

Additional remarks on needs of unsheltered people during our public health emergency and continued freezing temperature forecasts

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Dear Whatcom County Council and the Homeless Strategies Workgroup:

I wrote to the County Council yesterday, but have been thinking more about the subject of the Coronavirus regarding our unsheltered population more.

I also just read an article in The Hill, [Oversight Democrats question DHS on plan for possible coronavirus outbreak in detention facilities](#) and there was a paragraph I thought was relevant, even though it is talking about large detention facilities: "This Administration's immigration policies have grown the daily detainee population by more than 40%, resulting in severe overcrowding at detention facilities. Overcrowding creates dangerous conditions that increase the likelihood that disease will spread and make it more difficult to effectively quarantine contagious detainees,' the Democrats added."

Over the course of discussions during the Homeless Strategies Workgroup this winter season it has been noted that the Lighthouse Mission has been trying to fit in as many people as possible, sometimes in spaces, on mats on the floor, where people aren't meant to sleep overnight. This would be something that I think would be reasonable to assess as overcrowding, and it is a large shelter facility.

With this environment that is very conducive to the spread of COVID-19, and especially while there is an imminent spell of cold weather (on Friday night 3/13/20, the forecast is 28 degrees with a High Wind Watch and a chance of rain or snow), I feel it is urgent to contact all of the severe weather resources you worked to bring forward and to call on them to provide whatever aid they can to relieve overcrowding and help ensure that adequate measures are taken to reduce the chances of an outbreak amongst at-risk members of the community.

Also, this situation with the pandemic offers another reason why, until adequate permanent housing is made available, it would be wise to meaningfully encourage and facilitate numerous small-scale solutions such as 20 unit tiny home (or "cottage") communities where each person has their own separate space that is a manageable size to keep disinfected and where residents can recover from an illness, or do some types of work and study in. You have an organization in your community that wants to expand. I am calling on you all to do everything possible to help them forge ahead to achieve their goals, while continuing to help other providers to be able to achieve goals that will help end homelessness, as well.

Sincerely,
Dena Jensen
Birch Bay, WA

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