

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL
Dana Brown-Davis, C.M.C.

COUNTY COURTHOUSE
311 Grand Avenue, Suite #105
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Rud Browne
Barry Buchanan
Tyler Byrd
Todd Donovan
Carol Frazey
Satpal Sidhu

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL

Homeless Strategies Workgroup

Friday, August 23, 2019 Meeting #10 Summary

Time: 8:30 – 10:00 a.m.

Location: Whatcom County Civic Center Annex,
322 N. Commercial, Garden Room

Attendance:

Members

Steven Bass (for Mike Parker), Opportunity Council
Barry Buchanan (HSW Chair), Whatcom County Councilmember
Doug Chadwick, Whatcom County Sheriff, Undersheriff
Christopher D'Onofrio (for Anne Deacon/Ann Beck), Whatcom County Health Department
Carol Frazey, Whatcom County Councilmember (for Councilmember Rud Browne)
Dan Hammill, City of Bellingham Council Member
Mike Hilley, Whatcom County EMS
Michael Lilliquist, City of Bellingham Council Member
Kelli Linville, City of Bellingham Mayor
Tyler Schroeder, Whatcom County
Michael Shepard, Port of Bellingham Commissioner
Markis D. Stidham, Homeless Advocate
Emilio Vela, Jr., Northwest Youth Services

Guests:

Sara Arnoldi, Northwest Youth Services
John Campbell, citizen
Helen Campbell, citizen
Liz Coogan, City of Bellingham, Executive Assistant to the Mayor
Rachel Duval, HomesNow
Mark Gardner, City of Bellingham, Legislative Analyst
Carmen Gilmore, Basics PNW
Brittany Jones, BasicsPNW
Heather Katahdin, volunteer, citizen
Shari Lapof, HomesNow volunteer
Emerson McCuin, Northwest Youth Services
Jim Peterson, HomesNow
Rick Qualls, Fountain Community Church
Tara Sundin, City of Bellingham, Community and Economic Development Manager
Phill Wolff, BSAC

Meeting Summary Prepared By: Cathy B. Halka, AICP, Legislative Analyst, Whatcom County Council

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1. **Welcome and Introductions**, HSW Chair, Whatcom County Councilmember Barry Buchanan

Councilmember and Chair of the HSW, Barry Buchanan, welcomed the group and reviewed the purpose of the HSW as per Resolution 2019-034. The group approved the August 9th meeting minutes.

2. **BasicsPNW**

Brittany Jones provided an update on the work of Basics PNW.

- Locker truck provides 38 lockers in a box truck, every Saturday for 4 hours. They also offer food, coffee, clothes and hygiene items. BasicsPNW ended this effort in May to focus on permanent lockers effort.
- Basics PNW is in the process of finalizing a lease agreement with the City for permanent outdoor lockers. They are working to address concerns for safety and management while maintaining client confidentiality and providing a low-barrier service for clients. Once the City signs the land lease, the County will need to sign off. County Council set aside \$20,000 for the project. BasicsPNW is fundraising and raised over \$7,000. First set of lockers will be \$14,000 (includes lockers, installation, and roof). There are two locations: Police station cement pad poured and ready, County parking lot near City Hall

Brittany addressed the following questions from the HSW

- How big are the lockers?
 - o 18"x24" and 6ft tall, includes shelves
- What is the operating agreement for how long someone can use a locker?
 - o A monthly lease agreement will be signed with customers
- What is the utilization in the locker truck?
 - o 35-38 lockers were full, and a lot of people said they can't leave their things in the truck all week, or they can't return every Saturday to check in on their things
- Will outdoor lockers have more access?
 - o Yes, outdoor lockers will have 24-hour access via a locker key code
- How do you handle unclaimed property?
 - o Hold items off site until they are reclaimed or for a maximum of 90 days, after which items will be discarded
- What is the estimated need in the community for lockers?
 - o Numbers of people experiencing homelessness varies. There are no storage options for people in the county. BasicsPNW will offer 10-12 lockers at each location and hopes to have three locations.

