



City of Bellingham

Keep Washington Working Act Work Group Meeting Minutes

September 18, 2025, 5:30 PM

Board Members

Board members present:

Rebecca Agiewich

Eamon Bollinger

Catalina Hope

Holly Pai

Scott Powell

Krystal Rodriguez

Abigail Senuty

Board members absent:

Ian Garconnette

Ex-officio Members Present:

Katy Potts, Western Washington

University Police Chief

Rebecca Mertzig, Bellingham Police Chief

Bill Hewett, Bellingham Fire Chief

Justin Rasmussen, 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

Jay Hart, Deputy Police Chief

Janice Keller, Deputy Administrator

Paul Knox, Facilitator and Chair

Israel Paz-Toledo, Police Officer

Jackie Weller, Legislative Office Manager

Paul Knox called the meeting to order at 5:34 PM

Review and Approve June and July Minutes

Members discussed June and July minutes. Krystal Rodriguez's comments for the July minutes were displayed and members and staff discussed how best to reflect her suggested changes.

Holly Pai moved that the group accept the June and July minutes as written and include Krystal's comments as addendums to the minutes. Krystal Rodriguez seconded the motion.

Motion passed with no opposition.

Review Scope of Work Document

The scope of work was displayed and it was acknowledged that we are behind schedule. Members noted that they have not reviewed interlocal agreements or partner agencies'

related policies. Members also said that they would like the opportunity to revise the scope of work / roadmap document.

Krystal suggested having a meeting that is just appointed members so that they have an opportunity to discuss scope of work without ex-officio members present. Members discussed that possibility and the format of future meetings. Janice Keller explained that meetings have been focused on presentations thus far so that members can all be on the same page as far as information and access to documents and staff. After that has been accomplished, focus will shift. Holly Pai and other members indicated a desire to go line by line through policies and agreements soon.

Scott Powell suggested adding October and December meetings. Mayor Lund agreed that an October meeting would be a good idea, however December will be more challenging with holidays and vacations.

Holly Pai moved to add an October meeting to the group's schedule; Krystal Rodriguez seconded.

Members discussed best way to schedule this meeting and agreed that staff would send out a scheduling poll to determine the date and time that the most members can attend.

Motion passed with no opposition

Presentation: Transforming KWW, Policies, and Feedback into Action

Chief Rebecca Mertzig and Deputy Chiefs Jay Hart and Tyson Elmendorf, all of the Bellingham Police Department's (BPD) presented to the group. Topics and discussion included:

- Relevant BPD Policies
- a slide summarizing the AGO model policy compared to BPO policy
- Documentation of federal contact data – BPD is the only police department in the state that tracks and documents every single contact.
- New Officer Training – showed a screenshot of software used to track officer training. Software documents all policies officers are required to read through and be trained on.
 - Training for existing officers is also documented tracked with this software.
 - A member asked how often officers are required to renew training. Deputy Chief Hart replied that there isn't a standard set by the state but BPD could implement a policy. There is no current policy that requires officers to review policies yearly.
- State-level training – KWW is not a training topic at the state-level Criminal Justice Training Center (CJTC). Deborah Bineza stated that the AGO's office recommends that CJTC develops a training and they have not yet done that.
 - A BPD officer's first KWW training is with a BPD field training officer (FTO).

- Chief Mertzig explained the difference between CJTC training and BPD training (fundamentals vs. actionable items)
- Methods used to distribute training bulletins: BPD utilizes a software that requires Officers to sign and acknowledge that they've read updates, bulletins, and directives after they get out of academy.
- Difference between different levels of instruction and updates:
 - Directives can be issued by the Chief, and they become part of policy.
 - Training bulletins support or provide clarity on existing policy.
 - Shift briefings are emails that are sent out on a specific issue at the time it is happening. Supervisors are expected to go over those with officers before each shift.
 - An example of a shift briefing regarding ICE arrest warrants was shown.
- Standards of conduct: Chief Mertzig emphasized importance these standards because they allow discipline and accountability.
- Implementation of feedback from the group – Deputy Chief Elmendorf related that during a regional collaboration meeting between local law enforcement agencies, he brought up the KWW act and the critical importance of compliance. He asked other agencies to examine their policies and offered to share BPD's policies as a model to others.
 - At the same meeting, federal authorities were present and stated that there will be more federal enforcement in Whatcom County and they would be asking for assistance. BPD and WWU responded that federal agencies cannot call them for assistance.
 - Chief Mertzig said that this displays leadership among peers.
 - A member pointed out that those are examples of being in compliance with state law and don't have anything to do with local policies.
- ICE concerns and recent events: Staff and members discussed BPD's ability to gain information on what operations are happening in the area so that they can provide accurate information when 911 is called during an ICE raid.
 - A responding officer to something that looks like a kidnapping would check credentials of agents to verify that they are federal enforcement.
 - HSI cannot ask for assistance. Drug task force is insulated from immigration-related cases by DEA as a courtesy.
 - A member related an incident in which a shop owner called 911 while witnessing a response from uniformed federal agents. An officer came to location and told shop owner that she shouldn't call 911 for that. The member asked if BPD wants reports of these kinds of incidents so that they can talk to other jurisdictions about actions of officers. Chief Mertzig said that they can encourage different behavior from other jurisdictions but don't have power to take any disciplinary action.
- Outreach and community engagement:

