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WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL  
**Special County Council**

July 19, 2005

Council Chair Laurie Caskey-Schreiber called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. in the Council Chambers, 311 Grand Avenue, Bellingham, Washington.

Present:

Barbara Brenner  
Dan McShane  
Sam Crawford  
Seth Fleetwood  
Sharon Roy  
L. Ward Nelson

Absent:

None

**1. DISCUSSION REGARDING THE COMPREHENSIVE PARKS AND RECREATION OPEN SPACE PLAN (AB2005-201)**

Mike McFarlane, Parks and Recreation Department Director, stated there are three things to discuss: financial strategies, programming costs, and the public survey. Now, staff is still looking at the project list. The steering committee discussed the financial strategies a little bit. In-house, they are working on the capital maintenance and improvement list for existing facilities.

Tom Beckwith, Beckwith Consulting, submitted a handout of maps showing the proposal areas (*on file*). He submitted a prototype facility development costs handout (*on file*). The handout projects potential capital improvement costs for the next 20 years. The budgeting process only requires six years worth of planning. However, the implications indicate that they need to have a handle on what they expect the full plan to cost. The traditional marketplace costs are estimated. If they are going to forecast plan proposals, these estimates are the methodology they will use. Facilities are expensive. This estimate also shows what the facilities are worth.

In the last few years, there have been estimates of existing County structures, but those estimates are for construction costs, not replacement costs. The handout includes his estimate of what the County assets are worth. The estimates are preliminary. The table in the handout shows what the County has now, the ratio against the current population, the ratio against future population, and what the County will need in the future. He read through the estimates in the table in the handout. If the County maintains its inventory and existing ratios of land and facilities per capita, they will have a deficit in land and facilities totaling \$50 million by 2022 due to population growth.

1  
2 Roy asked if the funding deficit includes the Parks Department annual budget  
3 amount. Beckwith stated he has not yet factored in the budget amount. He will  
4 get to that. His estimates are theoretical, if the County doesn't change anything  
5 from what it is doing now.  
6

7 Page five of the handout shows the rations the County should have, given its  
8 population and the existence of other providers. The ratio will also include the  
9 ratios that should exist, including services provided by other providers in the  
10 county. The existing level of service (ELOS) and proposed level of service (PLOS)  
11 are only given for the County at this time. Later, he will add the levels for other  
12 public agencies and private providers. Over the next 20 years, the County and all  
13 other providers should add 1,057 acres of resource conservancy lands.  
14

15 The Washington State Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation (IAC)  
16 has standard ratios of facilities per capita for only some types of facilities. Their  
17 model is based on age-specific rates. The IAC doesn't provide standards for land-  
18 only facilities. Their issue is facility use.  
19

20 The National Recreation Park Association (NRPA) put out benchmark  
21 standards for certain facilities in 1983, but have since said that there really are no  
22 nationwide standards. The issue is how a standard is measured. The NRPA  
23 measures its standard by type of land, not size of park.  
24

25 Determining what ratios are right for Whatcom County is in imperfect  
26 science, and probably not relevant. The key issue is learning what facilities are  
27 being used and what people want. When he is done developing the PLOS for this  
28 handout, it will list everything the 20-year plan says should exist. Then, he'll  
29 compare that ratio with what the County has achieved and what other industry  
30 sources say. The key question is what the County is willing to develop if people are  
31 willing to fund the service. When this document is finalized, it will become the  
32 County's standards.  
33

34 Page seven of the handout includes the cost of the PLOS for 20 years. The  
35 list is incomplete at this time. When complete, it will include costs for all service  
36 providers, not just the County.  
37

38 McFarlane stated the price estimates with the partners are not firm. Some of  
39 the examples shown are carryovers from previous plans or have come up through  
40 the community visioning process.  
41

42 Beckwith stated his prototype costs are complete. The value of the facilities  
43 today approximates to \$2,000 per house. Every new house in the county has a  
44 \$2,000 charge on the park system.  
45

46 Nelson asked if it takes inflation into consideration. Beckwith stated it does  
47 not.

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1  
2 They've looked at other methods of determining the value of the County  
3 facilities. In the end, it's a matter of defining the costs. If the County can't afford  
4 what this price list comes to, decrease it, which decreases the level of service.  
5