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- What is the criteria for using a locker
 - o Clients fill out an application (developed in partnership with Bellingham Police, HOT team, Lighthouse Mission, and others). People will go through a background check. The City has asked that anyone accessing the lockers passes an outstanding felony arrest (can have a record, but not an outstanding felony)
 - Councilmember Hammill indicated that a person charged with a felony is presumed innocent, and he will discuss these criteria with the administration.
- What do you do when you find drugs or weapons
 - o The lease agreement does not allow customers to store certain items, and it also allow for random checks.
- Is there a way for people to allow others to open their locker (e.g. if they are hospitalized)?
 - o Customers provide an emergency contacts. Will keep items for up to 90 days if items in a locker are abandoned.
- Can a GRACE team member contact BasicsPNW to coordinate a locker space?
 - o Yes, they can direct them to available space in a permanent locker or in the weekly locker truck

Jim Peterson, HomesNow, provided an update. He indicated that the Fairhaven site has 15 tiny homes. They are moving everything there from Alabama Street on August 28th. HomesNow raised \$90,000 from the community. HomesNow is planning 3 more tiny home villages by November 2020: two in the City, one in the County, one Port property. HomesNow thinks the City, County, and Port should provide land. Additionally, HomesNow would prefer longer leases so as to not disruptive to uproot residents after a few months. A 2 year lease is preferable. He continued to discuss how amazing it is to see people come together to make the tiny home villages work. It is a personal dream of his dating back to 1991. The model works, and 48 people have gone through the program. Two more people move out today into permanent housing. HomesNow has housed 13 people and found permanent jobs for 9 people. By April 2020 when they move out of Fairhaven they hope to have 14 more people in permanent housing. They coordinate residents that get along to go in as roommates in an apartment. They take 3-minute videos of the residents and post them in hopes a community member might agree to lease a room in their house to them for extra income. He hopes the City and County build more affordable housing that is needed. All tiny homes will have infrared heating donated and installed by Heating Green. Ecotech may donate all the solar panels. Residents won't have to move into hotels this winter. There is a ribbon cutting September 14th at 12:30pm and we invite all officials to be there.

Rachel, VP HomesNow added that there are clients that don't get housing because of drug and alcohol; residents must be drug and alcohol free. Some residents have had issues, and

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HomesNow tries to help them get treatment. Treatment is not accessible. HomesNow doesn't look at residents as if they can't do it or are broken. They tell residents they can and they have to rely on themselves. We work with them and we establish a community to help them. This all helps with the success rate.

Jim Peterson said they have clients who want treatment, and it's not available. To deal with the opioid crisis you have to have treatment available. People can't wait on the streets for it. Meth is a big challenge right now because it's so accessible.

Jim Peterson discussed additional tiny home villages, and they need land that is at least a ¼ acre with water and electric. Port-a-pots (work well) so they don't need sewer. They cap a site at 20 homes. Their goal is to build 80 tiny homes by November 2020. They raised the funds for the first 20 homes in a month, after receiving the permit. HomesNow doesn't have the money now for additional homes. They are specifying villages for Veterans, women, families, and LGBTQ. HomesNow is considering providing a site for 17-24 year olds, but not younger, and may need assistance from others to handle that age group. The hardest part of getting clients employed is the gap in work history or residence history. They've typically relied on a client having an advocate for them in their job search, as well as helping them with their resume.

Councilmember Hammill added that access for treatment is important – it's a personal issue for him as his family member couldn't get into treatment because of lack of options. Medically assisted treatment (MAT) has doubled in our community. There is a new private practice on Lincoln by the Park & Ride. Last year's charges indicated meth was 36% and opiates were 33%. We can encourage and demand it, but ultimately its private providers that provide the service. It's a private provider that provides services through a Medicaid reimbursement program, for example. Government doesn't provide those services. He clarified that he will be advocating for supporting more services.

Michael Lilliquist clarified that the prohibition of people with felonies is not in the Council resolution.

Jim Peterson said that the City has put rules on HomesNow to prohibit clients with felony convictions. He clarified it may be in the city permit. If he knows someone, he can go to the Chief of Police to advocate for admitting a resident. He wishes he had more flexibility to determine eligibility, but it's ultimate up to the Chief.

Emilio Vela, Jr. said that they have capacity at The Pad for 17-24 year olds to stay a few days or longer. They can collaborate with HomesNow on the 17-24 year old groups, and will reach out

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to set up a time to talk with HomesNow.

