

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL
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Carol Frazey
Kathy Kershner

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL

Homeless Strategies Workgroup

Friday, January 8, 2021

Meeting #35 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
Rud Browne, Whatcom County Councilmember
Michael Lilliquist, Bellingham City Council Member
Gene Knutson, 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
Ann Beck, Whatcom County Health
Dean Wight, Northwest Youth Services Representative
David Crass (for Florence Simon), Bellingham Police
Mike Hilley, Whatcom County EMS
Guy Occhiogrosso, Bellingham/Whatcom Chamber of Commerce Representative
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

HSW members approved the Meeting Summary: Meeting 34 – December 18, 2020 (with abstention from Gene Knutson and Rud Browne). The next meeting will be held virtually on Friday, January 22, 2021 at 1:30 p.m.

2. Discussion and Planning for Tiny Homes

Mayor Fleetwood reported on recent efforts regarding tiny homes including:

- 8 additional tiny homes delivered today to Swift Haven for a total of 25 units,
- 20 people (80%) came from the encampment at City Hall,
- City is waiting for a response on a group to operate a potential site on Port property

HSW members discussed:

- Pallet shelter purchase considered on 12/31 by the City of Bellingham has not been purchased yet as it is subject to identifying an operator.

3. New Strategies Matrix

- Updates from subcommittees (including action items and ideas to engage community members)
 - Unsheltered (year-round)
 - No chair identified
 - Winter/Severe Weather
 - No chair identified
 - Consider different approach next year, regarding meeting criteria for Christ the King back up shelter to open
 - Youth (year-round)
 - Members met last week
 - Will continue meeting every two weeks and including community members
 - Families (year-round)
 - Met this week again
 - Members are looking at needs: e.g. currently spending 150,000 per month on motel stays
 - Tara Sundin reported that the County is receiving almost \$7 million to fund rental assistance. The City of Bellingham has added another \$50,000 to motel stays.
 - Funding Strategies
 - Met this week and scheduling next meetings
 - Discussed funding for community health as well as homelessness
 - Looking to identify funding mechanisms and recommendations
 - Communications
 - Adding County and City Communications staff to the committee
 - Received requests for members of the community to join, but waiting until work is better defined
 - Committee is not a messenger or mediator, but is focused on recommending communications strategies
 - Markis Stidham requested that HSW meetings be more accessible to the public
 - Mike Parker suggested a gap analysis for communications
 - Riley Sweeney discussed the biggest gap related to public perception of work being done and the impacts of efforts underway.
 - Emily O'Connor and Mike Parker shared that 2,200 individuals (1,300 households) in 2019 are served through coordinated entry system each year. The challenge is that there are not enough resources to address the needs of everyone. What people see is the people whose needs are not being addressed.

4. Winter Shelters

Mayor Fleetwood discussed the encampment at City Hall including:

- Encampment in operation for two months (Nov 11th),
- Shelter space is available at Basecamp (70-80 beds), new Swift Haven site at Civic Field, and the Byron Ave Isolation and Quarantine Facility,
- Work on an additional tiny home site,
- A commitment to discussing longer term solutions and responses to homelessness,
- Impacts to City and County staff working in the area,
- A specific date for when the camp will be cleared is not yet determined,

- Case management services being offered to encampment guests, and
- A hope to create a peaceful transition.

Hans Erchinger-Davis reported that there is currently capacity for 130 people at Basecamp and the overflow shelter combined. Unity Care NW has provided quick COVID tests. Guests are accepted via walk in. Lighthouse Mission worked with Health Department to coordinate testing and transfers of COVID positive guests to the Bryon I&Q facility. Lighthouse Mission staff are getting vaccinated next week. Everyone is welcome.

HSW members discussed:

- City Hall encampment and participation of the community in providing services, volunteers bringing needed supplies, and
- Point-In-Time count and plans for this year, to be discussed further at the next HSW meeting.

5. Public Comment

The following attendees provided public comment

Doug Gustafson
Hannah Stone
Aida Cardona
William Shenken
Melissa Wisener
Shari Lapof
Arrissia Owen Turner
Heather Katahdin
Jonah Lawhorn

From: Dena Jenson
To:

Subject: Regarding the 1/11/21 joint meeting discussing shelter "and Other Issues Related to Homelessness in Whatcom County"

Date: Sunday, January 17, 2021 7:02:27 PM

Dear Mayor Fleetwood, Bellingham City Council, County Executive Sidhu, Whatcom County Council, and Homeless Strategies Workgroup:

I would like to thank every person amongst you who has been responding to the calls for action to supply emergency winter sheltering and transitional housing this winter that have come from those camped and volunteering at the encampment at City Hall, and any other community members calling for the same. Without that work, I feel confident we would have no prospects for increased and more diverse winter emergency sheltering options over last year or the year before. I am calling for you all to stay in a proactive mode and effectively get people indoors during the remaining winter nights.

