

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

COUNTY COURTHOUSE
311 Grand Avenue, Suite #105
Bellingham, WA 98225-4038
(360) 778-5010



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WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL

Homeless Strategies Workgroup

Friday, January 3, 2020 Meeting #18 Summary

Time: 8:30 – 10:00 a.m.

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

Attendance:

Members

Ann Beck, Whatcom County Health Department
Barry Buchanan (HSW Chair), Whatcom County Councilmember
Jenn Daly, Northwest Youth Services
Hans Erchinger-Davis, Lighthouse Mission
Seth Fleetwood, Mayor, City of Bellingham
Mike Hilley, Whatcom County EMS
Michael Lilliquist, City of Bellingham Council Member
Florence Simon, Chief Deputy, Bellingham Police
Markis D. Stidham, Homeless Advocate
Riley Sweeney, City of Ferndale

Guests:

Melissa Bird, Road 2 Home
Helen Campbell, citizen
John Campbell, citizen
Liz Coogan, City of Bellingham
Chris D'Onofrio, Whatcom County Health Department
Mark Gardner, City of Bellingham, Legislative Analyst
Doug Gustafson, Homes Now
Shari Lapoff, HomesNow
Danielle Amari, Road 2 Home
Rick Qualls, Fountain Community Church
Rick Sepler, City of Bellingham
Ryan Simonis, Whatcom Community College

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

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

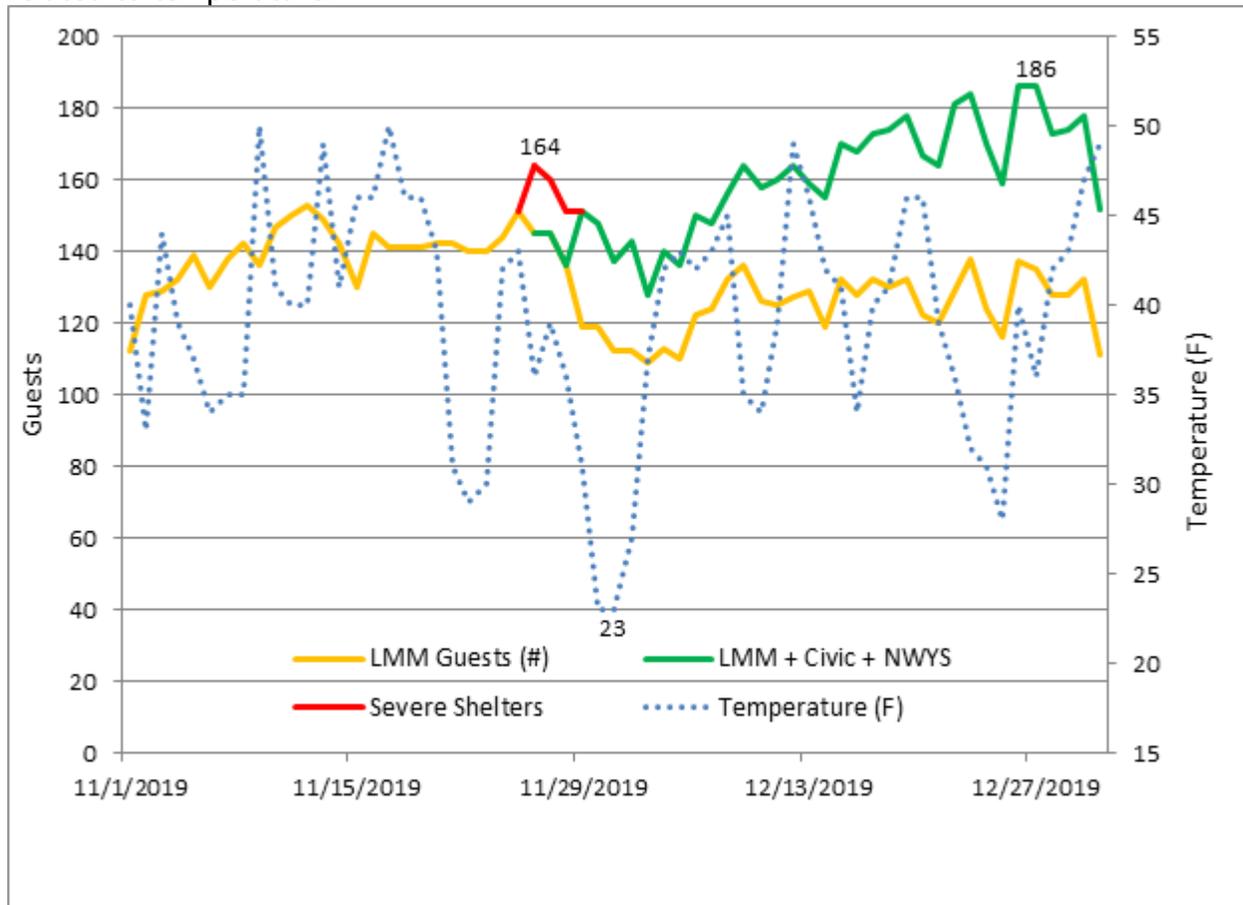
Councilmember Buchanan called the meeting to order, and attendees introduced themselves. The Meeting Summary from the December 13th meeting (Meeting #17) were approved.

