



City of Bellingham
Keep Washington Working Act Work Group Meeting Minutes
January 15, 2026, 5:30 PM

Board Members Present:

Rebecca Agiewich
Eamon Bollinger
Ian Garconnette
Catalina Hope
Holly Pai
Scott Powell
Abigail Senuty

Board Members Absent:

Krystal Rodriguez

Ex-officio Members Present:

Deborah Bineza, Strategic Initiatives Manager
for Equity and Belonging
Rebecca Mertzig, Bellingham Police Chief
Justin Rasmussen, WhatComm Deputy
Director
Hannah Stone, City Council President

**City of Bellingham Staff, Officials, and
Others Present:**

Janice Keller, Deputy City Administrator
Paul Knox, Facilitator and Chair
Jackie Weller, Legislative Office Manager

Paul Knox called the meeting to order at 5:30 PM

Welcome and agenda review / approval

Holly Pai moved to approve the agenda. Ian Garconnette seconded the motion.

Motion passed with none opposed.

Information was shared about a recent County Council resolution in support of the immigrant community. References were made in the resolution and during the meeting to this work group, work being done by the WREC, and other City work.

Interim work team report outs

Paul Knox, facilitator, asked one representative from each group to share about the progress they have made so far.

Federal Contact Data Group ([group-provided notes](#)):

- Researched the background of how Federal Contact Data started to be collected and published and are unclear if intentions of producing the data have been met.
- Analyzed data and found level of detail varies greatly, but generally lacks usefulness.
- Entries only contain information on the initial call, not an outcome or further communication, for example, between a local officer and a federal agent. There are some instances in which follow up or additional information would be useful.
- There may be other data sources that could be available to the public.
- There are contacts between City of Bellingham and Federal agents that are not law-enforcement related, which are not recorded here.
- A complete picture is not available, so City compliance can't be evaluated.
- Summarized recommendations

- Members found it difficult to ascertain if an entry is related to immigrant apprehensions. It is easier to work backwards, looking at an event and trying to find what happened, how they were identified and what led to the apprehension.
 - This is also difficult because the data from the apprehensions is not easily available
 - The data list does not feel like an adequate starting point
- During meeting with BPD, members asked if the police benefited from gathering this info. Response was that it keeps this on the forefront of dispatchers' minds. Chief Mertzig emphasized that this is a huge benefit.
- Talked about potentially paring down what types of contacts are reported. Discussed risks of a dispatcher making the determination of what should or shouldn't be recorded.
 - Chief Mertzig suggested that a more senior staff member could be responsible for this review.

What-Comm Interlocals and Policies, Practices, and Procedures Group ([group-provided notes](#)):

- Group members read their recommendations
- One member asked what is meant by "the stipulation in the interlocal agreement" in the first recommendation?
 - An ad-hoc committee is in the agreement, but could potentially be used to enhance ownership of KWW compliance
 - Was there conversation about having a member of the public as part of the group? No, they did not discuss that, but it has already been discussed and Deborah has it in her notes of possible recommendations

Training Group ([group-provided notes](#)):

- Group focused on What-Comm training at this point, will evaluate BPD next
- Information and recommendations are organized in their notes by document
- Chief Mertzig provided the group with a printed copy of the BPD policy manual
- Justin Rasmussen spoke to one of the questions posed in the document, stating that What-Comm compares favorably to other counties he knows of – nobody else collects data on federal contacts.

Work Group members discussed the small groups' progress so far, including:

- Observation that some recommendations and conclusions from groups were overlapping
- Discussion of whether KWWA is a law in of itself and how it's codified
- Paul acknowledged that there are some recommendations related to language access. The City is also working on a policy, which could be reviewed by the group.
- Janice thanked the members for their work in their small groups and said that the results are what the City is looking for in terms of recommendations.

Check in on remaining January work plan items

- Model policy – since the City has adopted this, Paul suggested that the group could have a brief presentation, describing what changes were made.
 - Sales tax calls for a checklist style description of how each jurisdiction is complying. However, the City's submission is not easily available, as it was submitted in an online form and the Criminal Justice Training Center (CJTC) has not been able to provide it back to us.