6 Caskey-Schreiber asked if they should be charging a \$2,000 impact fee for  
7 every new home. Beckwith stated no. That amount is the value of the park system  
8 to each home.  
9

10 Roy stated every home has a \$2,000 benefit of the County park system. To  
11 keep the same level of service, each new home would need to come up with that  
12 amount.  
13

14 Caskey-Schreiber asked if that is the investment the County would have to  
15 come up with per new house, to keep the current level of service. Beckwith stated  
16 that is correct. That cost could be collected through an impact fee. Impact fees  
17 are allowed, but not for existing facilities. Impact fees were initially low, such as 25  
18 percent of the value. Now, they are at about 50 or 60 percent of the value.  
19

20 Brenner asked if that value includes the percentage of taxes people pay for  
21 houses that end up going into parks. People are contributing to parks already  
22 through their property taxes. Beckwith stated that is correct.  
23

24 Brenner asked the standard recommended ratio. She asked if the County is  
25 high, low, or average compared to the minimum level of service. Beckwith stated  
26 Whatcom County, given its size and urban development, is low in conservation  
27 lands, very low in resource parks, and very low in recreational facilities. However,  
28 the nature of park financing has changed, and those numbers are probably okay  
29 today. The key issue is the number of resource parks, which is low.  
30

31 Nelson asked if they consider the state and national forest lands. Beckwith  
32 stated they are considered in the industry averages on a gross scale, depending on  
33 the distance between the jurisdiction to the forestland.  
34

35 Nelson stated no county would meet Mr. Beckwith's criteria. Beckwith stated  
36 it's not a statistical game. It's a process of inventorying what they have and  
37 deciding what they want to protect.  
38

39 Nelson stated each county is different. The ratio is determined by what the  
40 citizens want. Beckwith stated that is correct. It's also determined by what the  
41 County has and is willing to protect.  
42

43 Caskey-Schreiber asked if there is any correlation between growth rates of  
44 counties and how much parkland is available. A higher level of service could be a  
45 conflict by drawing growth to an area. Beckwith stated the plan will determine the  
46 model that fits the county. For instance, King County no longer provides regional  
47 and athletic parks. Instead, King County conserves the conservancies in lands

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1 beyond the urban growth areas. Now, they are having a hard time justifying their  
2 role to the people in other areas of the county. Snohomish County and Pierce  
3 County decided to go the other direction by preserving regional parks that residents  
4 can visit and use.

5  
6 Caskey-Schreiber stated Whatcom County has a recreation area at Mt. Baker.  
7 A question is whether the County is doing the best it can with Mt. Baker, and if it  
8 would be beneficial to build up that tourism industry. Beckwith stated that in his  
9 experience, he knows those assets are not going to grow in size. Therefore, local  
10 residents can't get to those facilities because of increased population, so they start  
11 looking toward the State and local parks for places to go. There is more demand  
12 for areas like Silver Lake Park to be developed at Cherry Point and the Nooksack  
13 River. They are resident parks.

14  
15 Nelson asked if there was discussion on the effect of condominiums and  
16 timeshares on park use over the years. He assumes it has increased. Beckwith  
17 stated they're inventorying everything that is recreational-based, not just County  
18 recreation facilities. The County must engage all those other recreation facilities to  
19 meet the demand.

20  
21 Nelson stated a concern is with a lot of recreational housing going in at Birch  
22 Bay, which pressures the County to provide the entertainment. Beckwith stated  
23 that if they attract a certain age group, it changes the factor even more.

24  
25 Roy stated the community services looked at what the citizens of this county  
26 want, including people who live in condos and in areas all over the county. She  
27 assumed that the recommendations from the community would reflect their overall  
28 desires. It isn't specifically the people at Birch Bay who are determining the need.  
29 The recommendations are on an overall need from people all over the county. She  
30 asked if the people living near the Nooksack River dictated the recommendations  
31 for the Nooksack River. Beckwith stated the recommendation does not consider all  
32 participants yet, but it will. The survey is not over yet.

33  
34 Beckwith submitted a financial strategies handout (*on file*). This is how the  
35 County can get the money and what it can afford. There are three scenarios,  
36 divided into parks and recreation. The handout also considers regional versus local  
37 facilities. The scenarios shows trends, conditions, and how the County could  
38 possibly meet the scenarios. Each scenario has three alternatives. The same  
39 structure is on each page. The top box on each page shows proposed  
40 expenditures. The rate of population growth is 1.5 percent per year.