2. Status Updates on Shelters, and other programs

Jenn Daly, Northwest Youth Services indicated their shelter has been open for three weeks, and

they've hosted 40 unduplicated youth since opening.

Ann Beck provided an update on shelters and provided a graph showing capacity over time related to temperature.



Ann Beck indicated that between all the providers there are around 225 beds available between Lighthouse Mission, Northwest Service, and Civic Field (winter shelters, not severe weather shelters). The highest capacity reached has been 186, around Christmas night. During the really cold nights in November, the highest was 164, and Fountain Community Church hosted a severe weather shelter during that time (helpful because Civic Field was not open at that time). The County completed 4 trainings, including about 60 people. WTA is running the shelter hotline phone number. The Library is providing information as well. She toured the Civic Field shelter and was impressed by all the hard work.

Councilmember Lilliquist indicated that the data show that people aren't moving from one shelter to another – but rather shelters are serving different populations. Markis Stidham asked what other severe weather shelters are ready to open. Ann Beck indicated Fountain Community Church, Garden Street Methodist, Christ the King, and Seventh Day Adventist (January start, no transportation offered) Markis Stidham asked for the number to be posted in locations where homeless gather including food banks, libraries, and others. The window for check-ins is a small window, and he would like to see the half hour window lengthened.

3. Communications Subcommittee

Riley Sweeney provided an update on the Communications Subcommittee, which met January 3rd. They are working now on a 1-page universal talking points handout about homelessness in Whatcom County, including terms, accomplishments, and resources. They will bring a draft forward to the HSWgroup at the February 14th meeting.

Responding to Councilmember Lilliquists questions about they myths of homeless people, Riley Sweeney referred to the following:

- All homeless people are addicted to drugs and drink all the time.
- People move here for the services
- We are throwing money at a problem and it's not being solved.

Markis Stidham said this is a great opportunity for us to work together and it's the work we should be doing. He further advocated for a dashboard with information, possibly a screen of information outside the mission, at Maritime Heritage Park, or at the library.

Riley Sweeney said the handout would be provided to service providers, first responders, and others so that everyone is talking about homelessness with the same message and understanding of terms.

Councilmember Buchanan asked about how effective we are with distribution of information. Ann Beck indicated that the City of Bellingham and Whatcom County communications staff met to discuss distribution. They sent out information to all the service providers, public schools, university, technical school, and community college, as well as PIOs for all the county area jurisdictions. Ann offered to send out handbills and flyers to all HSW members to print and distribute.

Ann Beck indicated that the Opportunity Council is the coordinated entry point. They are posting the number and operating the hotline. It is the starting point for people looking for service, and information is available there. Councilmember Buchanan asked if it would be helpful to add to the list of places where shelter information is available. Ann Beck asked members to reach out to her with requests to post the information in places they think would be helpful.

4. Action Items

Councilmember Buchanan asked members to review the Action Items on page two of the Agenda.

