

Josh Guthrie
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Dear Members of the Homeless Strategies Workgroup:

As a retail bank manager and a member of this community who has been working in Downtown Bellingham for the past 7 years, I want to take this opportunity to express my concerns regarding the proposed location of the Homeless shelter on Railroad and Champion. A shelter of this magnitude will cause major disruption to downtown commerce and negatively impact an area that has been working hard to re-establish itself as a vibrant location for our community members to work, eat, shop and otherwise conduct business.

The sympathy our community has for our fellow citizens that are homeless is to be admired. But beyond feeling sympathy, it's clear that our council members, non-profit representatives, elected officials and community members are taking action to address a serious problem of chronic homelessness. However, the goal of creating and sustaining a safe and comfortable downtown core is also of great importance in order for Bellingham to remain healthy and vibrant. These two challenges do not have to come at the expense of the other. We can achieve success in both areas as long as the location of the shelter is chosen with great care. The undeniable increase in drug use, crime, public intoxication, panhandling, emergency vehicle responses, etc... will undermine the efforts of business owners who have worked hard at serving clients in the downtown area. Customers will choose to no longer come to Downtown Bellingham and business owners will either close or move their business elsewhere. A safe and comfortable business district will be an unfulfilled goal of our community. Site D on Holly St appears to be a win-win for both the homeless and the downtown business district. Shelter residents are close enough to walk to Downtown and will also be in close proximity to other services, including a City Park, where they can enjoy the outside as opposed to business sidewalks and entry ways.

Over the last several years, as the branch manager of Washington Federal, I have worked with City Police, Downtown Associations, property managers, and other business owners to clean up the area surrounding our building and learn about solutions to the street problems we encounter. Washington Federal has spent a substantial amount of money removing benches, adding/removing certain landscape features, adding fencing, cleaning up drug needles, human waste, repairing vandalism, and at certain times hiring a security guard, all in an effort to make our customers feel safe and comfortable. We have an outside ATM stocked with cash only 120

yards away from the proposed site. Clients and non-clients alike use our ATM for cash which is often spent shopping and/or eating in Downtown Bellingham. Both business clients and ATM users have expressed fear in the past when using our ATM and with walking through our parking lot with cash on hand due to being approached by people on the street panhandling. The proposed site location will undermine all of our efforts to ensure a safe and comfortable banking experience for our clients and non-clients.

I am proud that I work in the Downtown branch of Washington Federal, who as an organization, has supported various organizations such as the Habitat for Humanity, Lydia Place, Assistance League of Bellingham, Whatcom Dream, Northwest Youth Services, and the food bank, along with many others. We hope to improve the quality of life in Whatcom County with our community efforts and monetary donations. I am also proud that our citizens and community leaders have a sympathetic heart towards the homeless and want to see a solution. Let's choose to house our homeless citizens in a safe shelter that also does not impact the safety and vibrancy of our Downtown community. We can choose a win-win solution for both Downtown Business and for the homeless, however site G is in direct opposition to that synergy and will create more problems, not solutions.

Sincerely,

Josh Guthrie

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