41  
42 Nelson asked if this is a six-year plan. Beckwith stated it is, because the  
43 County does a six year capital project plan.

44  
45 Nelson asked if the dollars reflect a proportional percent based on six years.  
46 Beckwith stated it does, for park administration.

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1 Caskey-Schreiber stated the growth rate for the last ten years is 1.6 percent.  
2 She asked if the growth rate is divided between the county and cities. Beckwith  
3 stated the growth rate is given countywide.  
4

5 Fleetwood asked if the \$1.65 million administrative cost over six years is per  
6 year or above the budget. Beckwith stated that amount is a per year total. This is  
7 the cost to provide administration for the next six years, based on 2004 trends.  
8 This is a zero-based budget. He read the expenditure items in the top box for  
9 scenario 1A.

10  
11 *(Clerk's Note: End of tape one, side A.)*  
12

13 Beckwith continued to state that if they maintain the 2004 park system  
14 trend, and add \$14 million of new facilities, the County will need \$35 million over  
15 the next six years. This is alternative 1A.  
16

17 Caskey-Schreiber asked what the County is currently spending. Beckwith  
18 stated the County is spending the amount indicated, minus the \$14 million for new  
19 facilities and their operations and maintenance costs for that added \$14 million in  
20 facilities.  
21

22 Caskey-Schreiber stated the County can use the real estate excise tax  
23 (REET) 2 for maintenance. She doesn't know if they are doing that this year.  
24

25 Nelson stated there are many ways that \$14 million in expenditures can be  
26 done. There is capacity in the County to do that. These are the types of  
27 administrative costs that would exist if they increase facilities. Beckwith stated  
28 they need to look at the overall cost and how to best fund that overall effort. An  
29 enterprise of \$35 million is major.  
30

31 He continued to read the handout on proposed revenues for scenario 1A.  
32 The County could get additional revenue of only \$6 million, which is not enough to  
33 keep the department alive for six years.  
34

35 Nelson stated remove the \$14 million from the total proposed expenditures,  
36 which could be from something like a bond mechanism. The numbers could be  
37 distracting. Beckwith stated the entire budget would still be about \$20 million.  
38 Dedicated sources will only generate \$6 million.  
39

40 Nelson asked if administrative costs could be reduced if they don't spend the  
41 \$14 million on new facilities. Beckwith stated the operations and maintenance  
42 (O&M) cost would be reduced, but the administrative costs would not be reduced.  
43

44 McFarlane stated they've been really falling short in the repairs column. The  
45 backlog continues to grow.  
46

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1 Caskey-Schreiber asked if they are putting forth proposals for REET 2.  
2 McFarlane stated he is working on those proposals.  
3

4 Beckwith stated there are six identified funding strategies for option 1A. The  
5 first option is to continue using general funds. Since there is a one percent limit on  
6 property tax increases, this option will begin to squeeze the budget. Plan on the  
7 budget for discretionary items declining.  
8

9 The second option is to charge an impact fee of about \$1,600 per house.  
10 However, homes in a municipal area can't be charged the fee, and the fee can only  
11 be collected for facilities. The potential value is \$12 million countywide over six  
12 years, but much less to the County. Impact fees can only be used for new  
13 development, not operations and maintenance. Also, the fees must be spent  
14 locally, not on a countywide facility.  
15

16 Roy asked how a local area is defined. Beckwith stated a local area is  
17 probably the place that is nearest the homes that has amenities such as  
18 playgrounds and ball fields. A regional facility is defined by the environment, such  
19 as Silver Lake, trails, and the shoreline. They are used by people countywide. A  
20 playground is not used by people countywide. When collecting an impact fee, the  
21 fee can be defined as being for regional facilities only. Then, they don't collect fees  
22 for a playground.  
23

24 Caskey-Schreiber asked if the impact fees are bound by subarea plans.  
25 Beckwith stated the impact fees for local facilities must be spent against the local  
26 plan.  
27

28 Brenner asked if the County would have the most flexibility if it defines the  
29 impact fee as being for regional facilities. Beckwith stated it would. Some counties  
30 collect fees countywide, and then distributes the funding to each jurisdiction that  
31 wants to participate. There would have to be an interlocal agreement between the  
32 County and each jurisdiction.  
33

