



City of Bellingham

Keep Washington Working Act Work Group Meeting Minutes

February 19, 2026, 5:30 PM

Board Members Present:

Rebecca Agiewich

Ian Garconnette

Catalina Hope

Holly Pai

Scott Powell

Krystal Rodriguez

Board Members Absent:

Eamon Bollinger

Abigail Senuty

Ex-officio Members Present:

Deborah Bineza, Strategic Initiatives Manager for Equity and Belonging

Sarah Chaplin, Senior Assistant City Attorney

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

Kim Lund, Mayor

Jackie Weller, Legislative Office Manager

Paul Knox called the meeting to order at 5:36 PM

Welcome and agenda review / approval

One member shared that they had recently read an article about New York City's Mayor joining a Mayors for America group, which is backed by the Public Rights Project. Mayor Lund noted cost concerns in joining the group but confirmed ongoing collaboration with the Public Rights Project. The member encouraged her to look into Mayors for America because it may be a different group than the one that was previously determined to be cost prohibitive to join.

A member reported that they are awaiting answers to emailed questions about the City's application for the public safety sales tax. Chief Mertzig reported that two jurisdictions have been conditionally approved, but are getting hung up on issues pertaining to participation on federal task forces. The Criminal Justice Training Center is struggling with implementation of the sales tax. They are being flooded with information from cities and have evolving standards, forms, deadlines, evaluations, etc.

Members and staff discussed what's next after the work group ends.

Paul noted that the work group was mentioned in the Mayor's State of the City address.

Interim work team report outs

Federal contact data group:

This group reported that they have created a refined list of recommendations. They were initially unsure of what to do with that document, but will send to Deborah for inclusion in the draft report.

Paul clarified that the report is a working draft and includes a compilation of informal recommendations and ideas that have been mentioned throughout the work group's meetings. Janice emphasized that this is a working draft, the group gets to make the final decision on what is included. The document is the work of the group.

Group members reported that draft report contains some of their recommendations already, but they have proposals that are more systemic. For example, federal contact data is collected, but doesn't reflect contacts that occur outside What-Comm Dispatch. They want to have a better understanding of other types of contact the City is having with federal agencies, including through joint task forces. They would like to hear rationale from City on why they are participating in some of those groups.

Training group:

The group has received Bellingham Police Department (BPD) training materials, but they are lengthy and the group wasn't able to review all of them. They plan to meet sometime in the next few weeks and figure out how to parse it out. They hope to meet with BPD to help guide them in looking through it and pinpointing what areas to review. Members and Chief Mertzig discussed the best way to achieve their goals and the timing of such a meeting.

Members discussed the possibility of reaching out to other cities. Chief Mertzig does not have knowledge on how other cities train their officers with respect to the KWWA.

Complaint and commendation process review group:

Group members shared that they have looked only at the complaint process, not commendations. They compared the City of Seattle's complaint form with Bellingham's and shared [their findings](#) with the group. Deborah stated that the City has plans to change the complaint form, as well as others, from a PDF to an HTML form that would be accessible and translatable.

Review draft outline of Council memo

Paul asked for members to share their initial thoughts on the draft report. One member asked the federal contact data small group to start by further detailing their impressions and new recommendations, which included:

- The ordinance ([Ord. 2019-11-33](#)) states that communication between all City staff and federal agencies needs to be logged, not just communication originating with What-Comm.
- More complete data regarding federal contacts is needed, including the response from the City to requests from federal agencies.
- Development of new policies and procedures for frequent types of calls that What-Comm is seeing now, such as abandoned vehicles, protests, community volunteers, raids.
- Inclusion of rationale and protocols for inter-agency communication with homeland security.
- Regular audits of data collection.
 - Discussion of what such an audit would look like and who would perform it.
- Creation of a form for City staff with certain fields that need to be entered so that someone filling in information has to give specific information.

Paul asked Deborah to explain how she put the document together. She explained that she reviewed notes from all meetings as well as the documents provided by groups during the last meeting. Then, she attempted to consolidate into topic areas and condense from her original long-form notes.

Paul asked for members thoughts on the document. Members discussed the format and content of the document, including:

- What is the best way to work together on editing this draft and future drafts as a group?
 - Paul stated that he planned to have members look at each category of recommendations and make comments and changes that the group concurs with starting at the next meeting.
 - Staff and members agreed that, in the meantime, they would review the draft and email Deborah with specific suggestions. Members can email her with a particular focus on the small group they were a part of to ensure that the report accurately reflects what each group suggested. Members do not need to limit themselves to commenting on only the sections relevant to their small group.
- What should be included in each section of the report and what should be included in an appendix.
 - Members discussed different ideas for what form the report should take, with some suggesting that each section be prefaced by a background or introduction and include the same sub-sections (for example, procedures, limitations, recommendations). Other members suggested that the body of the report should only include recommendations and other information, such as methods, background, and limitations, should go into an appendix.
 - Paul suggested a hybrid approach in which each section has an introduction for basic context with other information in an appendix.
 - The report will also include an additional overarching introductory section that explains the origins of the group, how the meetings took shape, etc.,
- Use of acronyms – report should clearly define acronyms used.
- Work in the remaining meetings – After receiving feedback from members, staff will bring a more complete draft for the group to review at the March meeting. The final draft should be approved at April meeting.
- Concern was raised that the group reviewing BPD training will not be able to finish. Paul said he is hopeful that meetings with BPD will result in members having a clearer and simpler path forward.
- What will the response by the City look like after recommendations are made?
 - Janice said that she imagines there would be a response and that the group will be able to present the report to Council.
 - One member stated that they want to see a line by line response from City.
 - Paul asked for some members to dig in to what public communication would look like. How is the City communicating to different immigrant groups and the general public.
 - Mayor said she imagined that they would use a framework around impact, cost to implement, time to implement to create a tiered grouping of recommendations based on priority. That would be presented to Council along with other relevant department heads.

Next meeting reminder and approve February minutes

The next meeting will be on March 19. January Minutes were not voted on because a quorum was not present by the end of the meeting.

Mayor reported that Council President Stone and Police Chief Mertzig recently participated in a meeting hosted by Bellingham Public Schools for families regarding immigration actions, and Isabell Meeker from Bellingham Public Schools wrote a note thanking them for their presence and reporting that families felt supported.

Janice reminded the group that there are two opportunities upcoming to meet with Municipal Court Judge Lev and Commissioner Henery.

The meeting adjourned at 7:10 PM