



Whatcom County Housing Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

Meeting Date/Time/Location: April 9, 2009 – 8:35-10:30 a.m. – Whatcom County Health Department, 509 Girard Street, Bellingham

WCHAC Members Present: David Cahill, Regina Delahunt, Laura DeRose, John Harmon, Rebecca Johnson, Nancy Larsen, Kathleen McNaughton, Sue Parrott, Steve Powers, Paul Schissler, Gary Williams

WCHAC Members Absent: Dave Finet, Gary Tomsic

Whatcom County Health Depart Staff/Guests: Gail de Hoog, Health Department Housing Specialist; Greg Winter, Homeless Service Center; Riannon Bardsley, Northwest Youth Services, Debbie Paton, Opportunity Council; Vicki McClure, Health Department Human Services Clerk

Agenda Item	Discussion	Action/Who
Call to order	The meeting was called to order at 8:35 a.m. by Paul Schissler	
1. Review February 12, 2009 minutes.	The February 12, 2009 minutes were reviewed and approved unanimously as presented	
2. Introduction of new WCHAC member	Kathy McNaughton was introduced as a new board member. Kathy, currently affiliated with Catholic Community services, and in the past has been involved with Habitat for Humanity as a volunteer. Kathy became interested in becoming a member of WCHAC through her involvement with Project Homeless Connect.	
3. Old Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none">2163/1359 Revenue Projections: Terry Hinz gave a brief presentation regarding revenues. Greg stated that he has asked county staff from the auditor's office to track re-fi information as it will impact funding for housing projects.	

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<p>2. Old Business (continued)</p>	<p>HGAP II Update: Gail reported that a contract with Pioneer Human Services is in process; it is for permanent housing with supported services for offenders leaving jail or prison. Another contract regarding flex funds is in the works as well, and also will serve the offender population. Gail is expecting some possible community push back regarding an article in <i>The Bellingham Herald</i> regarding a 38-unit apartment complex on E Holly, which the press called a “halfway house.” One concern voiced by opponents is the possibility of “displacement.” Mostly Western students live in the complex and their leases will be ending, so no one will be displaced.</p> <p>Point In Time Count: Greg Winter presented PIT information contained in the Draft “Whatcom County Homeless Count” report. The ability to eliminate duplicates, many of which were children, counted by school districts as well as Homeless Count partners and a count taking place at Project Homeless Connect made this year’s count a relatively reliable representation of the numbers of homeless in our community on a single day in January. The number of households decreased, while the number of homeless persons increased slightly. The full report will include a section on trends and will be completed by the end of the month. By comparing numbers to last year’s count it may be possible to determine the likely impact of the Homeless Service Center and other services on homelessness. Given the current economic climate, the fact that numbers are holding steady is a major accomplishment. Lost job and inability to pay rent/mortgage dramatically moved up the list of reasons for homelessness this year. The community is seeing more homeless on wait list, and HSC is seeing an increase in needed services. Hope House is seeing an increase as well, and there appears to be a whole new group of homeless. Footnotes on trends regarding the local economic climate will be included in the final PIT Report. The Section 8 list is closed at this time and the Housing Authority is seeing the same trend. Regina shared that there was a lot of support for housing at the Substance Abuse/ Mental Health Stakeholders’ Forum held on April 1, 2009. Project Homeless Connect groups will be meeting about the same time the Point In Time Report is released. The CTED report, which includes information from other counties, will be shared when available.</p>	

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<p>4. Phase IV Planning</p>	<p>Planning update: Gail provided an update and handout on Phase IV Planning, highlighting components expanding the scope of the plan. The plan will include identification of the number and types of units needed, goals and strategies for affordable housing, formation of a funders' round table, and recommendations for the housing chapters of the Comprehensive Plans of small cities. The planning group will use the term "housing first" instead of "rapid re-housing." The date and time for the next session has not yet been scheduled, and some terms need to be clearly defined. Additional topics to be considered include who will do this, how will we get units on the ground, can low income housing developers open up some of their units, and funding issues in terms of grants and low interest loans. Biennium funding doesn't look good due to the current economic climate. It is hoped that federal funding may become available. Limiting factors to additional housing availability need to be considered. A local group would be more effective in obtaining local funding due to having a finger of the pulse of the community. It was also stated that now would be a good time to purchase properties. Some money saved in housing special populations should be able to be captured for additional funding. The next phase of the plan is important, and it is hoped that the first draft will be ready in June. The group embraced Gail's quote, "Less can be more (or at least just as much)."</p> <p>Social marketing exercise: Greg Winter led a discussion/exercise in social marketing, which is part of a marketing strategy he used in presentations to landlords by HSC. The importance of knowledge versus beliefs was discussed: knowledge is fact based; belief is not as clearly defined or supported by fact. The group provided input for a list of several items which could be listed under each topic, which included:</p> <p><u>Belief:</u> It could be you; housing is a basic need; homelessness can be ended in our community; homeless prevention is cost effective; deserving versus undeserving; housing is a public safety issue; people needing affordable housing are a part of the community and functioning part of our local economy.</p> <p><u>Knowledge:</u> Housing first is cost effective and provides savings; the law requires the county to plan for increased affordable housing; homeless people work; re-entry planning and housing</p>	

