



## City of Bellingham

### Keep Washington Working Act Work Group Meeting Minutes

July 10, 2025, 5:30 PM

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#### **Board Members**

##### ***Board members present:***

Rebecca Agiewich

Eamon Bollinger

Ian Garconnette

Catalina Hope

Holly Pai

Scott Powell

Krystal Rodriguez

Abigail Senuty

##### ***Board members absent:***

*None – all members were present*

##### **Ex-officio Members Present:**

Katy Potts, Western Washington

University Police Chief

Rebecca Mertzig, Bellingham Police Chief

Bill Hewett, Bellingham Fire Chief

Justin Rasmussen, Acting What-Comm  
Deputy Director

Hannah Stone, Bellingham City  
Councilmember

Deborah Bineza, Strategic Initiatives  
Manager for Equity and Belonging

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

Mayor Kim Lund

Tyson Elmendorf, Deputy Police  
Chief/What-Comm Director

Jay Hart, Deputy Police Chief

Janice Keller, Deputy Administrator

Paul Knox, Facilitator and Chair

Jackie Weller, Legislative Office Manage

Sarah Chaplin, Senior Assistant City  
Attorney

#### **Paul Knox called the meeting to order at 5:35 PM**

##### **Welcome and Share Out / Reflections on Last Meeting**

Members of the work group took turns sharing reflections on the state of current events, the workgroup's work, and what they are looking forward to at this meeting.

##### **Review What-Comm Information and Tours**

Paul asked for follow up questions or comments regarding the information shared at the last meeting and at the What-Comm 911 Center tours, as well as any thoughts or recommendations that could be included in the final report, including issues that need to be looked at further. Suggestions included:

- Improving interpretation in languages other than Spanish for 911 calls.
- Looking at interlocal agreements with What-Comm in depth and possibly



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suggesting changes to ensure each agency is complying with KWW.

- Collecting data on officer-initiated calls to dispatch for traffic stops to include information on the reason for stop at the time of the stop / call to dispatch.
  - BPD Chief Mertzig said that the reason for a traffic stop is documented in another system, but not in the CAD system. She added there would be no report if there was no enforcement action taken.
  - Concern was expressed that community members are being stopped for no good reason with no report being created at the time of the stop or possibly no report at all. There could be a potential for racially motivated stops.
- Training for 911 operators in interactions with immigrant community.
- Developing ideas on how to do outreach to community members about their ability to call 911 without worry of immigration enforcement.
- Questions:
  - Has there been a change in the number of calls in languages other than English since January?
  - Do Health Department first responders, such as the Alternative Response Team, receive training in compliance with KWW?
  - Locally-based federal immigration enforcement personnel call 911 frequently asking dispatchers to do things – what is the difference between their access and the public's? Are they using this service as a member of the public or a law enforcement agency? If they are calling into a public agency, what can be done with that information?
    - Justin Rasmussen and others stated that What-Comm doesn't service anything for immigration enforcement or pull any information for them; questions persisted about access levels.
  - Is information on traffic stops public information?
    - Chief Mertzig said yes, to a certain extent.

#### Federal Contact Data

Chief Mertzig introduced Jay Hart, Deputy Chief for BPD, and Tyson (Ty) Elmendorf, What-Comm Director. Justin gave information on how he selected calls to review in [his presentation](#) and on how the federal contact data gets recorded. He played audio from three calls to dispatch.

First call reviewed: Mt. Baker Roofing Incident. Justin played audio of the call received at What-Comm from Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) on the day they detained workers at Mt. Baker Roofing. Members discussed this call specifically as well as the system in general, including:



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- How are these calls entered into the federal contacts database?
  - Justin and others explained that it was all manual input, nothing is automated.
- For this call, is HSI calling in as a law enforcement agency or member of the public?
  - HSI would see themselves as law enforcement agency, What-Comm would see it as no different than a member of the public calling in.
  - Discussion on how these calls could be elevated through a chain of command and potentially be made public before action was taken.
    - Chief Potts warned of impeding a federal investigation and shared guidance she has received from the Attorney General's office regarding student notification of federal law enforcement activity.
- What calls appear on this list?
  - Only those that involve contact with a federal agency, not all calls involving immigrants.
- Does HSI always call in before starting an operation?
  - No, What-Comm doesn't get a call on every HSI operation – there is no requirement. Usually only on large operations in order to “de-conflict” with other agencies.

Second call reviewed: Border patrol calling to try to get info on vehicle associated with driver. Justin played the audio of the call, in which a Border Patrol agent called What-Comm asking them to pull information on a vehicle associated with a driver's license. The dispatcher informed caller that she could not do that but gave information on the system they would need to access in order to do it themselves.

- One member asked what would prevent a member of the public from calling and asking for similar information?
  - Anyone could call and ask, but they wouldn't be given the information and a member of public would never have access to the systems that allow them to see that data.

Third call reviewed: Wrong way driver. Justin played audio of several calls between What-Comm, Border Patrol, and state and local agencies about a driver heading the wrong way on I-5. The calls concluded with Border Patrol asking dispatch to send local police to tag the vehicle for towing.

After reviewing calls, the group moved on to discussing the federal contact data, which is updated and posted to the KWW website monthly. Discussion topics included:

- Outcome of the calls is unknown because it is not a part of the data provided.
- Liability potential of City connecting calls to another agency that may not act in



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accordance with KWW.

