

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL
Dana Brown-Davis, C.M.C.

COUNTY COURTHOUSE
311 Grand Avenue, Suite #105
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Rud Browne
Barry Buchanan
Tyler Byrd
Todd Donovan
Carol Frazey
Satpal Sidhu

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL

Homeless Strategies Workgroup

Friday, August 9, 2019 Meeting #9 Summary

Time: 8:30 – 10:00 a.m.

Location: Whatcom County Civic Center Annex,
322 N. Commercial, Garden Room

Attendance:

Members

Lieutenant Don Almer, Bellingham Police (for Deputy Chief Florence Simon)
Ann Beck (for Anne Deacon), Whatcom County Health
Barry Buchanan (HSW Chair), Whatcom County Councilmember
Doug Chadwick, Whatcom County Sheriff, Chief Deputy
Carol Frazey, Whatcom County Councilmember (for Councilmember Rud Browne)
Mike Hilley, Whatcom County EMS
Nick Lewis, Lummi Business Council
Kelli Linville, City of Bellingham Mayor
Guy Occhiogrosso, Bellingham/Whatcom Chamber of Commerce, President
Mike Parker, Opportunity Council
Bridget Reeves, Lighthouse Mission Ministries, Associate Director (for Hans Erchinger-Davis)
Tyler Schroeder, Whatcom County
Michael Shepard, Port of Bellingham Commissioner
Markis D. Stidham, Homeless Advocate
Emilio Vela, Jr., Northwest Youth Services

Public

Sara Arnoldi, Northwest Youth Services
John Campbell, citizen
Helen Campbell, citizen
Liz Coogan, City of Bellingham, Executive Assistant to the Mayor
Mark Gardner, City of Bellingham, Legislative Analyst
Shari Lapof, HomesNow volunteer
Chris Kobdich, Unity Care Northwest
Emerson McCuin, Northwest Youth Services
Max Morange, Bellingham Food Bank
Rick Qualls, Fountain Community Church
Rick Sepler, City of Bellingham, Planning and Community Development, Director

Meeting Summary Prepared By: Cathy B. Halka, AICP, Legislative Analyst, Whatcom County Council

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

Councilmember and Chair of the HSW, Barry Buchanan, welcomed the group and asked each member to introduce themselves and identify what they hope the HSW will accomplish. Councilmember Buchanan reminded the group of the purpose of the HSW as per Resolution 2019-034. The purpose of the Homeless Strategies Workgroup is to identify additional temporary winter shelters, added capacity for year round shelters, additional opportunities to address the needs of the County's homeless population, and strategies to prevent people from having no other option than to sleep outside.

Mayor Linville suggested adding to the purpose/mission to create a communication network and work together. Further, the County needs a coordinated tracking of efforts to address homeless services so all organizations can know what others are doing.

Mayor Linville mentioned the lawsuit Martin vs. City of Boise, which determined you can't make people move along if you don't have a place for them to go.

Councilmember Buchanan asked if anyone had any edits to the Meetings #8 Summary (7/26/2019) and approved the meeting summary.

2. Unity Care (UC), Rest Stops, Update from Chris Kobdich

Chris Kobdich discussed the plan adopted by the Unity Care board in May. In 2018, UC had close to 100 patients with bed bug and head lice issues. UC explored urban rest stop in Ballard, which provides showers, laundry and restroom facilities free of charge, including towels and soap. UC expanded the idea to include medical, behavioral health, substance abuse, case management services. UC has a preliminary budget for cost, some of which can be funded by Medicaid. Other costs are water. UC applied for a HRSA grant, which will be awarded in October and then it will have to be operational in four months. UC is looking for a site and talking with collaborating partners (for non-clinical elements) like Opportunity Council. The Rest Stop would have 5 showers, 5 washers, 9 dryers, 5 restrooms, 2 medical exam rooms, 3 dental labs, 1 behavioral health office, space for haircuts, offices for 2 case managers, and a hot room for people's belongings (to kill head lice and bed bugs). Its \$900,000 per year in operational costs, and subtracting what UC can bill for it leaves \$400,000 in unfunded operational costs.

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Mayor Linville suggested that we look at using a building or space that is already available so there is less time to get it up and running.