Jim Peterson indicated that residents pay \$150/month utility fee to cover the village's \$1200 expenses. The biggest challenge right now is helping elderly and disabled people. HomesNow is happy with the partnership with the City. The tiny home village has not had any real emergencies, but some minor incidents. Additionally, he said people need non-religious shelters. For various reasons people won't go to a religious facility (e.g. they've experienced trauma through a religious organization). There needs to be options for people. It should not be based on bed availability, it should be need based. Some would rather freeze to death than go to a religious organization for shelter.

Markis D. Stidham indicated that HomesNow is the most successful sheltering program in Whatcom County. It should be our priority, and more tiny home villages should be built immediately. It's the government's mandate to promote the general welfare – they need to start doing it. It is cheaper to house them and see them through to rehousing than it is to do dreadful sweeps. A safe parking program and fenced enclosure can work as well. He said he wants to see the government running these things. People are waiting for spaces. There is a need for 200 additional beds more than what the Mission is providing.

Councilmember Frazey agreed that HomesNow is a great model. There are other models as well and everyone is working toward the same goal. All our partners are doing a great job.

Lilliquist requested a future agenda item to talk about funding partners and opportunities to address elderly and medically fragile populations. Lighthouse Mission is thinking of expanding their drop in center to include medical staff and facilities.

3. Action Items from previous meetings

Tara Sundin provided an update on the City's efforts to organize a winter shelter.

- The City will soon announce the location of a 35-40 bed winter shelter.
- City is working with the Lighthouse Mission to find a permanent location for an additional shelter location in another area of the city.
- Mayor Linville and Tara Sundin are working with a developer in town that owns a lot of property and a housing developer on an affordable housing site. An announcement will be made in the next several months. It will provide more options for low cost permanent housing.

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Chris D'Onofrio provided an update on the Health Department's effort to train volunteers and potential staff members for shelters. One or two of potential partners opening up their space have requested staff and volunteers at all times.

Michael Shepard indicated that the Port has space, but not any of the other services. The Port wants to have better expectations about what they get if they provide the space for a severe weather shelter.

Tyler Schroeder indicated that he is in discussions with Ann Beck regarding funding for the severe weather shelter and the cold weather shelter. They are trying to understand the budget needs better and will bring an update back to the HSW at a future meeting.

Mayor Linville said the City is pleased with the work HomesNow has done. The City is not going to be able to provide all the property for these sites. The City has set the example that the model works. The term of the Post Point shelter is 9 months. The City has asked other entities to offer up their properties for HomesNow, but has not heard anyone else offer a site. She continued to say she understands the need to have a non-religious site. She would like to see that be an item on the next agenda that other entities aside from Bellingham look at properties available (for a HomesNow site). Markis D. Stidham suggested the public market building on Cornwall be on the list.

Councilmember Buchanan asked for members to think about actionable items for the HSW to accomplish, for discussion at the next meeting.

Councilmember Hammill identified the ESHB 2263 handout as an opportunity for funding, nearly \$10 million. It could be like the Bellingham Home fund which helps hundreds of people with housing utility expenses.

Councilmember Buchanan explained that SB 1406 is underway. Cities need to approve resolutions indicating they are not taking the rebate. Then the County can consider a resolution and ordinance to take the rebate. Tyler Schroeder indicated that the County Health Department is currently working on a resolution and ordinance. There is a January deadline for the resolution. Mayor Linville indicated that she is supportive of Whatcom County taking the 1406 rebate. Councilmember Hammill said that we have to look at all the things we are asking the voters to approve. We have to meet the obligations for police, fire, and streets first. Councilmember Lilliquist indicated a new funding source can be applied for new projects and that everyone has to sing off the same song sheet.

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Markis Stidham said in 6 weeks they spent \$30,000, and it was on people not allowed into the Mission. That is really expensive, but for every person you are saving money. Sweeps and clean ups are a huge cost.

Steven from the Opportunity Council suggested that the HSW address the communications action item. How do we know where to send people? Markis added that we need real time data on how many beds are available where.

4. Public Comment

Shari Lapoff, a volunteer with HomesNow, discussed the food issue. She indicated that three months from now, we need to have something established and know how food is going to happen. The who, what, where, when, public, private.

