

Incarceration Prevention and Reduction Task Force

Meeting Summary for June 13, 2022

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1. Call to Order

Committee Chair Jack Hovenier called the meeting to order at 9:00 A.M. The meeting was held via remote-only Zoom Webinar.

Members Present: Barry Buchanan, Bill Elfo, Caleb Erickson, Arlene Feld, Heather Flaherty, Seth Fleetwood, Deborah Hawley, Jack Hovenier, Raylene King, Scott Korthuis, Mike Hilley, Stephen Gockley, Jason McGill, Rebecca Mertzig, Perry Mowery, Mike Parker (proxy for Greg Winter), Eric Petersen, Darlene Peterson, Eric Richey, Donnell Tanksley, Maia Vanyo

Members Absent: David Freeman, Dan Hammill, Jenn Lockwood, Dave Reynolds, Tyler Schroeder, Bruce Van Glubt

Fleetwood introduced Rebecca Mertzig as the new Bellingham Chief of Police and as a new member of the Task Force. Mertzig further introduced herself.

2. [Justice Project Needs Assessment \(00:05:12\)](#)

Gockley gave an overview of how and why the Behavioral Health Gap Analysis Team (BHGAT) was formed.

Mike Parker of the Opportunity Council, and Jackie Mitchell, Dean Wight, and Perry Mowery of the Health Department gave a presentation on the BHGAT Process and the newly updated Sequential Intercept Model (SIM). Main points included:

- Breakdown of what the SIM is, how it is used, and what each intercept and tier includes
- Types of changes made, such as a new addendum and addition of an Intercept 0
- Data used to inform the update
- The process followed to update the SIM, including the criteria used for any added programs, survey of representatives from various organizations in the area, identification of gaps, and recommendations made
- Overview of gaps and needs identified in each intercept

Korthuis asked what a budget would be for the needed programs and Wight responded that the next step would be to determine estimates of level of need and the costs of implementation. Gockley pointed out that we also need to take into account the costs we incur if we don't take action to address gaps.

Wight requested that the Task Force review the new version of the SIM and officially adopt it. Hovenier responded that they would bring that up at Steering Committee.

3. [2022 Annual Report to County Council and Executive \(00:51:07\)](#)

Vanyo moved to approve the 2022 Annual Report to County Council and Executive as it appeared in the meeting packet. King seconded. Peterson noted a change needed to a list of committee members. Members voted unanimously to approve the report.

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4. [Status of Jail \(item added to agenda at beginning of meeting\) \(00:54:00\)](#)

Elfo spoke to members about the letter he recently submitted and the current state of the downtown jail. He summarized the challenges they are currently facing and emphasized the direness of the situation. He described the causes of the problems, such as backlogs of many systems, prevalence of mental health and substance abuse disorder among incarcerated people. He said he is asking Council for approval to send some of the population to Snohomish County and went over the booking restrictions in place or soon to be in place.

Vanyo pointed out that there is no way for counsel to have confidential communication with clients who are housed at the Snohomish County Jail. There are no video or phone options for them to use there. This means that there would be an unrealistic amount of travel required for counsel to be able to serve clients there. Elfo replied that this was a last resort measure and that they are trying to implement IT solutions to the problem. He suggested that they may be able to contract for local counsel, but acknowledged that it may be difficult to find anyone. Vanyo agreed that finding a public defender in Snohomish to take those cases would be very difficult to impossible and offered to help in any way she could with establishing an IT solution.

King asked how many people were being treated at Eastern State Hospital and the impact of its potential closure. Elfo responded that he did not know how many people were housed at Eastern State, but the assumption would be that at least some of them would need to be transferred to Western State Hospital if it does close.

5. [Whatcom County 2023-2024 Biennial Budget \(01:08:30\)](#)

Buchanan reported to the Task Force that the budgeting process is underway and that co-chairs would need to get requests from their committees to the Steering Committee by the end of July.

The Task Force sent a letter to the Executive regarding recommendations for American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. Buchanan said that he would hopefully have an update on these funds at the next meeting. Gockley recalled that they had sent the letter without specific dollar amounts listed and the Executive's office had come back and asked for costs. Committee members discussed the idea of calculating costs, including benefits and challenges of doing so and the reasoning of not including them originally. Because the BHGAT is planning on doing cost analysis of needed services, it may make sense to include some of their numbers in a response to the Executive.

Members discussed possible revisions to the recommendations based on current developments, including the issues at the jail that the Sheriff spoke about.

6. [IPRTF Communications \(01:31:00\)](#)

Buchanan reported that the contract with the communications consultant would be going to the County Council for approval next week. Jill Nixon, Legislative Coordinator, went over the scope of work and goals for the consultant.

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7. [Committee Updates \(01:33:45\)](#)

Steering Committee: Buchanan reported that the Committee discussed implementing the Government Alliance on Racial Equity (GARE) toolkit, status of 2017 VERA report recommendations, and the annual report. Hovenier asked Buchanan about the SAC process and the relationship with the Steering Committee. Buchanan said that they have been utilizing the committee co-chairs as resources to the SAC in discussion sessions.

Behavioral Health Committee: Parker reported that they discussed items for the upcoming joint meeting with the Legal and Justice Committee, listened to a presentation from the City of Bellingham on downtown safety, and discussed the Clubhouse model, which will be further described at a future meeting.

INDEX Committee: Erickson reported that they discussed the data dissemination proposal submitted by Gockley, and the annual report.

8. Other Business

There was no other business.

9. Public Comment

There were no public comments.

10. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 10:47 A.M.