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<p>4. Phase IV Planning (con't)</p>	<p>decreases recidivism; housing first increases treatment compliance;</p> <p><u>Belief & Knowledge:</u> homeless are not all criminals, lazy, manipulative, sex offenders, mentally ill, bad, drug abusers, homeless by choice, outsiders, invisible; housing is needed for all income levels; lack of affordable housing decreases quality of life and ability to provide other basic needs; homelessness increases probability of victimization; home ownership (stable housing) increases pride, responsibility and self esteem and establishes financial security; children raised in more stable housing leads to their living in a stable environment; school performance, mental health, overall health is improved in housed children; housing is a fundamental human right of all people; low income housing doesn't decrease housing values; housing is an important part of a community's infrastructure; tenants and home owners are investors in a community; housing is not a tent, car, trailer, park bench or cardboard box; your children/grandchildren may be sitting next to a homeless child in their classes; there are business costs associated with having unsheltered people in our community; homeless is a function of wages/local economy and is part of every community; the foster care system is not the solution to youth homelessness; income diverse communities are robust; solutions for homelessness do not lie solely with governmental units, non-profits or faith based organization; we are all part of the problem <u>and</u> solution; homelessness prevention benefits landlords and the economy; housing is infrastructure much like roads, etc..</p> <p>What do we need to make housing first? Participating in "housing first" is a good business decision. Affordable rental housing is a good option for many as home ownership is not necessarily the best option for all. A "housing tenure spectrum," spanning homelessness to home ownership, needs an ideal mix of housing where there is a place for everyone. Housing preservation is a form of prevention and there are more housing models that need to be explored and/or implemented. It was stated that there are high up-front costs to housing subsidies, but long-term investment correlates with long-term returns on community investment. Getting small cities involved in housing planning is important and local funding is powerful and flexible. Prevention benefits all, and political leadership is needed.</p>	

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5. On the Horizon	<p>State budget cuts: State budget cuts will affect us locally and affects housing. CD/MH is taking hits, and many will be unable to obtain treatment. Jail diversion programs will retain funding. It is recognized that the DD population needs housing as well as the elderly. County millage funds for MH and DD are still available, and federal funding appears stable at the moment. The outlook is not good for the 2010 city budget as real estate fees drive funding for many city-funded programs. The county anticipates it will be two million behind in revenues. Building permits issued were up in March compared to February, but still below last year. A McLatchey poll indicates that 59% of those surveyed think the economy has bottomed out.</p> <p>Stimulus funds: Some stimulus funding is being distributed quickly; some appears to be mired down.</p>	
6. Other Business	<p>Discussion took place regarding a USDA rental housing complex (subsidized private housing) in Ferndale. Communities are notified when these mortgages are under request to prepay and the Pinetree Apt. residents, many who are elderly, disabled and low-income have been given such a notice regard to a complex in which elderly and disabled individuals will be affected. As there are a number of scenarios that could develop as a result of prepayment of the mortgage, including the possibility of selling or eliminating low income housing, it is a concern of the board. Gail shared a letter sent to residents, as well as letters from tenants. Greg would like to write a letter in support of low income housing. Greg and Gail will research the issue further before Greg writes a letter.</p>	
Adjourn	The meeting was adjourned at 10:30 AM	
Next Meeting	<p style="text-align: center;"> June 11, 2009 8:30 – 10:00 a.m. Whatcom County Health Department Administrative Conference Room 509 Girard Street, </p>	