In listening to the 1/11/21 joint meeting discussing shelter "and Other Issues Related to Homelessness in Whatcom County," I noticed that once again the topic came up of whether there are sufficient volunteers available to help staff a suggested warming shelter. This same topic of whether there are sufficient volunteers has been a recurring theme and barrier regarding providing ample shelter options to our community over the last three winter seasons now. This seems to be something to zero-in on and address in order for us to make critical and long past-due progress on providing shelter to those who do not have it, especially during the hostile weather months.

While the County Executive noted at the meeting how overwhelmed volunteers are in our community right now, we also know that new volunteers have turned up to the tune of around 40 people who are providing services to residents at Camp 210. We know that beyond those who stepped up to help manage the camp, there are also volunteers out doing nightly outreach to other community members who are presently left with no other option that to sleep outdoors. Additionally, there are people signing up to make meals for those camping at 210 Lottie, and there are people donating essential items to the camp and to Unity Village. HomesNOW is aware of a base of volunteers that turns out when their organization has been empowered to embark on a tiny home village.

On a related note, I heard Mayor Fleetwood say that he had pledged to fund a social services case manager for one of the villages that may potentially open. It seems that, in addition, hiring someone who would recruit and develop a volunteer base to staff annual emergency hostile weather facilities would also be well worth the investment. Paying one

person to recruit and foster an ample team of volunteers would help keep critical sheltering projects moving forward and would remove the other formidable barrier that comes up time and again, which is that of feeling that funding for staffing of sheltering facilities is prohibitive. This particular barrier is often brought up by members of the Health Department.

Until we are able to fund the staffing and accompanying service providers needed for keeping people from sleeping outside during inhospitable weather, we need to find and otherwise fuel volunteers who find passion and reward from contributing their services, which in turn creates well-being and justice for our entire community. Housing first, services next, and a safer and healthier community will follow.

Sincerely,

Dena Jensen
Birch Bay, WA

From: Christine Mansfield

Subject: NOTICE to vacate 25 ft City Hall parameter

Date: Thursday, January 21, 2021 2:07:06 PM

Citizen protests are not SOLUTIONS, but a means of vocalizing publicly the need for city and county action.

I think a constructive effort for URGENT CARE assessment as CRISIS MANAGEMENT needs to be put into place in real-time as a plausible route to SOLUTIONS.

This is a public health crisis in which the safety and well-being of all community sectors are compromised; most visibly the campers seeking shelter who are facing endangerment from exposure this winter, therefore utilizing public settings for life-sustaining measures disrupting public access to our housed community.

Please exercise your political will to advance the efforts of this protest in the direction of SOLUTIONS for both our housed and unhoused community.

<< EXAMPLE >>

PURCHASE and position pallet shelters on the street between City Hall and the library to move first wave of campers:

Campers located in the 25 ft parameter vacate zone.

IMPORTANT: NOTIFY the camp of intentions and garner mutual understanding for this cooperative effort.

(Honestly, this is not hard, and can be done with precision and clinical effectiveness to help these residents.)

- Block off the parameter of street between the library and City Hall at both ends with cones and signs.
- Erect pallet shelter units for first wave of campers who were notified to vacate from the 25 parameter around City Hall. Fence off street if necessary.
- In the street, begin a real-time coordinated entry with professionals to form a Community Crisis Management team: EMS, social workers (HOT), security personnel, medical providers initiating CDC protocol to provide an official "needs assessment" of campers seeking shelter.

*Some campers can be immediately evaluated and connected to existing local services.

*Some campers with extensive need, extenuating circumstances, and special need will require further evaluation of resource availability and interim options.

These solutions need to be exercised as life sustaining measures by our city and county government.

- Initiate third site with Homes Now as official operator for an interim "special need" camp for continued coordinated entry initiative (crisis management team as stated above...)

Relocate remaining campers needing assessment and sheltering to third Homes Now site.

Partnering with tiny home community agencies for this ongoing effort can offset cost.

A community effort is needed to best provide a level of resolution and comprehensive practice using all available resources and agencies.

Establishing a directive beyond VACATING a zone is required.

Dissolving the cycle of "sweeps" requires a physical occupancy location for persons in distress to locate to that aligns with all conditions of need, including special needs as pertains to individual health and safety.

This entry and assessment protocol is what is ABSENT for our special need population resulting in a cycle of miscommunication, underrepresentation, disconnect, and ultimately "sweeps" (destabilizing a person's occupancy of space without a stabilizing solution).