Carmen Gilmore, BasicsPNW, provided a written statement to the HSW. She said there needs to be another shelter open this winter when the temperature predictions are in the 30s. The opening should have nothing to do with the capacity of the mission. The initial shelter has to be available for all genders and couples. She said she drove around checking alleys for people next winter and we need to do better. There was a person she picked up from the library that was just released from the hospital from hip surgery and was prepared to sleep on the cement in an alcove. She arranged for him to connect with HomesNow and stay in a hotel. Housing first works and is cost effective. Government needs to do this stuff and put one in every neighborhood so there isn't a NIMBY issue. There is a lack of homeless voices on this workgroup, and she also addressed this in her written comments. Homeless voices need to be heard. This workgroup meets for 1.5 hours every two weeks, that is 3 hours a month. Is there a dedicated staff person for this? How will this work be done in 3 hours per month. What does the port get for the space? You get to save people's lives.

Sara Arnoldi, Northwest Youth Services, said she appreciates the discussion about including LGBTQ populations and all the diversities that need to be served. She said excluding people who have felonies and have done things to survive, we are perpetuating the problem. People who have housing can realize more of who they are and become contributing community members. Let's figure out how to screen everyone in somehow. Where is the place where they can go? Having a central access point would be helpful.

Markis Stidham read a comment submitted from Dena Jenson, Birch Bay. She supports

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HomesNow and repeating the model in other areas of Bellingham and the County. She hopes that winter shelters are provided at churches and non-religious facilities. Safe storage and safe parking areas are important. Don't let one provider be the determiner of whether or not other services are made available. She asked the HSW to find creative ways to fund and offer the community with services.

5. Discussion of Next Steps

The next meeting is September 6, 2019.

Homeless Strategies Workgroup Meeting – August 23, 2019

Comments & recommendations for the workgroup from Carmen Gilmore, Bellingham resident and volunteer with BasicsPNW's Safe Storage Lockers program:

- In the July 26th Homeless Strategies Workgroup meeting summary, I noticed the following statement regarding the lockers program, "Safe Storage is interested in leading the project." This is not really the case. We would actually love to see the city, county, and port lead the locker program, and our role to be offering our assistance in getting the program up and running. We want to be out of business as soon as possible, because that would mean everyone is housed. We see the storage lockers as a temporary, interim program that can be converted into lockers for travelers, once everyone has housing. The only reason BasicsPNW is taking the lead on this program is because no one else stepped up. So, what we have are concerned community members, all part-time volunteers, bringing this program to life because no other existing entity would take it on. I'd like to point out, that because of this, we've had to spend valuable time, years even, putting in place and setting up things that the City, County and Port already have. For example, we've had to get...
 - lawyers
 - insurance
 - property to install the lockers on
 - a bank account & business entity
 - staff, and
 - funding

Every single one of these things are things the city, county and port already have. In fact, the Port already has some day-use, outdoor storage lockers in use at the ferry terminal. Frankly, it's frustrating to think how quickly the City, County, and Port could set up storage lockers, if the will was there.

- I also happened to take a look at that the Member List for this workgroup, and noticed that it seems to be almost absent of homeless voices. There are 6 members from the county, 4 from the city, 1 from the port, some from service providers, a church, the Lummi Nation, a business advocate, and only one homeless advocate. It's not clear by looking at the list how many of the 19 members have personally experienced homelessness, but I'm guessing it's not close to a majority and may even be only 1 or 2 people. I seriously question the effectiveness of a Homeless Strategies Workgroup that doesn't have a majority of voices at the table informed by the personal experience of homelessness. The people who know the most about what homeless people in Whatcom County need and what measures will be effective, are the people who are currently or formerly homeless. There's a saying, "Nothing about us, without us." Meaning that if we're going to have an effective Homeless Strategies Workgroup, it's vital to have a significant number of people who've experienced homelessness sitting at the table and being part of the decision making. And, it would also be a good to include voices from the grassroots organizations involved with homelessness like HomesNOW, BasicsPNW, Cascadia Volunteer Advocacy, and Homeless Voice.