- Chris Kobdich and Mike Parker will be presenting an update on the Rest Stop at the January 31st meeting.
- Basics PNW - The County re-appropriated \$20,000 to the 2020 year for the lockers.
- Safe Parking – Rick Sepler provided an update that the City created a template for safe parking. They asked partners and partners did not have the resources to provide safe parking. They are working on providing an update to City Council and possibly

suggesting a budget request.

Councilmember Lilliquist added that financial support for staffing will be needed. He further indicated a concern for volunteer burnout.

Markis Stidham asked if the City would staff a safe parking site.

Rick Sepler clarified that the city would look for partners to host and staff it. He said they have some options they would like to present to Council in the next month or so.

Councilmember Buchanan opened the floor to discussion on Action Items for 2020, which included the following suggestions from members:

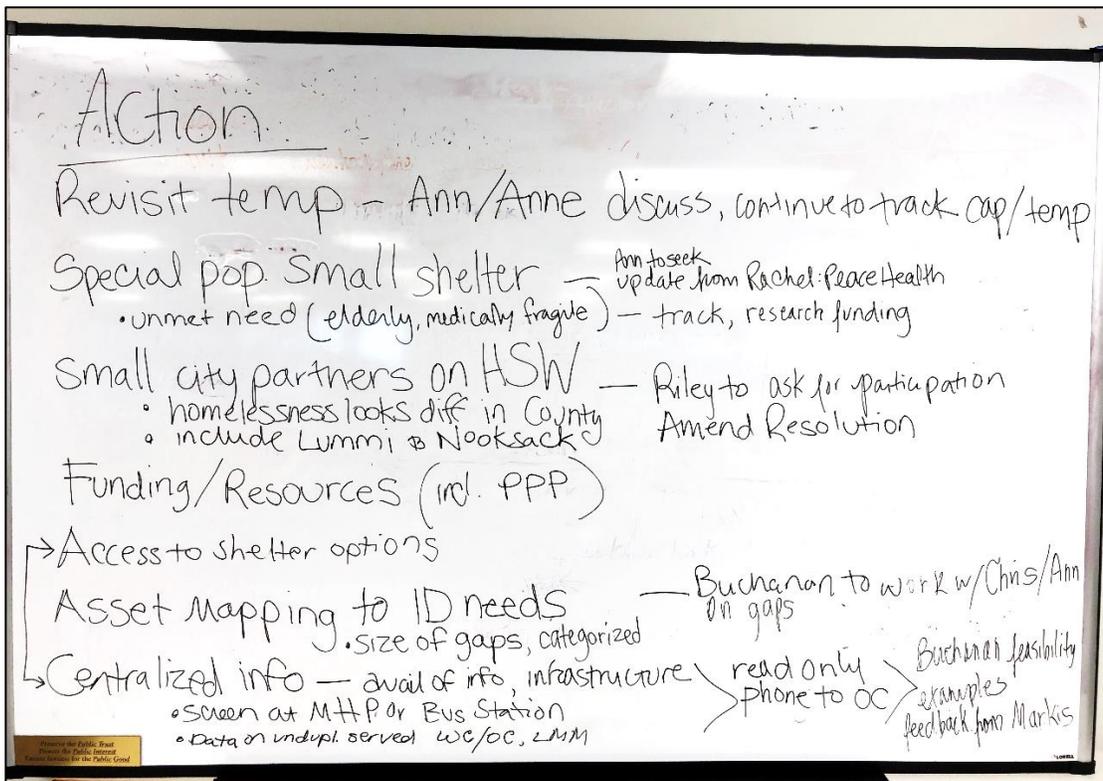
- Reconsider the temperature threshold, continue to track capacity and temperature. How does capacity and temperature track?
 - Ann Beck indicated she would discuss options with Anne Deacon
 - Markis Stidham mentioned wind chill as a science that impacts how temp feels. Things get dangerous between 38 and 28.
 - Councilmember Lilliquist asked if we can raise the temperature if we can find available shelter capacity, and if so how much more is needed?
- Special population small shelter – unmet need (e.g. elderly, medically fragile)
 - Ann Beck to seek update from Rachel at PeaceHealth
 - Markis Stidham indicated that tiny home shelters are very cost effective
 - Hans Erchinger-Davis said Lighthouse Mission is seeing older populations needing shelter.
 - Mike Hilley said that 80 people in GRACE now, with 25% in rural areas. 75% all have complicated chronic medical issues. He offered to bring updates on GRACE participation at the next meeting.
- Identify small city partners to participate on the Homeless Strategies Workgroup as homelessness looks different in the county and requires different tools
 - *Changes to HSW membership would require amendment to Resolution 2019-034*
 - Consider including Lummi and Nooksack tribes (note: Lummi already included via member Nick Lewis)
 - Riley Sweeney to ask small cities (Lynden, Sumas, and Blaine) for participation and hopes to add at least one representative to the HSW
 - A myth is that homelessness doesn't happen in the small cities in the county.
- Funding resources including public private partnerships
 - Identify ways for more funding and creative funding sources. There are great ideas, but not enough resources for the need