34 The third option is to go for REET 3, with voter approval of 50 percent plus  
35 one. REET 3 can be collected and used for operations and maintenance as well as  
36 capital acquisition. It would be worth \$9.6 million over the next six years. The  
37 proposition to the voters would be to apply 100 percent of REET 3 funds collected  
38 to regional parks.  
39

40 Caskey-Schreiber stated she supports going for REET 3. People would accept  
41 that tax to protect the community's amenities. Beckwith stated the survey will ask  
42 people if they will support REET 3.  
43

44 Brenner asked if there is an option to increase the sales tax. Beckwith stated  
45 the retail sales tax revenue is \$8.3 million annually, but the County doesn't give  
46 any of that to the Parks Department. This alternative doesn't propose increasing  
47 the sales tax for the purpose of parks.

1  
2 The fourth option is to go for a local option vehicle license fee. Counties,  
3 with voter approval, may add up to \$15 per license for capital projects. Charge  
4 that fee and invest the revenue in trails and open space. That would be worth \$18  
5 million over the next six years.

6  
7 The fifth option is to do the same thing with the local option fuel tax.  
8 Counties, with voter approval, may add 2.3 percent to gasoline sales. That would  
9 be worth less than the license fee.

10  
11 He's found that people are more responsive to the license fee, especially with  
12 what has happened with gas taxes. If the fee only gets residents, the fuel tax will  
13 get tourists.

14  
15 This alternative does not propose options four or five.

16  
17 The last option is to go to a bond, which requires 60 percent voter approval,  
18 or property tax to put into acquisition and development. A levy requires 50 percent  
19 plus one voter approval, and can also be spend on operations and maintenance.  
20 For a levy or bond of \$14 or \$15 per year, the County would invest it's target  
21 budget of \$35 million. For a levy or bond of \$25 per year, the County would also  
22 be able to invest \$15 million in new land and facilities. If they use the mixture of  
23 strategies he recommends for 20 years, they can invest from \$60 million to \$70  
24 million in new facilities. Scenario 1A looks at all the regional parks. It is possible to  
25 fund the facilities if the County does this.

26  
27 Roy stated the survey will indicate whether the community is willing to pay  
28 for this. The public may say it is not interested in any more fees or taxes because  
29 of other recent increases for the jail and gas tax. Beckwith stated that if that is the  
30 survey result, he will revise the financial strategies. Then the County will have a  
31 real plan that reflects the citizens' wishes.

32  
33 Nelson stated the citizen meetings discussed only a wish list. They didn't  
34 include a discussion of financial impacts. He's sure the plan will be somewhat  
35 scaled back. Beckwith stated it may or may not be.

36  
37 Scenario two is the same as scenario 1A, but with a different combination of  
38 options and revenue. In past budgets, open space was purchased with  
39 conservation futures funds, but not through the park plan. Some of those  
40 acquisitions should be in the park plan, and those funds should flow through the  
41 park plan.

42  
43 Caskey-Schreiber stated the County has purchased property with  
44 conservation futures funds in the past, with other partners. She asked if that land  
45 is not considered parkland because it was purchased with conservation futures  
46 funds or because it is conservation land. Beckwith stated they will still use the  
47 same partners and conservation futures funds, but the purchases will be in the park

1 open space plan. It is like an accounting change. These need to be in the parks  
2 plan, and the funds should be identified as a park project.  
3

4 Nelson stated the Council needs to start addressing the issue of buying up  
5 land that is put in conservancy, but is not planned for park or recreational use. The  
6 Council needs to start discerning for what the funds are used. The public expects  
7 those funds to be used for recreational and park activities.  
8

9 Roy asked what are the public expectations for use of the conservation  
10 futures funds. She always thought open space and conservation of critical areas,  
11 not just parks, is a part of the fund. Also, the County needs to prioritize the use of  
12 the funds. She asked if this proposal suggests that the County would commit 25  
13 percent of the conservation futures funds to parks use. Beckwith stated the  
14 percentage is dedicated to open spaces that are in the parks plan.  
15

16 Roy stated the County is purchasing land in the Lake Whatcom watershed,  
17 working on conservation easements, and working on protection of agricultural land.  
18 She asked if the County can ask for more from the voters for conservation futures  
19 funds. McFarlane stated the County is almost at the limit.  
20

