board membership includes representation from city and county councils, small cities, the Port of Bellingham, and community members. The Board is requesting one voting member from the Whatcom County Business and Commerce Committee (WCBCC) to enhance representation. Ideal candidates should have experience in local government, public-private funding mechanisms, and economic development

The Council recently updated the EDI fund's strategic direction to prioritize public infrastructure and affordable workforce housing as a recent change in state law supports these initiatives.

The Board meets quarterly (Garden Room, County Courthouse) and seeks to increase meeting frequency. Previously, meetings were held on an as-needed basis.

Motion: Dan Dunne Appointment to EDI Board

Voting WCBCC committee member Dan Dunne self-nominated for appointment to the Economic Development Investment (EDI) board, seconded by WCBCC voting member Gil Lund and approved unanimously by WCBCC quorum vote. Motion passed.

Review of Draft Letter Related to the Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) & Project Labor Agreement (PLA)

Pete Dawson, CEO of Dawson Construction + Lance Calloway, AGC Northern District Manager

Pete Dawson and Lance Calloway presented a draft letter relating to the Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) and Project Labor Agreements (PLAs) draft ordinance prepared by Whatcom County Council.

Review of Draft Letter Related to the Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) & Project Labor Agreement (PLA) (Cont'd)

Presented the following key points:

Represents union and non-union workers, advocating for an equitable and competitive public bidding process

- Stated current laws already ensure prevailing wages, safety, anti-discrimination, and apprenticeship standards.
- Believes the proposed CBA/PLA structure would:
 - Increase project costs.
 - Exclude 90% of local construction workforce (open shop).
 - Primarily benefit unions, which comprise about 10% of the workforce.
- Warned that leadership may be receiving biased information from advocacy groups with vested interests.
- Emphasized intention to present a full and accurate picture to the County Council.

Highlighted differences between union and non-union contractors:

Detailed wage structure comparison between union and non-union contractors:

- Union: \$56 take-home of \$79/hr; \$23 for union dues/benefits
- Non-Union: \$74-\$79 take-home depending on insurance opt-out if already covered
- Union vesting delays up to three years and associated lost benefits
- Expressed concern the ordinance serves a minority (unionized) workers and is exclusionary to open-shop contractors

Provided historical context:

- **Dec 2024:** Initial CBA ordinance draft introduced
- **Jan 2025:** Dawson and Calloway presented to WCBCC; feedback gathered from 80+ businesses representing ~5,300 workers.
- **Feb 2025:** Memorandum addressing key points of the ordinance presented at WCBCC meeting; Councilmember Kaylee Galloway was present and requested more time for review
- **April 2025:** Revised letter submitted to Council detailing concerns with the ordinance
- **April 29, 2025:** Calloway scheduled to present to full County Council

Committee discussion highlights:

- Concerns Raised:
 - CBAs may reduce the value of public dollars (~60–70% efficiency via construction contracts).
 - Claimed prevailing wage compliance is already well-regulated.
 - County systems for prompt pay of subcontractors are functioning well.
 - Estimated CBA administration would require 2–3 FTEs—resources better used elsewhere (e.g., housing, behavioral health).
- Additional Notes:
 - Suggestion to offer a 5% bid preference to local contractors as an alternative.
 - Committee members questioned the origin and need for the ordinance.
 - Clarified ordinance is limited to County-funded public facility projects over \$15 million.

Review of Draft Letter Related to the Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) & Project Labor Agreement (PLA) (Cont'd)

Councilmember Galloway's Input:

- Stated the goal is to prioritize local labor and ensure responsible contracting.
- Version 2 of the ordinance addresses earlier feedback and raises the project threshold to \$15M.
- Emphasized openness to further dialogue and feedback.

Motion: Accept Memorandum to County Council regarding the CBA/PLA Agreements as drafted

Motion to approve the memorandum in response to the CBA/PLA Agreement ordinance as written provided by Ryan Allsop, seconded by Paul Burrill. Motion passed unanimously by committee quorum vote.

Smart Code: Reducing Housing Costs by De-Regulating Land Use Laws

Andrew Reding, Public Policy Professional, Charter Review Commissioner

Andrew Reding presented on adopting a Smart Code to address Whatcom County's housing shortage by replacing traditional land use regulations with a form-based, simplified code aimed at reducing development costs and increasing housing availability.

Presented the following key points:

- **Problem Identification:**
Whatcom County faces a severe housing shortage. Traditional zoning contributes to high regulatory costs—comparable to a 100%+ hidden tax—creating barriers to affordable housing development.
- **Policy Context:**
 - Commended recent state and local efforts (e.g., state legislation, mayoral executive orders) to reduce regulatory barriers.
 - Stressed the need for faster, more comprehensive reform to address outdated, fragmented zoning codes.
- **Smart Code Overview:**
 - **Form-based, not use-based:** Emphasizes building form and neighborhood function over land use separation.
 - **Transect Zones:** Ranges from natural areas to urban cores, supporting dynamic growth over time.
 - **Simplification:** Replaces Bellingham's 480+ zones/subzones with six core zones plus special districts.
 - **Traditional Patterns:** Promotes compact, walkable, mixed-use communities.
 - **Environmental & Fiscal Benefits:** Supports infill over sprawl, protects natural areas, reduces infrastructure costs, and improves municipal revenue efficiency.
- **Implementation Advantages:**
 - **Streamlined permitting:** "By right" approval for conforming projects; administrative approvals for minor modifications; public hearings only required for non-conforming uses.
 - **Support for local business:** Encourages neighborhood retail and construction sector jobs.
 - **Regional coordination:** Facilitates Growth Management Act compliance and inter-jurisdictional planning through tools like transfer of development rights (TDRs).

Smart Code: Reducing Housing Costs by De-Regulating Land Use Laws

Andrew Reding, Public Policy Professional, Charter Review Commissioner (Cont'd)

Presented the following key points (Cont'd):

- **Housing Type Flexibility:**
 - Increases supply of both single- and multi-family homes.
 - Expands opportunities for ownership of smaller units (e.g., ADUs, cottage homes).

Discussion Highlights:

- Council members expressed interest in real-world examples of Smart Code implementation.
 - **Examples cited:** Petaluma (CA), Bothell and Mountlake Terrace (WA), and Redwood City (CA).
- Clarified that form-based codes regulate the *form* and *public realm* rather than *land use* (e.g., not distinguishing between single- vs. multi-family occupancy).
- Emphasized that form-based codes are still regulations—just structured differently with a potential to better align with community values.

Next Steps:

- Committee to review materials, including a follow-up letter from Council Member Lilliquist.
- Consider inviting City Planning Director Blake Lyon for a detailed session comparing traditional and form-based codes.

Adjourn

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:31 p.m.