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WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL

Homeless Strategies Workgroup

Friday, November 6, 2020

Meeting #31 – Meeting Summary

Time: 1:30 p.m. – 2:50 p.m.

Location: Remote online meeting, for more information visit

Members in attendance:

Barry Buchanan, Chair, Whatcom County Councilmember
Michael Lilliquist, Bellingham City Council Member
Hannah Stone, Bellingham City Council Member
Seth Fleetwood, City of Bellingham, Mayor
Riley Sweeney, City of Ferndale
Michael Shepard, Port of Bellingham, Commissioner
Hans Erchinger-Davis, Lighthouse Mission Ministries Representative
Mike Parker, Opportunity Council Representative
Jenn Daly for Dean Wight, Northwest Youth Services Representative
Dave Crass for Florence Simon, Bellingham Police, Deputy Chief
Mike Hilley, Whatcom County EMS
Markis D. Stidham, Homeless Advocate
Joel Kennedy, Homeless children and families
Emily O'Connor, Homeless children and families
Michael Berres, Special populations
Lisa Marx, Schools

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

Councilmember Buchanan welcomed attendees. HSW Members approved the meeting summary from Meeting #30 on October 23, 2020.

2. New Strategies Matrix

Emily O'Connor summarized previous work on the matrix. HSW members discussed activities related to ranking priorities in Matrix 'Item 6. Interim Housing & Services.'

HSW Members discussed next steps including members taking ownership of certain topic areas, rather than collectively working on each item. Subject areas and potential leaders may include:

- Families – Emily O'Connor
- Youth - Jenn Daly
- Unsheltered – Barry, Emily, Mike Parker
- Severe weather shelter
- Funding

Emily O'Connor, Barry Buchanan, and Mike Parker will review the categories and identify people to serve on each subcommittee. They will bring back a draft list at the next meeting.

Council Member Michael Lilliquist suggested as a part of funding, consideration be given to earmark REET funding, a portion of which may be used for building and rehabilitation for people exiting homelessness. Funding can be used for facilities, not operations. Finding partners to operate is a hurdle.

Members discussed including a survey tool as an opportunity to identify additional ideas not covered in the topic areas.

3. Safe parking

Rick Sepler provided an update on Bellingham's recent RFP for safe parking operators. The RFP was advertised extensively, staff answered questions, and the City did not receive any RFP responses. The City is not equipped to run a safe parking site themselves.

Members discussed whether an RFP could stay open, and acknowledged that partners/agencies are stretched and the timing may not be right. Members acknowledged that the City has created a model and program and could try another time to issue an RFP.

Rick Sepler continued discussion on other Bellingham efforts, including an RFQ for a temporary encampment. He also mentioned that parking is currently allowed for under 72 hours, and the City is not asking people parked longer to move along unless there is an adverse circumstance or complaint.

4. Year Round Sheltering for Families

Joel Kennedy, Michael Berres, Lisa Marx, and Emily O'Connor reported on the following:

- Research on rental vacancy rates and poverty levels prior to the pandemic
- 81 households currently registered as homeless
- Potential increase in homeless households in the new year if the eviction moratorium is not renewed. The best-case scenario is 100 households over 6 months, and the worst-case scenario is 1,000 over 6 months. This is in addition to levels the community is currently experiencing.

Melissa Bird, Road 2 Home, discussed the deficit of case managers to help people through the system. A community ally program in Los Angeles pairs volunteers with people experiencing homelessness. Volunteers assist case managers. Road to Home received a grant from the Whatcom Community Foundation to train volunteers. LIHI is partnering with Road2Home to do a project in Bellingham.

Bradford Gerber presented on LIHI's work building and operating multi-family housing in the Puget sound area. LIHI also established 9 tiny home villages in Seattle, 2 in Tacoma, 1 in Olympia. Villages range in size from 14 tiny homes to 52 at the largest. Behavioral health services and full-time staff are available for some villages. Tiny home designs are available online and vary from 450 sq. ft. to 96 sq. ft. There are a variety people that a tiny home works for and a shelter setting does not. LIHI contracts with Human Services departments and is held to a standard of 40% exits to permanent housing. Last year, LIHI achieved 55% exits to permanent housing among all their properties, and having an on-site case manager is an element of success.

5. Winter Shelters

Councilmember Buchanan provided an update on an effort by the County to utilize the Byron Isolation and Quarantine facility as a family shelter. County Council will consider authorizing a contract at their next meeting to extend the facility use into 2021 and also include the use rooms for sheltering families. HSW members discussed ways to support the effort.

Markis Stidham suggested pallet shelters be used in the parking lot, and described recent efforts to set up a pallet structure as an example.

6. Public Comment

The following attendees provided comments:

- Doug Gustafson
- Heather Katahdin
- Shari Lapof