21 Fleetwood stated the ballot measure at the time was whether the fund would  
22 be to support open space, farm protection, and other things. There was no  
23 delineation of specific expectations. A number of things were listed in the ballot  
24 title. Beckwith stated conservation futures can't be used for active recreation, such  
25 as ball fields. However, a property can usually be packaged so conservation futures  
26 funds are used for open space, and campsites or other active recreation would be  
27 purchased with park money.  
28

29 Nelson stated the State statute is specific that the funds be used for  
30 conservation of open space for future generations. The public had a wide variety of  
31 perceptions of what that meant. They need to have better coordination on how to  
32 use the land for recreational use and public access.  
33

34 McShane asked if they anticipate using funds from other funds. Beckwith  
35 stated they will pull from the options listed in the handout.  
36

37 McShane stated it seems like there are policy issues about the percentage to  
38 set for each fund. Beckwith stated conservation futures funds, timber sales, and  
39 road fun monies can be used on the parks plan in some aspects. Therefore, there  
40 should be a better accounting of the flow of money from those funds through the  
41 park plan.  
42

43 He continued to read scenario 2, which would create \$43 million to \$46  
44 million in six years for acquisition. That's too much money. Over 20 years, the  
45 amount generated would be \$165 million to \$180 million for acquisition.  
46

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1 Nelson stated a lot of administration goes into the development and  
2 implementation of this plan at that level. He asked if that was considered.  
3 Beckwith stated it was.  
4

5 Nelson asked if there are other resources in the county to add or assist with  
6 development of the plan at that level. Beckwith stated some of this money may  
7 flow to other jurisdictions or trusts. At a level of \$165 million, they would have to  
8 start adding staff.  
9

10 Scenario 3 reallocates the funds similar to scenario 2, without impact fees or  
11 a bond. They can still generate \$67 million for the proposed level of service.  
12 Between the three scenarios, repackaging the programs to flow through the parks  
13 plan, it's possible to maintain an aggressive regional park system in the county.  
14 The survey will indicate what the public is willing to pay for.  
15

16 Scenarios one through three are for regional facilities. A local park facility,  
17 such as in Birch Bay, would be done through the establishment of a local recreation  
18 area. The people who live in that local area would vote on the creation of the local  
19 recreation area.  
20

21 Roy stated the Birch Bay area is a regional facility. Many people who come  
22 to Birch Bay are from out of the area. Beckwith stated he's not talking about the  
23 shoreline. He's talking about things such as playgrounds and ball fields.  
24

25 Roy asked if there is any measurement of the use of different areas in the  
26 county. She asked if the County keeps data on public use of park facilities.  
27 McFarlane stated staff tries to in some areas. Regarding local versus regional park  
28 use areas, a community park at Bay Horizon would be an example of a local park.  
29

30 Fleetwood asked if some of the tax increases are required through a vote of  
31 the people in 2006. Beckwith stated some options, such as REET 3, the license fee,  
32 the fuel tax, and the property tax, would require a vote of the people. That is one  
33 purpose of the survey, to see what the citizens are willing to pay for.  
34

35 Nelson stated they should wait until they see the survey results before  
36 putting forward a proposed tax. First, have a plan.  
37

38 *(Clerk's Note: End of tape one, side B.)*  
39

40 Beckwith continued to state that this process anticipates the questions that  
41 will come up when the County asks for a levy, bond, or whatever.  
42

43 Caskey-Schreiber stated the level of service will decline in the future, given  
44 the population increase, if the County doesn't do something.  
45

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1 Beckwith stated areas within the county can have their own local facilities  
2 through a recreation service area. They don't have to create another jurisdiction  
3 and elect officials. The County can do it for the area, but it would be expensive.  
4

5 Pages nine and 10 of the handout are about recreational programs. In 2004,  
6 it cost almost \$500,000 per year to run the programs. These programs bring in  
7 revenue that is less than half of the cost. There are three options. One option is to  
8 increase the fees, but some programs will go away. A second option will be to  
9 continue to subsidize the programs from the general fund. A third option is a  
10 property tax levy to generate money for programs. If they can increase the  
11 recapture rate, the general fund subsidy becomes manageable.  
12

