

DISCLAIMER: This document contains the Whatcom County Council or Committee minutes, as approved. However, unless an attested signature page is attached, they are not the final approved minutes.

1 Ken Oplinger, Bellingham/Whatcom Chamber of Commerce President/CEO,
2 stated the overall budget for the Chamber is about \$550,000. All political action
3 activities, not including advocacy, are in a separate organization with a separate
4 fund.
5

6 Roy stated political action is having a committee to decide which candidates
7 to endorse, and financially backing the candidates. Advocacy is what every group
8 does for its own interest.
9

10 Brenner stated advocacy can become political action. It depends on how one
11 advocates. Oplinger stated the Chamber speaks on behalf of businesses on
12 proposed legislative bills. The Chamber of Commerce will be more active politically
13 and in advocacy. It's important for business to have a voice. The Chamber
14 activities are strictly advocacy on issues. The only electoral measures the Chamber
15 will take a position on may be a ballot measure. The Chamber will not take a
16 position on any candidates for office. For that, the Chamber will set up a separate
17 board and funding.
18

19 Brenner stated there can also be a problem when the Chamber advocates on
20 a ballot measure. Oplinger stated the Chamber will draw the line by informing the
21 membership, not the general public, of the Chamber's position. The Chamber will
22 not spend any money advocating those positions to the general public.
23

24 Fleetwood stated the 2005 action plan for the Chamber came out after he
25 heard the Chamber will no longer accepting money from the County Council. One
26 action item was to find appropriate pro-business candidates for office. He asked if
27 the Chamber may oppose one of the current councilmembers. Oplinger stated the
28 Chamber will set up a separate board and organization to do any political activity.
29 The Chamber of Commerce itself will not take a position or spend money on a
30 position.
31

32 Crawford stated he is not interested in funding the Chamber of Commerce.
33 That doesn't mean he doesn't support the Chamber. He is interested in the
34 tradition of the Ski to Sea Festival. The Chamber is the vehicle by which the
35 community gets the race. The Chamber has not asked for operating funds, as it
36 has traditionally done. Mr. Desler and Mr. Oplinger can set up reasonable
37 accounting for direct expenses for the race. That's fine. In addition, the Council
38 will watch the Chamber. If advocacy turns into electoral politics, the Council will be
39 able to decide annually if it wants to continue to contribute to the Chamber.
40

41 In the meantime, the Chamber's separate organization may take a look at
42 completely separating the Ski to Sea Festival from any politically active
43 organizations.
44

45 Fund the \$29,000 this year, and keep an eye on accountability. The County
46 will watch the Chamber's actions, behavior, and advocacy very carefully in the
47 meantime to make sure the County's funding goes directly toward the festival. The

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1 County should not fund even advocacy. The County works with the Council of
2 Governments on issue advocacy already. Oplinger stated the Bellingham/Whatcom
3 Chamber of Commerce is one of only six chambers in the state with a regular
4 presence in Olympia. It would be happy to assist with funding issues in Olympia.
5

6 Crawford stated that is fine as long as they agree there will not be funding
7 for it from the County.
8

9 Caskey-Schreiber stated the councilmembers' first experience with Mr.
10 Oplinger was a white paper he wrote against the Boats Off Lake Whatcom issue.
11 She was concerned because that paper was written just after the County had given
12 the Chamber a significant amount of money. The citizens weren't happy with that.
13 The citizens want accountability of taxpayer money. She is in favor of funding the
14 Ski to Sea Festival through an invoice payment system.
15

16 Roy asked if this political arm will still be called the Chamber of Commerce.
17 Oplinger stated a working name is Business for Better Government. There will be a
18 separate name, board, and funding, but the organization will be run out of the
19 Chamber office.
20

21 **Roy moved** to remove funding \$29,000 for the Chamber of Commerce from
22 the budget, and to ask the administration see if there is another way to support this
23 activity. She is still uncomfortable with the invoice system. She's uncomfortable
24 funding any kind of a political action group.
25

26 Fleetwood asked if the Business for Better Government arm of the Chamber
27 will make a decision that one of the councilmembers has to be voted off the Council
28 because he or she may be pro-environment and anti-business. Oplinger stated
29 that's not necessarily true. The organization is not anti-environment. With the
30 boating issue, his perspective was that he didn't see scientific proof that the boats
31 should come off the lake, and there are other problems instead.
32