3. County Review of Resources Available for Severe Weather Shelters

Ann Beck, Whatcom County Health Department, described limited resources. There is some funding for water and packaged snacks. After a budget review, the revenues are down this year and all funding is already committed. There are not extra resources in the Health Department budget, but maybe there is funding in other departments or areas of the County.

Tyler Schroeder indicated that the process will be to understand the costs and engage the County Council and the City Council (if interested) to identify general funds that might be available. Behavioral Health funds are the first source, but those funds are already committed. Next step is to have the **County Council look at general funds, maybe in mid-biennium budget process.**

Michael Shepard indicated the Port of Bellingham has a facility available, but they don't have staff. It's important to identify an approved sponsor now so there isn't a scramble later.

Ann Beck indicated that three faith-based organizations are interested, some with little assistance and others are asking for paid staff to assist overnight. The County Health Department is trying to set up volunteer training. The Opportunity Council is working on a cold weather shelter. There is a conversation that needs to happen to **identify volunteers for cold weather shelter and the severe weather shelter.**

Mike Parker mentioned that organizations that don't think they can handle a program like this should reconsider. There is a lot of support out there to make it happen and a lot of passion.

Markis D. Stidham mentioned that it is difficult to hear everything hangs on availability of volunteers. He continued discussing the importance of shelters being secular, and that if everything is faith-based people might not feel included. Markis continued to say that some rules are prohibitive, such as separating couples. Also, he said the preamble of the Constitution talks about providing for the general welfare; and that is our mandate. His goals are to set a good example with a budget and a model and ask the government copy it because. Jim Peterson should not do it all. Markis said that he keeps seeing groups wait for partners, and he fears we will leave people out again this winter.

Rick Sepler provided an update on the shelter location. The location and details will be made

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public in a few weeks.

Tyler Schroeder and Ann Beck will put together an estimated budget for a winter shelter. The government process requires issuing an RFP or RFQ to make sure we aren't missing someone out there interested in participating. The budget estimate, when complete, will be shared with the HSW, the Mayor of Bellingham and the Whatcom County Council.

Mayor Linville indicated the City of Bellingham is putting efforts and resources into a partnership with the Opportunity Council on a 3 month winter shelter, and has a letter of agreement to work with Lighthouse Mission and Parberry's to look at locating the drop in center.

Bridget Reeves clarified the difference between a winter shelter that operates for three months and a severe weather shelter, which is operational intermittently.

Nick Lewis said he's never seen a true partnership for the tribe. His non-profit is working on housing for sex offenders. Partnering with tribes, which don't have to follow all the same regulations, can be an opportunity. There are a lot of opportunities not being discussed. Nick is building 27 tiny homes. Another issue, he said, is funding restrictions, and people have to think about challenging the rules and creatively pushing interpretations of the rules. He built a women's home with state funding last year.

Mayor Linville indicated that everyone at the meeting is invited to sit at the table, to be part of the conversation, and figure out what's the most practical.

Mike Hilley discussed a partnership the County has with the Lummi Clinic.

Markis agreed with the idea of partnerships with the tribes, as well as with stepping outside the boundaries or rules for an emergency such as the current emergency.

Emilio Vela, Jr. said he worked for government for 20 years and left because he wanted to be part of a creative solution and use his government knowledge. Culture is relevant to effectiveness. Latinos and Native Americans are overrepresented in the homeless community.

4. Legislation discussion, House Bill 2263

Councilmember Buchanan suggested sending out the bill to HSW members and discuss the item at a future meeting. HB2263 allows for an election for a new tax to create a fund for some efforts (He clarified that SB1406 is a rebate tax, and 2263 is a new tax)

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5. Encampment locations and operations

Rick Sepler provided an update on Unity Village, located in Fairhaven on Post Point. The permit was approved with no appeal. By the end of the month residents will be transferred from the existing site on Alabama to occupy the new site until next spring. Units are produced off site. The permit is valid through April 2020. Twenty homes are permitted – it is whatever they can complete by November 1st. The structures are very portable.

Markis Stidham described the mass production of walls and completion of installations yesterday. There are 15 buildings on site. He encouraged government leaders to reexamine budgets and allocate money for more locations. He indicated that residents are relieving the pressure on shelters, and people are getting jobs and moving out, opening spaces for the next people in need. He encouraged government to follow the model because it works.