- I would also like to acknowledge the historical and current influences of settler colonialism, white supremacy, white fragility, patriarchy, religion, capitalism and ableism in our community and in these meetings. If we think these influences have nothing to do with the current state of homelessness in Bellingham and Whatcom County, we are sorely mistaken. Our Coast Salish brothers and sisters have lived right here, for some 12,000 years, ever since the beginning of human existence on this land. In those many millennia, prior to the arrival of European settlers in Whatcom County, there was not the homelessness like we see today. Not only do we have an outrageously high amount of homelessness in Whatcom County, but our local statistics show much higher rates of homelessness in our populations of Native Americans, people of color, LGBTQ, people with disabilities, and women facing domestic violence. Actively dismantling the influences of settler colonialism, white supremacy, white fragility, patriarchy, religion, capitalism and ableism everywhere, including right here at these meetings is imperative, and I believe critical, to ending homelessness in Whatcom County. A few ways we can begin to dismantle these influences in this workgroup setting are:
 - #1. Start each meeting with a Land Acknowledgement and moment of reflection that those of us who live in Whatcom County, and are not Coast Salish, are occupying the lands of the Coast Salish peoples. This very moment. This serves to remind us of the current existence of settler colonialism, but not only that, challenges us to think and act in ways that we can actively dismantle it right here, right now, in this present moment.
 - #2. Have a standing agenda item that invites and allows time for any of our Coast Salish community members to share their thoughts, if they care to do so.
 - #3. Have an ASL interpreter at every public governmental meeting.
 - #4. Have each of us be aware of our privileges in the situation (e.g. race, perceived race, able-bodied, non-immigrant, straight, housed, etc.) and how these might be shaping our perspective. If you are someone who has more of these privileges than others, be aware of how much space you are taking up in these meetings and make room for other voices to come to the front. Prioritize the wisdom of those most affected by the topic at hand, homelessness (*credit: parts of #4 taken from and inspired by the Racial Justice Coalition's 'Posting Guidelines' document posted on their facebook page*).

- Finally, I think we need to expect discomfort in these meetings and conversations around homelessness, and welcome the discomfort. If we're not being pushed out of our comfort zones, then we're most likely not doing the work needed to end homelessness. It's intolerable that there's even one person who's homeless in our community. In 2008 there was a 10-year plan to end homelessness in Whatcom County. In 2016, there was a request to the Governor, from our Mayor and City Council, to declare a state-wide emergency around the issue of homelessness. Yet, the 2019 Point-In-Time Count still shows 700 people homeless and the actual number is more likely in the thousands. These are our mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, daughters and sons who are suffering. Let's act like it. Let's have an urgency about ending homelessness, and get people into homes now! And continuously think outside-the-box about how to do this. We have incredibly creative, resourceful, amazing people in our community, who are just waiting to be inspired and led. We can do this. It's time for all options to be on the table, and for us, especially our elected leaders, to be bold and courageous. Those with the most privilege and power, have the most responsibility. Thank you.

Provided by: Markis D. Stidham
August 23, 2019

From Dena Jensen, Birch Bay:

I am commenting in support of relying on simple, effective, and expedited means of keeping people under a roof and as stable as possible during extreme weather conditions.

If those engaged in this effort, as part of the Homeless Strategies Workgroup, embrace the model being brought to life by HomesNOW! and facilitate it being repeated and improved in any ways necessary, in other areas of Bellingham and the County, I believe it will be one of the most economical and successful approaches you can make to supplying the wide range of needs for people experiencing homelessness.

For the winter season that is approaching, I understand you may need to also offer some shelter locations, such as at churches (but not just churches), other private properties, and at County and City properties for people to be ensured of being indoors overnight when temperatures are freezing or below, or in the 40s and wet or snowy for any extended period of a couple days or more.

Safe Parking and Safe Storage locations are critical to help lessen the dangers and demands of severe weather on people who are not housed.

One of the most vital steps I feel you can take is to not let any one provider of sheltering options be the determiner of whether or not other services are made available. That proved to be a failed approach last winter in particular, and it is important that services are based on the needs of the community not the say-so of a provider whose government agency partner is leaving the decisions to them. This level of burden and responsibility is not fair for any provider and does not result in your community members being safely sheltered under dangerous weather conditions.

Needs of the diverse types of people without shelter must be identified. And the various service providers that are going to be able to supply those needs, or those who can form a group that can supply those services and resources also must be identified.

I call on the Workgroup to call for financial and human resources, coming up with creative ways of securing and developing those, that can help provide necessary amount of fuel to be able to provide the community with services that the community, in turn, can then choose to help augment with their own efforts and funds.