33 Crawford stated he is against the motion. The County doesn't have a role in
34 providing funds to the Chamber. Fund the Ski to Sea Festival in some way. He
35 asked if the Chamber can fund the Ski to Sea Festival as a private activity in the
36 future, or spin it off to a separate organization. He doesn't want the festival to
37 become the sacrificial lamb of a political discussion. Oplinger stated several
38 members of the board have been concerned about the Ski to Sea Festival in the
39 past few years. After the most recent event, the board members decided the
40 festival is benefited from staying with the Chamber. There is a number of non-
41 profit agencies that benefit from ancillary activities. The Chamber generates 1,700
42 room nights in the County because of the Ski to Sea Festival.
43

44 Nelson asked if the festival is a gain or loss for the Chamber. Oplinger stated
45 before this year, the festival was a loss. This year, the festival was a gain.
46

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1 Brenner stated she supports the motion. Mr. Desler and Mr. Oplinger can
2 work out a procedure for submitted invoices.
3

4 Desler stated the administration has a good relationship with the Chamber.
5 The County has supported a festival for more than 30 years. They can construct an
6 agreement that clearly stipulates the money will only be used for the actual
7 expenses on certain items and present a contract to the Council for approval.
8 That's the administration's first choice. If the Council decides it doesn't want the
9 appearance of a relationship with the Chamber because of the Chamber's earlier
10 comments, then the administration could develop something with another
11 organization to pay for those same expenses in a partnership with the Chamber of
12 Commerce.
13

14 Brenner suggested a friendly amendment to postpone any action on this item
15 until Mr. Desler has put together an alternative funding method with the Chamber.
16

17 Roy stated she does not accept the friendly amendment. Don't give taxpayer
18 money to an organization that has told the Council it is a political action group. The
19 national Chamber of Commerce has made clear it's a political action group.
20

21 Fleetwood stated he supports the funding request from the Chamber. He has
22 some problems with the request, but the Chamber has relied on the County for this
23 money for a long time. The festival is a major event for the community.
24

25 Oplinger stated he was one of many chambers in the state that issued a
26 strong rebuke to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce for its activities. He doesn't have
27 any ties to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, except that the local chamber says it
28 belongs to the national chamber for the purpose of getting information from
29 Washington D.C. He does not support its activities and the local chamber is not
30 owned by national chamber in any way.
31

32 Desler stated this is a two-step process. The Council budgets the money.
33 The administration will prepare a contract. There are adequate controls in place to
34 assure the Council's objectives are carried out under the contract arrangements.
35

36 Caskey-Schreiber stated she understands the concern. Down the road, look
37 at a request for proposal (RFP) for race sponsorship and see what other vendors
38 are willing to take it on. Now, the Chamber is the only agency that requested
39 funding to put this race together. She supports the community event. It's very
40 important. It showcases the county and is a signature event in the community.
41

42 Crawford stated the Chamber owns this event. The County can't put out an
43 RFP for someone else to do it.
44

45 Caskey-Schreiber stated they don't know what someone will come up with.
46

47 Roy restated her motion to remove funding for the Chamber of Commerce.

1
2 ***Motion to amend failed 1-4 with Roy in favor.***
3

4 Brenner referenced the solid waste specialist position in the Public Works
5 Department. The County needs Ellen Barton's position for working on bike paths.
6 She's looking for positions to eliminate. She asked in previous years that this
7 position be eliminated. If the Council doesn't eliminate this position, then at least
8 cut it back to half time. The County did just fine with a division secretary without a
9 solid waste specialist. The administration went out for bid to hire a specialist, and
10 instead bumped someone up in-house who was a secretary. She was probably a
11 fine secretary, but when she was promoted, she didn't have a background in solid
12 waste. It's fine to bump someone up from the inside, but it's obscene to call
13 someone a solid waste specialist when secretarial work is that person's background.
14

15 Desler stated the funding for this position comes from the solid waste fund.
16 The County can only spend solid waste funds on solid waste activities, not on
17 bicycle trail support. The County would have to fund bicycle trails support from the
18 general fund.
19

20 Brenner stated that instead of proceeding with the solid waste specialist
21 position as it is, go out for a bid that is a recommendation to the County Council,
22 and let the Council see who is applying for this position. Real incredible solid waste
23 specialists applied for this position. At least get the best bang for the County's
24 buck.
25

26 Crawford stated he made comments last week regarding Ellen Barton's
27 position. He's concerned about the position. If funding is not found for the
28 programs that Ms. Barton is working on, then the Council may be able to handle it
29 with an additional services request (ASR). Jim Miller told him they are exploring
30 other funding options. The situation doesn't need to be addressed at this time.
31 The solid waste specialist position is completely unrelated to this position.
32