13 Lee Springgate, The Point Wilson Group, submitted the recreational pricing  
14 strategy handout (*on file*). Most public agencies are undisciplined and illogical in  
15 pricing recreational services. The first question they must ask is whether the  
16 recreational programs are consistent with their mission. Most programs aren't  
17 consistent. The next question is whether the County or someone else should  
18 provide a particular service. If the County doesn't have to provide the service  
19 directly, it can partner with another organization, subsidize the service for low  
20 income residents, or offer a referral to the other organization. More and more  
21 jurisdictions are choosing to spend less of their energy on providing the service  
22 directly. Instead, they ensure that someone else in the community provides the  
23 service.  
24

25 Nelson stated most communities must balance providing the service with  
26 partnering with other agencies. Springgate stated jurisdictions may facilitate the  
27 service, help with scholarships, and offer referrals. The County's job is to put some  
28 energy and effort to make sure recreational services are provided by and through  
29 others where possible.  
30

31 Brenner stated one idea is to have people pay based on their ability to pay,  
32 but was told it would cost too much to facilitate. She asked if the cost of  
33 scholarships includes the cost of administering the scholarships. Springgate stated  
34 it does. It is up to the Council to decide on whether the program is important  
35 enough to facilitate scholarships. In his experience, they can confirm eligibility with  
36 a minor amount of verification. Some people may take advantage of the  
37 scholarship, but ultimately it's a better system.  
38

39 If the County is going to deliver the program directly, it must decide how to  
40 price the program. He read the handout on the recreation services pricing policy.  
41 Jurisdictions price their services somewhere along the range from a full subsidy to  
42 benefit the public good, such as offering parks to resident at no charge, to  
43 collecting a profit for the private good, such as private golf and tennis clubs and the  
44 gun range. The Council must make policy decisions on what programs it may want  
45 to subsidize.  
46

1 Nelson stated jurisdictions have to consider why it may subsidize a program.  
2 One reason to subsidize the rifle range, for example, is so people don't go shooting  
3 in areas such as gravel pits or other areas. The Council must also measure the  
4 benefit that can't be measured financially.

5  
6 Brenner stated the deputies use the gun range, also.

7  
8 Springgate read the handout on alternative pricing strategies. The  
9 administrative model is more related to pricing according to the cost of the service.  
10 The Council should take a hard look at that strategy, which is rational and coherent.

11  
12 Nelson stated the Park Advisory Board could be more involved in considering  
13 cost effectiveness if the County uses the administrative model.

14  
15 Brenner stated there was an issue about why the County has to have a  
16 person at the park to collect the user fees, instead of putting up a fee drop box.  
17 She was told that it wasn't a legitimate way to do that. McFarlane stated there are  
18 staff people who collect the user fees at the parks now. They also have self-  
19 registering containers. Staff is available during peak times to help the public and  
20 also provide other services.

21  
22 Springgate stated many originations do a hybrid pricing strategy. When  
23 they're all done, make sure the primary pricing goals are reached. The net result of  
24 the pricing strategy should be to improve efficiency and equity.

25  
26 The Whatcom County Parks Department has a budget of about \$3 million.  
27 The recreational programs account for about 16 percent of that budget. That's not  
28 an onerous amount for the department to have. Of that 16 percent, the overhead  
29 costs for running the program are \$171,000. That amount should be lower.  
30 Compared to other jurisdictions, Whatcom County is in the middle in terms of  
31 recreation cost recovery. Staff will work on all program costs and cost recovery.  
32 Then, the County will know the implications of fee changes for different cost  
33 recovery rates. Also consider the variables, such as reduced participation due to  
34 higher fees. He read the handout on policy options. Everyone is facing budget  
35 crises, so they are subsidizing programs less.

36  
37 Nelson stated outside dollars are also supporting the services. Springgate  
38 stated that is true. There are other policy options.

39  
40 McFarlane read the recommendations on the last page of the handout. He is  
41 closely watching what the cities do to provide services, also, to minimize duplication  
42 of services. The department has already begun to expand the teen adventure  
43 program (TAP). Use has doubled in 2005. He has already started the process to  
44 transition certain programs, such as out-of-county trips, to the private sector. The  
45 County has a huge investment in equipment and liability for some of the programs.  
46 He would like the department to serve as a clearinghouse or referral for some of  
47 these programs. Redirect general fund subsidies to interpretative and recreational

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1 programs that are appropriate for the parks and other community areas. Through  
2 a private grant, the department has elected to offer some free programs to kids.  
3 There is no magical level of cost recovery for all programs. It depends on the  
4 programs. Cost recovery recommendations and strategies will come forward to the  
5 Council in the future.