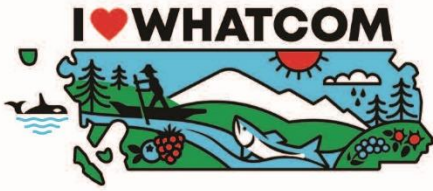
Evaluation is needed of persons in crisis for the purpose of facilitating paths for urgent care, immediate relief, and longterm solutions.

Contact points are lacking (24/7 public Kiosk to connect, direct, and collect data, for two-way communication and ongoing critical public safety analysis).

PLEASE consider initiating a plan of action that provides stability for our unhoused residents at City Hall!

Best regards,

JC Mansfield



Satpal Singh Sidhu
Whatcom County Executive



January 21, 2021

RE: Emergency Winter Shelters

Dear concerned community members,

I appreciate you sharing your concerns and empathy for the people staying at City Hall. I too am concerned about their welfare and well-being.

First, I want to dispel the misconception that there are no emergency winter shelters.

The [County has worked closely with the City of Bellingham](#), as well as Lighthouse Mission Ministries and HomesNOW!, to create additional shelter space this winter. During the past week, between [Base Camp](#) and the overflow shelter on Holly Street, 90-100 beds have been available each night. That number is sufficient to provide shelter to all the people camping at City Hall.

Lighthouse Mission Ministries staff have been very clear that [everyone is welcome at Base Camp, including those who have been restricted from entry in the past](#). All they have to do is adhere to [the code of conduct](#), which is both reasonable and necessary to keep everyone safe. No shelter can safely operate without a code of conduct.

Some forecasts show that the weather may be colder in the coming weeks. I strongly encourage everyone sleeping in tents at City Hall to make use of the shelter available at Base Camp, where they provide not only warm beds but also hot meals and access to services which could help them transition into a more permanent housing situation.

With regard to plans for Friday, January 22, I understand that the City's Public Works crews aim to create a 25-foot fire protection area around City Hall and have been speaking with campers and volunteers about this. This fire protection area is being created per the City's Fire Marshal, similar to the fire protection area created around the Central Library building in December.

I hope you will join me in urging the protest organizers to start working today to get the campers to our existing shelters before the weather worsens and before the City of Bellingham begins taking steps to end the encampment.

Sincerely,

Satpal Sidhu
Whatcom County Executive

Subject: FW: Comment Homeless Strategies Workgroup
Date: Friday, January 22, 2021 11:16:40 AM

From: Arrissia Owen
Sent: Friday, January 22, 2021 11:16:01 AM (UTC-08:00) Pacific Time (US & Canada)
To: ccmil@cob.org; Council
Subject: Comment Homeless Strategies Workgroup

Public comment for the meeting 1-22-21

Members of the Homeless Strategies Workgroup:

I am tired of meetings. I am exhausted from caring and worrying, the frustration, anger and running around trying to help care for the vulnerable people who have been abandoned by our local government. Truly. I would like to see some action.

Meeting after meeting, the same questions are asked, the same information expressed, the same ideas bandied about. Do something. I am begging you to please think outside of the box. Everyone has been talking in circles for months, years even.

Please, please move forward with purchasing more tiny home shelters ASAP. Please consider the various needs and subpopulations that can be serviced in group settings by case managers and social services if needed with social distancing and independence in mind. Homeless people are not a monolith.

Please listen and absorb the reasons you have all been provided as to why so many unsheltered people do not want to or can't or don't feel safe enough to go to Base Camp. You have all heard the reasons multiple times and yet continue to act like you do not understand why Base Camp is not full.

Please take responsibility for the situation that has unfolded due to poor planning in violation of state mandates regarding the Growth Management Act. Make it right.

Please re-evaluate how affordable housing dollars are spent in the future and audit the results. Learn what and how the providers who do outreach to the homeless population use that money and if it is results-driven and backed by data. Linear approaches to homelessness are not progressive. They are bandaids.

Please quit assuming the only people willing to volunteer are from churches. Clearly, that is not the case. There are plenty of people willing and able.

Please remember that human beings are not disposable. They have to BE somewhere. We are headed towards a very drastic economic downturn due to the pandemic. There will be more unsheltered, destitute people faster than imaginable. Get ready. Get in front of it. Be the heroes.

Please educate yourselves about deinstitutionalization.

Please study the root causes of the affordable housing crisis. Look at the number of available vacancies compared to people who need homes here.

Please show compassion. Recognize your privilege and invest in service to others who do not have privilege. That is a form of gratitude that is functional.

Please listen to those of us begging for these human beings to be treated like human beings.

Sincerely,
Arrissia Owen
Bellingham Resident

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Arrissia Owen