33 Jeff Monsen, Public Works Director, stated he's discussed before what solid
34 waste staff should be capable of doing. It's new to him that this is again a concern.
35 The primary job of the two solid waste staff positions is managing meetings and
36 contracts. If the County wants to increase its in-house capability, it would be a
37 shift away from contracting services and toward higher classifications inside the
38 Solid Waste Division to perform those activities. That is not a matter that was
39 specifically proposed in any budget presentation to the Solid Waste Executive
40 Committee. The Executive Committee recommends the program delivery as
41 described.
42

43 Brenner stated she's brought this up in the past. The County needs to make
44 that commitment. For the same amount of money, get someone who is more
45 proactive than just running meetings. She heard they would get a recommendation
46 this coming year about the direction they want to move in with solid waste. She's
47 willing to wait until then, but she's been waiting for years. They could be doing a

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1 lot more for the same amount of money. Monsen stated there hasn't been any
2 substantive direction from the Solid Waste Advisory Committee or Solid Waste
3 Executive Committee to change course for priorities. That said, next year there will
4 be a substantial amount of focus on the rewrite of the solid waste plan to see if
5 they are going to change direction and priorities, and see how that relates to
6 financing. That is a specific objective in the planning process.

7
8 Caskey-Schreiber stated reconstructing a position like that is micro-
9 managing. She doesn't want the Council to get into that level of administration.

10
11 **Brenner moved** to remove the solid waste specialist position and refer the
12 position's activities to the Solid Waste Advisory Committee to come up with a more
13 proactive position.

14
15 **Motion failed 1-4 with Brenner in favor.**

16
17 Crawford asked about the comprehensive review of the phone system. He
18 asked if the time for that is now. Desler stated there are issues going on with the
19 phone system in the Treasurer's Office and two or three other places during peak
20 times. The relative cost of investing in the proposed software that will basically put
21 people on hold is about \$20,000. The administration prefers to train all staff
22 involved in answering calls to make full use of the existing phone system
23 capabilities. Also, the administration can add additional phone lines. Third, the
24 Treasurer's Office can add extra help during those high volume periods to assist
25 with the calls. Those three options may not be a solution. The administration is
26 concerned because this is a phone system that has met many County needs. Over
27 the next year, the administration is committed to developing a new system. The
28 administration may come back to the Council to invest in a new phone system.
29 He'd rather go through that process than have a short-term fix for a few staff
30 members.

31
32 Crawford stated the Council wants to be responsive to the Treasurer's
33 concern, in the sense it is looking at the big picture. If addressed this year,
34 system-wide, he asked if there are funds to do that. Desler stated the
35 administration is gathering information on how to fix the problem long-term. It has
36 held a training session for Treasurer's Office staff on how to optimize the current
37 phone system. It is measuring the current call volumes on the phone system.
38 Customer service is a high priority. The administration is constantly trying to be
39 more responsive. It has a few things left it can do with the existing phone system.
40 If necessary after all those things are done, the administration may bring forward a
41 supplemental budget request.

42
43 Brenner asked if the administration talked with the Treasurer. She thought
44 the Treasurer said the proposed system can be used by other departments.

45
46 *(Clerk's Note: End of tape one, side A.)*

1 Desler stated the software, licenses, and other updates to other systems are
2 required.

3
4 Barbara Cory, Treasurer, stated there are two parts to the proposal. One
5 part is the hardware. The second part is the software. The hardware is the
6 majority of the cost. That would be available for every department. In order for
7 every department to use the hardware, they would have to purchase software for
8 each phone at a cost of \$238 to use the hardware.

9
10 Brenner asked if each department will have to purchase software, no matter
11 what system the County purchases.

12
13 Cory stated adding another line will only make more callers go on hold.
14 Adding extra help is not a solution because that extra help doesn't have the
15 knowledge and information that is necessary to answer the very detailed and
16 complicated questions the callers are asking.

17
18 Caskey-Schreiber stated the Council is sympathetic, but it doesn't want to
19 piecemeal a solution.

20
21 Cory stated there is no strategic planning objective for phone systems.

22
23 Desler stated the administration started talking about it and added the
24 objective because of Treasurer Cory's request.

25
26 Crawford suggested an internal survey of the departments to see which
27 departments are also having troubles with the phone system. Desler stated that's
28 the reason the administration needs to examine the phone system overall. There
29 are better solutions for the County's growing needs, but it must look at a major
30 solution rather than spend money on temporary fixes.

31
32 Caskey-Schreiber asked if the administration would come back with a budget
33 amendment if it finds a long-term solution. Desler stated it would.