Mayor Linville indicated that people should visit the site to see the tiny homes offered in Unity Village, and Mike Parker further agreed. Linville said it is different than the example from the Builders' Association. The Unity Village tiny homes are not a permanent solution. Nick Lewis said they call them extra bedrooms instead of tiny homes, so that the expectation is clearer. Markis Stidham called them cabins, and said there is a culture that allows for supporting each other to get back on their feet.

Mayor Linville suggested that not everyone wants to look in Bellingham for places to live and that the HSW look at additional locations outside the City of Bellingham. She suggested taking a message to the small cities workgroup about the Bellingham experience and copying the model.

The members discussed going to the small cities meeting to present and identify opportunities to meet the needs of the homeless populations in those communities. Markis Stidham echoed the need to provide opportunities in small cities, but that there also exists a strong need in Bellingham. Being homeless should not be a death sentence. We need to identify community leaders in other locations to understand the need. HomesNow has plans to build more, in Bellingham if they can. An estimated 200 beds more are needed.

Nick indicated people don't want to move around. Lummi community members were welcomed to the casino for help last winter. Over half of the reservation is non-tribal and everyone was welcome. There is revenue the county gets and none of it goes back to the reservation. \$40M of property was sold on the reservation last year. Where does the collected tax money go; it doesn't come back to the support us. Sixty to seventy percent of the population is on Medicaid,

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and there is a higher need than in Bellingham.

Mayor Linville indicated that revenues collected in Bellingham don't all come back to the city. She said it is difficult to track money because it goes to support the public good in many areas, and she believes it does.

Michael Shepard requested data on numbers of beds and locations. Mike Parker suggested that creating an asset map and list of resources would be a good place to start, and health departments should compile an inventory of resources. He suggested looking at city or county owned properties first as potential shelter locations, or where Lummi might have a location where things can move forward more quickly.

Nick Lewis indicated that government moves slowly. As a non-profit there are fewer regulations. A home has 15 kids and 2 adults, and it's been operational for two years. It has kept kids out of CPS and reunited them with their parents.

Bridget Reeves has discussed opportunities with St. Peter's church in Deming, which hosts meals for 150 people a month. Lighthouse Mission is looking at how they can partner to offer a shower trailer on Tuesday mornings. There is probably a greater array of needs for those 150 people, and it is an opportunity for partnerships.

Markis indicated that HomesNow still needs \$8,000-\$9,000 more for completion on materials alone. They will meet their goals, but workers are burning themselves out to complete everything. Last winter they spent \$30,000 after 6 weeks. They have a good model to follow.

Lieutenant Almer asked if the workgroup has reached consensus that a specific model has worked. Mayor Kelli said it is not one size fits all but there can be a menu of options.

Bridget Reeves mentioned that the community may not be able to find a 200-bed shelter location, but partners are still looking for a location and they will take suggestions.

Mayor Linville said that when they were at LIHI tiny home village, it was interesting that groups built them (Boy Scouts, Rotary, etc.) and then donated their project to the community. That is reaching out and asking more people to be part of the solution. Nick Lewis added that the Northwest Indian College carpentry students built extra bedrooms.

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6. Strategies Chart Review and Updates

Councilmember Buchanan reported that the County Council requested the Executive move forward to issue a contract for construction of the Crisis Stabilization Center and support for a future budget amendment for the overage cost (\$1.2M). The Center will be breaking ground soon.

7. Public Comment

Shari Lapof, a volunteer with HomesNow, said that you can't build a countywide program on volunteers. Money has to be triaged to identify what is most important for life saving. People on the street have to be housed whether there is money or not.

Sara indicated that 22 North was open the first time last fall. It is the first time there weren't tents outside. Regarding culture, there are barriers with visitor rules such as singles only. People have to choose between being housed and being together with their community. How do you put together resources for those without a place to go?

8. Discussion of Next Steps

The next meeting is August 23rd, and Safe Storage PNW will be attending and presenting.

Mike Parker suggested that at the next meeting we discuss creating a tool kit and creating dashboard of resources that quantifies beds and services.

Emilio Vela, Jr. said we need to consider youth because they are usually not alone, and a lot of what we do is family reunification. As we look at homelessness in severe weather, we need to address the challenges then and moving forward year round.