- Michael Lilliquist indicated that the governor may be looking to move rainy day reserves for shelter services and homelessness (\$126M). Chris D’Onofrio indicated that the health department hasn’t heard specifics about where the funding is going and how much.
- Mike Hilley indicated the Crisis Stabilization Center will open this summer. It’s a great entry point for mental health services. A Snohomish model shows people entering the facility for 3-5 days and getting case management and services. Then being placed in a next step location. Discussions are underway
- 1406 rebate is being collected. The Whatcom County Housing Advisory Committee will map out a plan at their February meeting. The funding is around \$694 thousand
- Councilmember Lilliquist would like to see the policy level coordination in a body like the HSW, rather than only going to Council. He would like the discussion to be more public.
- Riley Sweeney noted that Ferndale is looking at putting an affordable housing levy on the ballot in 2020
- Access to shelter options
 - Markis Stidham would like every person in town to have an option for sheltering
- Asset mapping to identify needs – Size of gaps, categorized
 - How much funding allocated by each jurisdiction and where is funding going
 - Councilmember Lilliquist mentioned the funding is \$19M annually as per the Plan to End Homelessness. Chris D’Onofrio indicated that the Opportunity Council tracks people on the housing list and can see who’s waiting.
 - Is it a million-dollar shortfall or more, and in what categories?
 - Ann Beck indicated that funding is available for veterans and families with children. There is not specialized funding for elderly. Roommate café at the Opportunity Council allows people to join together to afford an apartment. AL TSA (Aging Long Term Support Administration) through the state is a resource but there are specific criteria to meet.
 - Ann Beck reminded the group that the Plan to End Homelessness has a lot of information on what’s being done and the gaps
 - Councilmember Buchanan volunteered to work with the City and Chris / Ann on identifying gaps.
- Centralized information, availability of information infrastructure
 - Markis Stidham indicated that HomesNow.org has an outreach dashboard
 - Screen of info at Maritime Heritage Park or Bus Station
 - Ann Beck indicated that too specific information can be difficult to manage in real time and if a person sees a bed at a location and arrives to find

there are no beds, it's a big problem.

- Challenge is identifying information and maintaining it.
- Ann Beck indicated that a recorded message could work
- Offers a way for people to get information about resources without going to the religious service providers.
- The community worked hard to create one centralized intake process through the Opportunity Council.
- Data on unduplicated served (tracked by Whatcom County, Opportunity Council, Lighthouse Mission).
- Rick Sepler indicated that the Opportunity Council reached 2,800 individuals last year and the Mission dealt with 1,800 people.
- Councilmember Buchanan to look into feasibility of the infrastructure

Homeless Strategies Workgroup – 2020 Action list, discussion board.



5. Discussion of Next Steps

Next meetings:

- January 31, 2020, 8:30-10:00 a.m., Garden Room
- February 14, 2020, 8:30-10:00 a.m., Garden Room

6. Public Comment

Shari Lapoff asked about transportation. Last year people traveled across the county in a blizzard. She indicated that if county shelters are open but don't have transportation it doesn't help people.

Ann Beck clarified that Civic Field shelter check-in at the mission provides transportation to the shelter site. There is one shelter in the county that does not have transportation to it.

Markis Stidham indicated that last year he drove a van to transport people to shelters. Partners are willing to take people if a van or funding for a van were provided.