- The Chiefs present all stated that they did not see a potential for liability.
- Mechanisms available to ensure the signatories to the interlocal agreement are bound to KWW and actively complying with it.
  - Discussion on limitations and abilities of City of Bellingham, including their sphere of influence over other jurisdictions, provision of training, and responsibility to be a leader.

Holly Pai related a report from a community member regarding a person who was detained by ICE while driving. When their family was called by BPD to come retrieve the vehicle, ICE agents came on scene and held the family at gunpoint. This family felt that BPD was in contact with ICE during this incident, since both agencies were involved. Chief Mertzig and others looked into this incident and said that it appeared that ICE detained the person, leaving their car near the road. When BPD came across the car, they assumed there had been an accident and called the family to come get the car before it was towed. ICE heard the associated radio call and came back to the scene when family came for the vehicle. Chief Mertzig later did a more in-depth investigation and sent out [a report](#) regarding the incident.

Continuing to examine this incident and reports from past federal contact data sheets, members and others had a robust discussion. Topics included:

- How to inform the community that this incident, and any other similar incidents in the future, are not set ups by BPD and do not involve collusion between the agencies.
- What are red flags officers can look for that are signs that ICE might be involved in a call?
- How local radio lines function – BPD and other local law enforcement do not have encrypted lines, but federal agencies do. Encryption would be extremely expensive.
- Potential alternative communication methods.
- A recommendation that What-Comm incorporate a method to automate federal contact data reporting from dispatchers.
  - Justin believes this would be achievable relatively easily.
- What can be done at a local level to prevent ICE officers from being masked, unidentifiable, and saying that they are police officers?
  - In these cases, 911 can be called and a uniformed officer would be dispatched to verify if person is a federal agent.
  - How should the City communicate to people to call 911 if this happens and that it's a safe number to call?



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#### Administrative Items and Other Business

Paul explained that one member had emailed out several suggested changes to the June minutes, making them more detailed. However, the resolution creating the group calls for summary minutes. Members and staff discussed how much detail to include in the minutes and to what level personal notes from the meetings would need to be retained according to the Public Records Act. Members requested and staff agreed to produce more detailed minutes that attempt to capture the nature of the discussion.

Members and staff also discussed:

- Status report to Council, which is required by the resolution. Janice Keller said that she anticipates bringing that to Council in early fall since the group started later than anticipated. She suggested the group talk about it at their next meeting.
- Scope of work for the group: one member said they did not feel that the group had an adequate opportunity to weigh in on the scope of work. Janice said that the feedback received was that the timeline felt too aggressive and we should revisit at the next meeting.
- Suggestion from a member to add communication to public about 911 to our next agenda.
- Information on BPD ride along opportunities and additional What-Comm tours will be sent to the group via email due to time constraints at this meeting.

#### **The meeting adjourned at 7:36 PM**

*\*Note: Attached hereto as Addendum A is a written record of the modifications to this document suggested by Krystal Rodriguez. At the September 18 meeting, members voted acknowledge the suggestions by attaching them to the minutes without accepting them.*

# Addendum A

**Jackie A Weller**

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**From:** Krystal Rodriguez <krystallr@hotmail.com>  
**Sent:** Saturday, August 2, 2025 8:03 PM  
**To:** Jackie A Weller  
**Cc:** Deborah C Bineza; Janice L Keller; paul  
**Subject:** Re: KWW Work Group July Minutes and Important Information

CAUTION: This message originated from outside of this organization. Please exercise caution with links and attachments.

Jackie,

Thank you for sharing these much-improved meeting notes, which are much more in line with my expectations. 😊

Here are my suggested changes for this round:

- What-Comm Tours
  - Collecting data on officer-initiated stops - the second bullet relates to my comment about a need to document within CAD the reason for an officer-initiated stop regardless of whether a report is generated. I don't believe I would have said community members are being stopped for no good reason but I did convey that unless we collect data about the reason for all stops, we can't know whether there's a racial bias for the stops.
  - Developing ideas for outreach - I think that's important to note that was a topic raised by ex-officios. I'm not comfortable with it implying a member has said calling 911 doesn't come with worry. In my opinion, that's a very City-centric stance.
- Contact Data
  - How calls are entered - I believe Jay is the one that spoke most to this because he explained he personally receives the email indicating a contact has been made. It's also important to note my comment the list is not all inclusive since it requires a dispatcher to report but there is no automated method. Jay or Justin agreed.
- Holly's report - To accurately reflect the meeting, please strike everything from "Chief Mertzig and others" to "when the family came for the vehicle". What I recall hearing was purely conjecture since Mertzig and others knew nothing about this incident at the time of the meeting.
- Administrative
  - Resolution calls for summary minutes - Please include that several members commented they felt the summary minutes didn't adequately capture a meeting and they had concerns about missing a meeting for this reason.
  - Council update - I didn't hear Janice explain she planned to update Council in the fall or that the group would talk about it at our next meeting. It's possible she had these plans but didn't say that, or that she said it and I didn't hear it. I do recall her saying it wasn't planned mid-year because we were behind schedule. Please confirm with Janice what was actually said during the meeting and only document that.

- Scope of Work - I didn't say we didn't have an opportunity to weigh in. I mentioned the workgroup didn't have an opportunity to assist with development of the Scope of Work, as it requires in the resolution.

Again, please share with other members, preferably in a timely manner. This would help spread out the workload of reviewing this and all the other documentation that comes in soon before a meeting. I'm also interested in learning about other communications coming in from workgroup members if they relate to our work.

Thank you for considering my suggested changes.

Krystal