6  
7 Caskey-Schreiber stated she and Mr. McFarlane have worked out a summer  
8 activity schedule two days per week for kids in the Kendall area.

9  
10 Beckwith submitted an opinion survey parameters handout (*on file*). The  
11 most effective survey type is a mail out, phone back survey. He will randomly  
12 recruit people to participate by calling them on the phone to ask them the  
13 participate. He uses two key phrases to ask what people want in the future and  
14 what they want to pay for it. To those who agree to participate, he will mail a  
15 written survey with all the graphics that illustrate what they are trying to do. There  
16 will be up to 100 questions, which is a large survey. Because the participants have  
17 time to read over the survey, the questions can be fairly sophisticated. After a  
18 week and a half, they will call the participants on the phone and ask them to read  
19 their answers. When they reach the desired sample size, they will thank the  
20 remaining participants and allow them to mail in their surveys.

21  
22 Nelson stated the survey sample size seems too small. He is concerned  
23 about getting those results back. He asked the number of surveys that are mailed  
24 out. Beckwith stated he will mail out twice as many surveys as they want to  
25 respond. The thank you letter to all participants is critical.

26  
27 Caskey-Schreiber asked if they would survey only residents in the  
28 unincorporated area. Beckwith stated that is an option. In the past, they've  
29 surveyed residents countywide because they are asking about countywide priorities.

30  
31 Caskey-Schreiber stated the survey sample size is very small. Beckwith  
32 stated the handout includes the margin of error depending on sample size and  
33 survey result percentage.

34  
35 Caskey-Schreiber stated she works with the survey center at Western  
36 Washington University. They don't do surveys that small. Beckwith stated it  
37 depends on the type of survey. When survey results are mailed back, there must  
38 be more participants. With a phone-back survey, they can do with fewer  
39 participants.

40  
41 Caskey-Schreiber stated she disagreed. Beckwith stated it also depends on  
42 the sample group. If they want to compare subgroups within the survey, such as  
43 county residents versus city residents, the sample size would have to be larger.  
44 For the purpose of this budget, he proposes a sample survey of 300 participants  
45 countywide, which will produce an accuracy rate of about 5.8 percent.

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1 Another thing to consider with the accuracy rate is how they are going to use  
2 the results. Since they are prioritizing programs from top to bottom, a program  
3 that receives about 50 percent in favor will be questionable. They'll want to go with  
4 programs that receive a huge amount of support. In that case, the accuracy level  
5 can be less than something like a political election, with a straight yes or no  
6 response.

7  
8 Roy asked if the percentage is the error margin, not the accuracy. Beckwith  
9 stated the confidence level is the number of people who participated and if the  
10 random sample group is legitimate. The rate is an accuracy rate of what a typical  
11 person will say. The accuracy result of a 300-person survey sample will be 5.8  
12 percent, plus or minus, of what a typical resident would say.

13  
14 Caskey-Schreiber stated it will be hard to base policy on a survey sample  
15 that small. Beckwith stated there won't be a question if a program comes in with a  
16 60 or 70 percent approval.

17  
18 His assumption is to survey 300 registered voters countywide. The Council  
19 can change those assumptions.

20  
21 Roy asked if the accuracy rate is that there is a five or six percent chance  
22 that the survey represents the rest of the residents in the county. Beckwith stated  
23 it is not. The percentage is a range within which the result is accurate. The range  
24 will go up and down that percent.

25  
26 McFarlane stated the contract was originally to survey 200 residents, but the  
27 review committee felt that number was too low, so they changed it to 300. If the  
28 Council wants a larger sample, now is the time to decide that.

29  
30 Brenner asked the cost to survey more people. Beckwith stated the survey  
31 cost is \$50 per completed survey.

32  
33 Caskey-Schreiber asked if they've thought about contracting out the survey  
34 service elsewhere. She knows of one company that can do it for less. Beckwith  
35 stated he uses GMA Market Research, which is the biggest and most efficient in the  
36 region. The \$50 cost per survey person includes the design of the survey and  
37 mailing list, publication and mailing, phone calls, collation of results, and his time to  
38 analyze the results.

