

Anacortes City Council Special Meeting Minutes

Date: June 6, 2025

The Anacortes City Council met in a special joint session with the Skagit County Board of Commissioners and the Cities of Burlington, Mount Vernon, and Sedro-Woolley on Friday, June 6, 2025, with Councilmembers, Ryan Walters, Christine Cleland-McGrath, TJ Fantini, and Carolyn Moulton present.

I. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL:

Skagit County Chair Lisa Janicki, Anacortes Mayor Matt Miller, Burlington Mayor Bill Aslett, Mount Vernon Mayor Peter Donovan, and Sedro-Woolley Mayor Julia Johnson called the proceedings to order at approximately 8:00 a.m.

Skagit County Commissioners Ron Wesen and Peter Browning were present.

Councilmembers present from the City of Burlington included Elizabeth Turman-Bryant, Dr. Jesús Pérez-Linares, Kelsey Freeman, and James Stavig.

Councilmembers present from the City of Mount Vernon included Navor Tercero, Iris Carias, Andrew Vander Stoep, Melissa Beaton, Mary Hudson, and Richard Brocksmith.

Councilmembers present from the City of Sedro-Woolley included Kevin Loy, Sarah Diamond, Allan Henderson, and Paul Cocks.

Anacortes Planning Commission member Michael Mills was also in attendance.

Other staff in attendance included Skagit County Director of Strategic Initiatives Monica Negrila, Skagit County Deputy County Administrator Jennifer Johnson, Skagit County Public Health Director Keith Higman, Skagit County Senior Public Health Analyst George Kosovich, Skagit County District Court Judge Jenifer Howson, Skagit County Clerk of the Board Amber Erps, and Mike Bonetto from Tenfold Health.

II. AGENDA:

a) 8:00 a.m. - 9:00 a.m. Special Joint Meeting with Cities of Anacortes, Burlington, Mount Vernon and Sedro-Woolley (Swinomish Casino & Lodge, 12885 Casino Drive, Anacortes)

1. Overview of North Star Initiative

Director of Strategic Initiatives Monica Negrila provided an overview of the North Star initiative and shared that the goal for the meeting was to strengthen collaboration by building trust, deepening understanding, and that there was a desire to see if the four cities were interested in revisiting a city-county partnership to address homelessness and behavioral health challenges in the community by pooling resources and funding.

2. Jurisdictional Cross-Sharing & Exploring Formal Collaboration Roundtable

Discussion was held regarding highlights and challenges each jurisdiction faced, hopes for regional collaboration, desire for a formal partnership agreement, what benefits or concerns were foreseen, and what conditions or deal-breakers needed to be addressed.

Ms. Negrila asked each jurisdiction to discuss these topics and share feedback with the group.

Some of the highlights shared by Anacortes included partnerships with housing providers, the Salvation Army, and Community Action Agency, and the approval of sales tax for housing. Burlington highlighted the STAR Center, medical detox, two additional affordable housing units, and the First Steps Center. Mount Vernon highlighted Martha's Place, and another behavioral health center. Sedro-Woolley highlighted Family Promise, Helping Hands Food Bank, a youth center at the high school that also served meals, the STAR Center, and opioid funding. Skagit County highlighted the STAR Center, co-response teams for mental health, and community court.

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Some of the challenges discussed by Anacortes included bringing the public along and the need for improved information/transparency regarding North Star. The Interlocal Agreement provided by the county in 2023 regarding North Star had not been fully signed because it generated more questions than answers. Anacortes appreciated the increased outreach and presentations provided by the county since then. Burlington discussed challenges with meeting affordable housing needs and job opportunities. Mount Vernon discussed budget concerns. Sedro-Woolley discussed eviction prevention and adequate programs for youth. Additional discussion was held regarding the U.S. Department of Labor's decision to possibly close the Job Corps Center in Sedro-Woolley. Skagit County discussed co-response expansion, Medicaid funding, and declining revenue streams.

There was general consensus to collaborate regionally. Requests were made for a sound policy, to avoid "silos" between partners, and to ensure that each community was represented. Commissioner Browning discussed the successes Skagit County was able to achieve regionally with the five-county partnership (between Skagit, San Juan, Whatcom, Island, and Snohomish Counties) and he was optimistic about achieving success for the community through a strong cities-county partnership.

Further discussion was held regarding the formation of a joint agreement/partnership for North Star and additional details were requested about the dispersal of funds, that the cities be involved in drafting the agreement, that the North Star website be improved, that North Star minutes be more robust, and to hold some of the meetings and work sessions in the evening for councilmember attendance. The group requested to continue moving forward and hold both joint cities-county meetings as well as city council meetings.

Three options for formalizing a collaborative North Star partnership were discussed and the group was generally supportive of the first option which was to amend the 2006 Interlocal Agreement regarding homeless housing Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) and replace United Way's approval committee with a cities-county North Star aligned committee so long as there were clear expectations with a comprehensive process and continued discussions with cities. This option would update and improve the 19 year-old process regarding funding recommendations for the document recording fees collected by the Auditor's Office for homeless/housing uses.

3. Discussion on Funding Alignment of Opioid Settlement Funds

Senior Public Health Analyst George Kosovich provided an overview of the total funds available through the city and county opioid settlement agreements and he discussed some potential high priority projects that could be jointly funded by pooling all or some of their opioid funds. The projects would benefit the entire community and included detox bridge housing, additional recovery housing, additional recovery support services, or funding the startup of the STAR Center.

The group discussed the projects and noted the benefits of joint funding but found it difficult to decide which projects to fund with the available opioid settlement funds. After further discussion, a preference was shown for the detox bridge housing, additional recovery housing, and some STAR Center start up costs. It was agreed that additional discussion was needed on this topic.

4. Summary and Next Steps

In addition to forming a partnership agreement to work together, concerns were also shared for further discussion regarding continued support for local non-profits and North Star competing with local non-profits for grant funds.

Ms. Negrila thanked attendees for their meaningful discussions and feedback.

Presntation: <https://www.skagitcounty.net/CountyCommissioners/Documents/AgendaPackets/o6022025.zip>

III. ADJOURNMENT:

Chair Janicki, Mayor Miller, Mayor Aslett, Mayor Donovan, and Mayor Johnson adjourned the proceedings at approximately 9:00 a.m. so that the group could join the North Star Connect Symposium where they heard from speakers and stakeholders on behavioral health, housing, and recovery.