- One member will be submitting a public records request.
 - Chief Mertzig spoke with AGO's office representative and made some changes based on that conversation. They are still waiting for a result.
 - Members discussed how the applications are being submitted, re-submitted, and reviewed.
- Complaints and commendations – Paul suggested that this could be another small work group.
 - Janice said that members could connect with her and Chief Mertzig – non-law enforcement complaints and commendations go through her, law enforcement related complaints and commendations go to Chief Mertzig.
 - Hannah spoke to removing the word “citizen” when not specifically referencing a legal status.
 - Rebecca, Eamon, and Ian's group will be moving to this task since they are finished reviewing What-Comm interlocal agreements and policies, practices, and procedures.
- Next three meetings will largely be spent on making recommendations and reviewing report.
- Paul proposed that the work product take the form of a memo to Council that provides background and lays out recommendations.
 - How specific and detailed? Paul said level of detail in work group reports tonight were good, the how of implementation is for City Council and/or staff to determine
 - Deborah will be taking the lead on the writing, members will be deciding on content and editing.
 - Small groups are now tasked with firming up their recommendations and sending them to Deborah in one cohesive document (rather than being embedded in notes). This should be done by the next meeting, but recommendations can still be added later.
 - Before the next meeting, group members will get an expanded outline of recommendations. Members will have the opportunity to make changes during the February meeting.
 - Document will take form after that, and there will be a final draft in April.
 - Janice added that members can work to review drafts along the way in sections and also affirm that the final product represents the full package of recommendations.
 - Members will be invited to come to City Council to present work, likely in a work session format.
 - Hannah Stone stated that Council would like to hear about recommendations for future work and next steps – if there was to be additional work taken on, what would that look like?
 - Paul suggested that there could potentially be a presentation to the County Council as well
 - One member asked what will happen to the recommendations?
 - Hannah stated that there's not a roadmap for what will happen next. Engagement with the County and the small cities will likely be needed. Some recommendations may be more suited to the County, and they may be receptive to that, especially given their recent resolution.
 - Janice: Recommendations will vary in terms of complexity, cost, and ability

to implement. They will likely be categorized into things that can be done, can't be done, and future work. 2027 budget process is also starting soon, so the timing will likely be good.

- Interest and possible bias of stakeholders – This topic was noted in an earlier Work Group meeting as a priority for discussion. Paul asked members what the intentions behind it were so we can plan for this discussion in future meetings.
 - The member who originally suggested that item said that he didn't remember his intentions and would be fine letting it go as we fine tune priority agenda items for the remaining meetings.
 - This led to a discussion amongst group members, including:
 - Expectations of community
 - Difference in level of expertise between group members and staff
 - BPD possibly feels that observers of federal contact data are constantly searching for violations by the City; but observers see themselves as trying to ascertain whether federal agents were attempting to get information they are not entitled to
 - Federal agents are viewed as law enforcement partners, but they may not have the same trainings, objectives, or standards as City
 - Chief Mertzig stated she wants to collaborate with federal partners in some areas and that public trust is everything
 - Hannah noted that federal contact data doesn't reflect contacts outside of 911 dispatch. Her understanding was that list would be all contacts made throughout the City. Additional information would help to build trust through further transparency.
 - Chief Mertzig added that there is value in having channels of communication with federal agencies, for example, so they can verify what operations are happening. It is beneficial to the City that federal agencies are willing to answer those questions.
 - Should this be reflected in the report?
 - One member suggested that BPD Should be publicizing operations that they were not involved in. For example, stating on social media that BPD was not involved in a particular immigration enforcement action.

City updates

Public safety sales tax was discussed earlier in the meeting during the check-in on remaining January work plan items.

Janice Keller asked Chief Mertzig to provide context to the group on a federal contact data item that was brought into question during the August meeting. Chief Mertzig explained that person who made the call to dispatch is a former City employee who now works for Homeland Security Investigations (HIS). That person called dispatch to let BPD know that there would be a protest inside City limits.

One member thanked BPD for responding graciously to an unplanned protest march that happened recently.

Next meeting reminder and approve November minutes

Ian Garconnette moved to accept the November meeting minutes. Eamon Bollinger seconded the motion.

Motion passed with none opposed.

Members discussed a previous idea of inviting Municipal Court Judge Debra Lev and Sheriff Donnell Tanksley to a future meeting:

- Paul said we could do that, but he would rather focus on creating the report at the next meeting.
- One member suggested a separate meeting outside of work group time.
- Janice encouraged members to watch the video of the recent County Council meeting, at which the Sheriff discussed KWW and related issues with Council Members.
- Members generally agreed that it would be valuable to hear from Judge Lev about recent ICE action at municipal court.
- Janice suggested that she would send out video of County Council and would also follow up with Judge Lev to see if they can coordinate a meeting with her outside the work group meeting time.

The meeting adjourned at 7:38 PM