39  
40 *(Clerk's Note: End of tape two, side B.)*

41  
42 Roy stated the wording of the questions have to be done correctly. She  
43 asked the increase in error rate by increasing the sample size. Beckwith stated that  
44 the rates are in the table on page four.

45  
46 Roy asked what error rate is about average, when news polls are taken.  
47 Beckwith stated four percent is about average for political purposes. In cities,

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1 they've done a sample size as few as 100. For counties, they usually do between  
2 200 and 400. It's a question of what the Council is comfortable with.

3  
4 Caskey-Schreiber asked if there has been analysis of the correlation between  
5 a survey's accuracy rate and the result of the decision that was made. Beckwith  
6 stated that they're trying to prioritize what has the most support down to what is a  
7 gray area. As they categorize their project proposals and financing strategies,  
8 those results are kept in mind. Projects that aren't ranked by a large majority  
9 would be things that should be done at another time or left for someone else to do.  
10 When they make proposals about things such as passing a levy or tax, they want a  
11 higher margin. This is stage one of the process. An actual campaign is stage two,  
12 when another test must be done.

13  
14 Caskey-Schreiber asked the cost of increasing the survey size from 300 to  
15 400. Beckwith stated the additional cost would be \$10,000. The cost is \$50 per  
16 complete survey.

17  
18 Caskey-Schreiber stated that when the survey comes in and it indicates the  
19 direction the Council should take, she must consider how much weight the survey  
20 should have when making their decisions. Beckwith stated that first,  
21 Councilmember Caskey-Schreiber has to be comfortable with the survey. Second,  
22 he has to be able to defend the survey. He can defend the statistics on any sample  
23 size. Someone will always question the statistics, but they are accurate.

24  
25 McShane stated the issue with surveys is how the questions are asked, not  
26 what the survey numbers are. So far, he is confident the right questions will be  
27 asked.

28  
29 Roy stated that even she, as a policy maker, will be looking for the projects  
30 that receive a priority rank from 60 or 70 percent of the survey participants. The  
31 information they want is where the priorities are. It seems that is the information  
32 the Council will get. It wouldn't be very smart to put something on the ballot that  
33 only has 54 percent. Once they know what the margin of error is and what they  
34 are looking for, they will be able to make the decisions.

35  
36 Caskey-Schreiber stated the survey size is a very small representation of the  
37 entire County population.

38  
39 Roy stated the statistics are valid.

40  
41 Caskey-Schreiber stated a survey sample of 300 people isn't really valid for a  
42 county with this population. She works with people who do surveys all the time. It  
43 is not a good representation.

44  
45 Beckwith stated that no matter what the probabilities are, the  
46 councilmembers have to decide what they'll be comfortable with. The question  
47 they're asked most is not about the survey size, but whether they create

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1 subgroups, such as incorporated versus incorporated areas. If the Council decides  
2 to look at subgroups, he will have to survey 400 people.

3  
4 Brenner stated she would like to see the questions ahead of time, in case  
5 anyone is uncomfortable with the wording. Beckwith stated that, depending on  
6 what the Council wants, he can either send the survey out, give the Council the  
7 ability to design the survey, or give the Council the survey before it's sent out, for  
8 information.

9  
10 Brenner stated she wants to review the survey questions, in case there is  
11 something that jumps out at her. Beckwith stated he will draft a survey for the  
12 Parks Board to review, with a mailing date in three weeks.

13  
14 Caskey-Schreiber stated she doesn't need to see the questions.

15  
16 McShane stated he would like to see the questions, just for information, but  
17 the Council should not make any changes to them. That would be risky.

18  
19 Beckwith stated that he has to deal with all the councilmembers or none of  
20 them when he designs the survey.

21  
22 Roy stated she agrees that the Council should not change the survey. The  
23 Council has no business messing with what a professional statistician decides to do.  
24 They need professional people to design the survey. This is not the Council's area  
25 of expertise.

26  
27  
28 **ADJOURN**

29  
30 A quorum of the Council left the meeting at 12:30 p.m. Discussion  
31 continued.

32  
33  
34  
35 \_\_\_\_\_  
36 Jill Nixon, Minutes Transcription

37 The Council approved these minutes on August 9, 2005.

38  
39 ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL  
WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON

40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45 \_\_\_\_\_  
Dana Brown-Davis, Council Clerk

\_\_\_\_\_  
Laurie Caskey-Schreiber, Council Chair