



## Whatcom County Housing Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

**Meeting Date/Time/Location:** February 10, 2022 8:30 AM to 10:00 AM – Virtual Meeting

**WCHAC Members Present:** Diana Phair, Hadrian Starr, Dean Fearing, Ashley Thomasson, Deanna Wildermuth, Brien Thane, Samya Lutz, Bruce Bosch, Tara Sundin, Michael Jones, Ann Beck, Satpal Sidhu (present through item #4)

**WCHAC Members Absent:** Marc Walker, Teri Bryant

**Whatcom Co. Health Dept. Staff/Guests:** Chris D’Onofrio, Barbara Johnson-Vinna, Ann Beck, Ashley Geleyense, Dawna Morse, Helen Campbell, Von E. Ochoa, Paul Schissler, Jed Holmes, Dena Jensen

Agenda Item	Discussion	Action/Who
<b>A. Call to order, introductions</b>	Introductions commenced and quorum present.	<b>Brien</b>
<b>B. Minutes Approval</b> Dec 2021 Minutes Approval	Samya moved that the minutes from the December meeting be approved. Ann seconded the motion. The committee voted and the motion passed. Satpal was not present for the vote.	<b>Ayes: 11 Abstain: Motion Passed</b>
<b>C. Agenda Review</b>	Diana Phair is prepared to give a presentation on the Sche’lang’en Village in Lummi Nation.	<b>Brien</b>
<b>D. Reports/Discussion</b>  1. Membership Updates	Bruce Bosch, Mayor of Sumas was introduced as the newest Small Cities Representative. Erika Lautenbach had been filling in for one of the County Representative positions, which Ann Beck, Human Services Manager will now assume. Karen Burke termed out January 31 <sup>st</sup> , and there were five applicants to fill that Homeless Advocate position. Dawna Morse’s recommendation will be sent to the Executive and will need to be approved by County Council.	<b>Chris</b>



Agenda Item	Discussion	Action/Who
2. Election of new chairperson and vice-chairperson	Samya nominated Michael for Chair. Deanna seconded. Michael nominated Brien for vice-chair. Ann seconded. The committee voted to approve the nominations for chair and vice-chair positions for 2022 and the motion passed.	<b>Ayes: 11 Abstain: Motion Passed</b>
3. Workforce Challenges within Housing Services	Barbara talked about workforce challenges within the housing program, which have been even more prominent since the beginning of the pandemic. Seeing higher level of staff resignations and taking longer to fill. In statewide meetings, hearing that this the same thing that is happening in other counties. County staff have been working on solutions to retain experienced staff and looking at using Emergency Solutions Grant specific to COVID to provide two hazard-pay stipends, if eligible. Since cannot be used for transitional housing, would look to use other funds to provide stipends for staff retention not focused on emergency shelter. This would have to be approved by County Council.	<b>Barbara</b>
4. State and Local Budget Opportunities	Executive Sidhu shared that he has been attending meetings where the Governor's proposal for an \$800M investment to find solutions for individuals without shelter and help those at risk of becoming homeless will be divided amongst jurisdictions across the state. He has been advocating for Whatcom County being included in the allocations, and asked members of this group to be involved in the process of advocating for projects in our community as that will impact the distribution of funds over the years.	<b>Satpal</b>
5. Health Dept Budget Update	Chris provided an update on the budget for the housing program. The budget currently consists of 16 different funding sources totaling about \$10M. The Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG-CV) from the Department of Commerce expires at end of September 2022 and has proven challenging to spend. One way Chris suggests spending down these funds is to address workforce challenges by offering stipends, or hazard pay, to shelter operators to retain staff, or as a hiring bonus in late spring. Tara suggested using ESG where appropriate, and using County and City American Rescue Plan Act funds, which are more flexible, to support staff that are not eligible for ESG to prevent only some staff receiving a stipend while others do not. Chris agreed. Chris also talked about other eligible uses and suggestions for use for ESG, the two sales tax funding sources, Skagit HOME Consortium dollars, and the Consolidated Homeless Grant from Department of Commerce. Additionally, Chris asked the committee for input regarding prioritization of short terms solutions versus long term solutions, and quality of services versus quantity. The committee discussed the challenge of balancing the two, and offered suggestions for prioritization. This conversation will continue in future meetings.	<b>Chris</b>

Agenda Item	Discussion	Action/Who
6. Sche'lang'en Village Presentation	Diana Phair gave a presentation on the Lummi Nation Housing Authority's Sche'lang'en Village, a gated community that was completed in 2017. The village consists of 45 units that integrate an array of wrap-around services around the work of the elders and the residents. The Lummi Nation Housing Authority is looking at building more gated communities like this in the future for families. Diana answered the committee's questions.	<b>Diana</b>
7. Eviction Prevention Update	Chris provided an update on the eviction prevention efforts of the Whatcom Dispute Resolution Center (WDRC), Opportunity Council, local legal aid offices, and the court system to slow down and prevent evictions. Adequate staffing to run the Eviction Resolution Pilot Program through the WDRC remains challenging, but overall the rate of eviction in the community remains low.	<b>Chris</b>
8. Severe Weather Shelter	Ann provided an update on what severe weather shelter looks like for the rest of this winter, and beyond. There is likely an operator identified for the rest of this winter season, and the Health Department is looking to partner with the Department of Emergency Management and other organizations as we see severe weather events (cold, smoke, heat) happening more often.	<b>Ann</b>
9. WCHD Staff Changes	Ashley Geleyse has moved into a new Community Health Specialist role in the Housing Program, and Ann Beck has stepped into the Human Services Manager role. Open vacancies include the Human Services Supervisor position which Ann had previously held, and an Affordable Housing Specialist. The Health Department is also creating a new Response Systems Division which will house GRACE and LEAD programs, which will also be tied to the other existing behavioral health programs. Another manager will be hired to oversee the new division.	<b>Ann</b>
10. Bylaws Update – proposed action for April	Chris encouraged Committee members to look at the bylaws and to send him feedback. The newest version of the bylaws has not yet been ratified, so members will vote on doing so at the next meeting.	<b>Chris</b>
11. WHSC and PIT Update	Teri was not present at the meeting so there was no Whatcom Homeless Service Center update. Chris shared that the Point-in-Time count date was rescheduled for February 24 <sup>th</sup> . County staff and the Whatcom Homeless Service Center will follow up with a report after the count.	<b>Chris</b>
12. COB Update	Samya reported that Notices of Funding Availability closed at the end of January, and applications were received for childcare supports, the families with children interim housing facility, and for and expansion of Sean	<b>Samya</b>

Agenda Item	Discussion	Action/Who
	Humphrey House. The City is continuing to progress on the affordable housing projects that are in process right now.	
<b>E. Public Comment</b>	There was no public comment.	
<b>F. ADJOURN</b>	Meeting was adjourned at 9:54.	<b>Brien</b>
<i>NEXT MEETING</i>	<b>Next regular meeting April 14, 2022 8:30 – 10:00 a.m.</b> <b><u>VIRTUAL</u></b>	