- There is a new role within BPD (utilizing an existing full time position) - Recruiting, Outreach, and Compliance Officer. This role's duties include making sure that officers are in compliance with training and will start in January.
 - A member asked if compliance aspect of new role includes compliance with racial profiling law. I.e., if officers don't document race during a stop, will that person be looking at that for compliance? BPD answered that will not be part of compliance officer's role.
- Detailed outreach to Sterling Meadows, a Mercy Housing complex that provides housing for migrant and immigrant populations, and resulting opportunities.
 - BPD has done various events there, including National Night Out and a back to school event.
 - At these events, they have an opportunity to convey the department's policies, including those related to KWW. They are also able to explain how ICE vehicles and agents may appear different from BPD and what to look for.
- Deputy Chief Elmendorf introduced Officer Israel Paz. Officer Paz shared more about himself and why he became a police officer. One big reason was seeing the fear in the Latin community of calling police. He felt that community members would feel more at ease seeing someone who looks like them responding.
 - Related some experiences he has had recently with the community. Being bilingual has a big impact on community building and victim interactions.
- Language Services – Deputy Chief Elmendorf explained the department's policy on language access. BPD prefers to have bilingual officers communicate with community members and uses Language Line as a secondary method. He explained how Language Line works and attempted to demonstrate.
 - Other sources SHALL NOT include Federal immigration authorities. Prior to this policy, Border Patrol was often used as interpreters.
 - A member asked what makes BPD officer qualified as a bilingual officer. Answer: there is a third party that administers a test. The officer phones in and is presented with a scenario and conducts a conversation about that scenario (for example, "we are friends and my bike was stolen, now we have to get my bike back").
 - As a result of KWW meeting, BPD started using data to track Language Line use. Since outreach has increased, so has Language Line use.
 - A member pointed out that this data shows that Language Line is being used but there is not necessarily a correlation with number of contacts. Officers could simply know to call Language Line more often.
- Hiring Update: Chief Mertzig explained a slide that shows demographics of new hires (last two years), including race, gender, and language fluency.

Members discussed and asked questions at the end of the presentation, including:

- Regarding the demographics slide, what do the numbers look like for the overall force, rather than only new hires? Chief Mertzig did not know.
- How many officers does BPD have total? 127 with 3 vacancies currently.
- Does BPD conduct knowledge tests to reinforce learning with repetition? No, but they have the capability to do that. The state does push training that has knowledge tests involved. The focus at the local level is to do more scenario-based training that represents real-life types of calls.
- Have there been Language Line calls from Mixtec and other indigenous languages? No. Mam and Mixteco are on the list of available audio interpreters with Language Line.
- What is the roll of dispatchers when it comes to allocation of resources and determination of response size? Dispatcher will dispatch an officer, sergeant will make adjustment if needed. Does dispatcher know from any department in the county, who is going where? Yes, but not federal or state. Don't necessarily know where officers are patrolling at all times because of lack of time.
- What is the status of streamlining federal contacts data with dropdown menus and introducing more automation into that process? Chief Mertzig suggested changing language of what is being reported and asked for specific recommendations on what is most valuable in reporting contacts.
- Do What-Comm staff receive instruction on what to include on the federal contact record in terms of detail? Sometimes there's not enough in the report to understand what happened. Answer: Enough is logged so that they can be investigated further. Most are very brief. Instruction is to include what the contact was, who initiated it and not opine on situations beyond what they know.
 - This might be opportunity to recommend situations where more (or less) information will make data more meaningful.

Scott Powell summarized an email that he wrote, which was distributed to the group, detailing reports of ICE enforcement outside of County jail. There was a question about whether ICE was receiving information from County employees about exact release times of those who are being released on bail. The Whatcom County Sheriff is investigating. There has also been a report of ICE agents being present in a court room, possibly in violation of the Courts Open to All Act (COTA). Scott has asked court for policies and procedures in regards to COTA.

End of Meeting Reflections

Paul Knox suggested closing the meeting with some reflections from members. Members commented on City leadership among peers in the region, appreciation for ride-alongs and WhatComm tours, gratitude to BPD for listening to feedback and conducting outreach

efforts, appreciation to Krystal for asking questions, excitement for Officer Paz and wanting to do ride-along with him.

Meeting Recap

Deborah will send out a poll to find the best day possible for an October meeting in which members will look at roadmap carefully to see what else they would like to do and resources they need to do it.

Janice asked for members to send three top things they want to talk about during that meeting. Staff will not come with any presentations and the review of the roadmap is agreed as a topic.

Deborah pointed out that meeting dates for 2026 were added to the calendar on the agenda. Paul suggested we send out calendar invites.

The meeting adjourned at 7:43 PM