34
35 Fleetwood asked for an update on the discussion last week about the Parks
36 Department outdoor recreation program. Desler stated the departments efforts are
37 to make sure it focuses the outdoor programs on local events and local services.
38 The department wants to capture the cost of the service from the fees that are
39 collected. The outdoor recreation position will begin to work part time on opening
40 up Semiahmoo Park and other parks in the northwestern part of the county.

41
42 Roy stated only 100 people have been using the outdoor recreation program,
43 according to Mr. McFarlane. The department will try to broaden the user base by
44 including more day activities, local activities, and family activities. Include people
45 of varying athletic abilities. The focus has been narrow toward one specific group
46 of people. The objective is to broaden the program.

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1 Brenner stated it is a very expensive program that is only available to those
2 few people who are taking advantage of the program now.

3
4 Caskey-Schreiber stated they all question whether there has been an
5 assessment of the current phone problems countywide.

6
7 George Reid, Information Services Manager, stated the phone system
8 proposal is just for the Treasurer's Office. There is definitely a need in other
9 departments, including District Court, Health Department, Prosecutor, and Public
10 Defender. The current system is 12 years old, which is old technology. They need
11 to look at a new system in two or three years. To make the proposal available
12 countywide, departments need to purchase licenses and upgrade phones. He's not
13 sure if they would need to upgrade the file server.

14
15 Crawford stated the Council will discuss its travel expenses at tonight's
16 Committee of the Whole meeting. Traditionally, the Council budgeted \$10,000 for
17 travel expenses. In the last few years, costs have affected councilmembers'
18 abilities and willingness to participate in training and discussions with legislators in
19 Washington D.C. They will discuss expanding the amount of money budgeted for
20 travel expenses. He asked if the Council should discuss an expansion of the budget
21 now, in anticipation of that meeting. Desler stated the committee can discuss it
22 this afternoon. The administration can incorporate that amended amount into the
23 technical corrections that the administration will present the Council.

24
25 Caskey-Schreiber stated she wants to increase the budgeted amount for
26 travel expenses. The current amount only pays for the one trip to Washington D.C.
27 After that, a councilmember can't go to meetings at the Washington State
28 Association of Counties (WSAC) or in Olympia. In three months, she put 250 to
29 300 miles on her car just going to meetings within the county. Whatcom County
30 councilmembers are the lowest paid councilmembers in the state. Councilmembers
31 also talked about having a policy discussion about what expenses are appropriate
32 for reimbursement.

33
34 Crawford stated Councilmember McShane suggested very clear guidelines
35 about appropriate official government expenses. The Council will expand its policy
36 to define those expenses.

37
38 Caskey-Schreiber stated she will advocate a budget of \$2,500 per
39 councilmember.

40
41 Roy stated she wants to address the policy about being able to submit
42 mileage to meetings from home, which is disadvantageous to councilmembers who
43 live in the county.

44
45 Crawford asked about methamphetamine action coordination. There is a
46 methamphetamine action team meeting this Thursday. Straight Talk About
47 Responsibility (STAR), a local action group, has taken on a role of facilitating

1 methamphetamine action and coordination. There is concern about any progress
2 taking time, effort, and a level of coordination on case response to
3 methamphetamine problems, which is currently not occurring. A STAR concern is
4 whether the County is able to handle more complaints to County departments that
5 are generated as a result of information being given to the public. There may be
6 some reluctance to have that level of response. Desler stated the administration
7 feels that eliminating meth labs is significant. Last year, the Council appropriated a
8 lot of money for two strike force deputies who will solely focus on meth lab
9 enforcement. Those deputies began last month. If the County can do things with
10 existing resources to focus on meth, the administration is in favor of making it a
11 higher priority.

12
13 Roy asked who must clean up these sites.

14
15 Crawford asked if the funding budgeted will be adequate to deal with clean
16 up.

17
18 Regina Delahunt, Health Department Director, stated the Health
19 Department's role in cleanup is to post property and make it known that the
20 residence is unfit for habitation. The homeowner is responsible for cleanup. The
21 homeowner must submit plans for clean up to the Health Department. Generally,
22 that's what happens. They talked about putting together local regulations that
23 requires clean up when it doesn't happen. Right now, clean up isn't required.

24
25 Brenner stated the criminals are not the owners most of the time. The
26 absentee owners are not doing anything. Delahunt stated that has happened on
27 occasion. Eventually, one specific owner succumbed to the pressure of the
28 community and cleaned up the site.

29
30 Brenner stated her suggestion was to allow the County to do clean up, and
31 put a lien on the property. Delahunt stated the County is allowed to do that, but
32 the County must have the money to do clean up, and recovering funds is often
33 difficult. That's a policy discussion that needs to happen.

