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WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL

Homeless Strategies Workgroup

Meeting Summary – Meeting #28

Date: Friday, September 25, 2020
Time: 1:30 p.m. – 2:50 p.m.
Location: Remote online meeting, for more information visit

Members in Attendance:

Barry Buchanan, HSW Chair, Whatcom County Councilmember
Michael Lilliquist, Bellingham City Council Member
Hannah Stone, Bellingham City Council Member
Seth Fleetwood, City of Bellingham, Mayor
Hans Erchinger-Davis, Lighthouse Mission Ministries
Mike Parker, Opportunity Council
Ann Beck with Anne Deacon, Whatcom County Health Department
Dean Wight, Northwest Youth Services Representative
Florence Simon, Bellingham Police, Deputy Chief
Mike Hilley, Whatcom County EMS
Markis D. Stidham, Homeless Advocate representative
Joel Kennedy, Homeless children and families representative
Emily O'Connor, Homeless children and families representative
Michael Berres, Special populations representative

1) Welcome, HSW Chair, Whatcom County Councilmember Barry Buchanan

Councilmember Buchanan welcomed members. HSW members approved the meeting summary from Meeting #27, September 11, 2020. Next meeting is October 9th at 1:30 pm. HSW members welcomed new member Council Member Hannah Stone.

2) Ideas for List of Alternative Strategies & Responses Chart

HSW members discussed the List of Alternative Strategies & Responses. An edit to the chart was requested to add 'families with children' as its own listed item.

Members discussed sending revisions to update the chart to Council staff (Cathy). Several members suggested meeting outside of a regular HSW meeting to identify the top three items to focus on and bring a recommendation to the full committee for discussion.

3) Identify location and partner for safe parking

Rick Sepler provided an update to HSW members and indicated the city will be issuing an RFP next week that will solicit a group or organization to support a safe parking site. The RFP allows for scalable projects (can be small or large).

Members discussed demand for safe parking sites last spring, including data from the HOT team indicating 60

people living in vehicles.

Additional survey information collected through HomesNow indicates 1 to 2 people per week over the summer were moving into their cars

4) Year-round sheltering for families, Emily O'Connor

Emily O'Conner updated HSW members about the work of a small group of HSW members to brainstorm innovative ideas for family shelter options. The current efforts include:

- A data request was sent to the Opportunity Council's Homeless Services Center to understand potential needs of families, including:
 - o how much is spent on motel stays for families
 - o average length of stay in motels
 - o where families go after leaving motels

Members discussed ideas for next steps, such as:

- HSW members making a recommendation to the Council or Executive's office for funding for families with kids for the coming winter,
- HSW adopting priorities for a trauma-informed response (ACE scores of 8 can be a predictor of future homelessness, and can service interventions be trauma-informed to reduce ACE score and create better future outcomes for children).
- Review housing data chart provided by the County Health Department staff (Christopher D'Onofrio) showing all the housing resources.
- Providing a year-round shelter and options for moving youth out of shelters.
 - o Idea to create a subcommittee to discuss alternatives for shelter and other options for youth
- Providing family shelters in government building, such as the Girard Street building or State Street building.
 - o Feasibility of that is unknown at this time, because the County facilities department is looking at several building expansions at Northwest annex and does not know yet how departments will be relocated.
 - o Councilmember Buchanan offered to review the facilities plan and report back to the group.
 - o Anne Deacon indicated that the state street building is on a future Council agenda, but there is currently no option for transferring Health Dept staff out of the Girard Street building.
 - o Markis Stidham indicated the Northwest Annex site has a field which would work for a tiny home village and add a playground. There could be camps for different populations.
- HSW members discussed a distinction for youth as separate from children and families. Unaccompanied minors is one category. Families with children are a different category
- Members also acknowledged the priority to address medically fragile populations during the pandemic.

5) Winter Shelter – temporary and emergency

Ann Beck reached out to NWYS to discuss Emergency Solutions Grant (COVID-19 funding) and how they can focus on special populations. There is nothing specific to share with members at this time as they are still working through details.

Hans Erchinger-Davis provided an update on Basecamp with a population of 174 people (on rainy days). Lighthouse Mission is working with Christ The King to operate an overflow (severe weather) shelter in the old drop in Center. Approximately 35 people can be hosted there. There is currently one family at Basecamp now (with one child). In the past there was a second family, including a newborn and toddler, staying at the shelter. Basecamp has stayed COVID-19 free. There was a staff member that tested positive at Agape House (women's shelter), and everyone was tested and no one else had it. As a protocol, Lighthouse Mission continues to test people when symptoms present and have not had any more positives reported.

Markis Stidham reported that the Homes Now program has been COVID-free, and highlighted the importance of getting temporary shelters up quickly as winter is approaching quickly.

6) Additional Action Items

HSW members discussed homeless encampment clean ups and sweeps, including the following:

- Council Member Stone worked with Lt. Crass (BPD) on a procedures document for camp clean ups. The document will go before the Bellingham City Council to have a broader discussion about policies related to homelessness.
- Rick Sepler indicated that the matter should be addressed at the City Council since it is about a City policy.
- Michael Lilliquist indicated that he has not seen evidence that the City of Bellingham is not following the policy or procedure. The policy is to focus on camps that are problematic (e.g. those with complaints of health risks, criminal activity, etc.). Procedures say to act if there is a report of an issue with a camp.
- Council Member Stone will report back to HSW members after the issue is discussed at the October 12th Bellingham City Council meeting.

7) Public Comment

The following speakers provided comments:

- Doug Gustafson
- Jennifer Christine Mansfield
- Krystal Rodriguez
- Josh Cerretti
- Dena Jensen
- Melissa Gragg
- Mary MacIntosh
- Heather Katahdin
- Rain Forever