34
35 Caskey-Schreiber stated the Council is interested in pursuing that option.

36
37 Crawford asked if the County is financially ready for the community
38 awareness program by private organizations regarding methamphetamine labs.
39 Delahunt stated that if this community awareness campaign is as successful as they
40 hope it will be, the Health Department will have to shift resources from one area to
41 another to deal with it.

42
43 Caskey-Schreiber stated they should develop the laws that will allow the
44 County to recover its expenses before the Health Department has to shift
45 resources. The Council supports that activity. Delahunt stated that she must hire
46 the staff person for the position that will work on that rulemaking.

47

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1 Fleetwood asked if the Council and administration will still review the budget
2 annually. Desler stated they would, if there are issues and problems they need to
3 deal with, through the supplemental budget process. The County will go through
4 the entire 12 months and compare where they are at the middle of January when
5 the new Council comes in. That would be the time to make some adjustments if
6 needed. During the spring of 2006, the County will begin going through the two-
7 year budget process again.

8
9 Caskey-Schreiber asked if the Council and administration will meet again to
10 approve expenditures if the sales tax levy increase is approved. Desler stated they
11 would, to discuss the details of the biennial budget that specifically apply to
12 construction and operation of the jail. In fact, there are things in the budget now
13 that will allow them to get started right away, including architectural work and
14 hiring and testing procedures for hiring staff.

15
16 Caskey-Schreiber stated she wants to fast track the project if the levy is
17 approved. Desler stated he agreed.

18
19 Roy stated an unapproved ASR is for the social services coordinator for the
20 Public Defender's Office. The position seems consistent with the County's emphasis
21 on looking at alternatives and treating the whole family, not just the offender. She
22 asked if this is a second position, and if there is currently someone working on that
23 activity. Desler stated this coordinator position would be a second coordinator
24 position. In addition to the issue of funding new positions, there is also an issue of
25 housing the staff.

26
27 Roy asked if housing staff is something the Law and Justice Council looks at.
28 Desler stated it doesn't. The criminal justice working group, which includes all the
29 department heads in the criminal justice system, will meet regularly to discuss a
30 variety of issues.

31
32 Roy stated she hoped discussions will include philosophical discussions about
33 alternative sentencing, supporting families, and triage.

34
35 Crawford asked who assigns the priority level for each ASR. Desler stated
36 the department head rates the priority. The administration wants to make the
37 justice system run more efficiently. The administration and Council should discuss
38 in the future the logic gone into making the system more efficient.

39
40 Caskey-Schreiber stated she and the councilmembers are very pleased with
41 how well-thought out the budget is and how smoothly the budget review has been.

42
43 Desler stated the administration is still talking with the Planning and
44 Development Services Department about workload issues. A position that is in the
45 2006 budget that the administration would recommend starting in 2005. Look at a
46 slight adjustments in fee revenue to help pay for that adjustment. The Executive
47 will come forward with that adjustment. The position is a floater position in the

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1 Land Use Division. They may exchange a position that will be eliminated in 2006,
2 and put those funds in the 2005 budget. The plans examining work may slow as
3 interest rates rise. The change is more of an adjustment than a new cost. If it
4 becomes a new cost, the administration will seek a modest revenue change in fees
5 to allow that volume to occur. He will work on it and present it to the Council this
6 evening.
7

8 Second, the road fund budget in 2006 is not fully formed. The administration
9 needs to do more work on planning and scheduling. Also in 2006, there may be a
10 few other building issues that are not captured in the 2006 budget. The
11 administration does not have enough information on them at this point. The
12 County may have to address some capital issues in January.
13

14 Last, regarding the Public Works Department and Facilities Management
15 Division, the administration would like to work with the Council to develop a project
16 budget to extend beyond a one- or two-year period. It carries with it budget
17 authority for the life of the project rather than having to come back to the Council
18 for budget authority each year. He is still working on that proposal.
19

20 Caskey-Schreiber thanked the administration for being so fiscally
21 conservative and creating a healthy budget.
22

23 Desler stated he's happy to work with each councilmember.
24
25

26 **OTHER BUSINESS**

27
28 There was no other business.
29
30

31 **ADJOURN**

32
33 The meeting adjourned at 11:02 a.m.
34
35

36
37 _____
38 Jill Nixon, Minutes Transcription

39 The Council approved these minutes on November 9, 2004.
40

41 ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON

42
43
44
45
46
47 _____
Dana Brown-Davis, Council Clerk

Laurie Caskey-Schreiber, Council Vice-Chair

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