

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL
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COUNTY COURTHOUSE
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Barry Buchanan
Tyler Byrd
Todd Donovan
Ben Elenbaas
Carol Frazey
Kathy Kershner

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL

Homeless Strategies Workgroup

Friday, May 29, 2020 Meeting #24 Summary

Time: 10:30 a.m.

Location: Remote Online Meeting*

Members in attendance:

Ann Beck, Whatcom County Health Department
Rud Browne, Whatcom County Councilmember
Barry Buchanan, Chair, Whatcom County Councilmember
Karen Burke, Housing Advisory Committee Member
Anne Deacon for Anne Beck, Whatcom County Health
Carol Frazey, Whatcom County Councilmember
Dan Hammill, Bellingham City Council Member
Mike Hilley, Whatcom County EMS
Michael Lilliquist, City of Bellingham Councilmember
Mike Parker, Opportunity Council Representative
Tyler Schroeder (with Executive Sidhu), Whatcom County Deputy Executive
Michael Shepard, Port of Bellingham Commissioner
Lt. Dave Crass for Florence Simon, Bellingham Police
Markis D. Stidham, Homeless Advocate
Dean Wight, Northwest Youth Services Representative

Summary prepared by: Cathy Halka, AICP, Legislative Analyst, Whatcom County Council

1. Welcome and Introductions

Councilmember Buchanan welcomed the group and introduced the agenda item to discuss efforts to identify a replacement shelter facility (future move from Bellingham High School)

2. Discussion regarding replacement shelter facility (future move from Bellingham High School)

Tyler Schroeder provided an update on City and County progress on relocating the Drop-In Center and discussed the following:

- Lighthouse Mission moved the Drop In Center to Bellingham High School, which is leased through August 10th
- County and City Staff are working together to identify a next location that will allow for social distancing.

- An inter-local agreement between the City of Bellingham and Whatcom County identifies roles for specific tasks such as the County leading the financial effort for funding through the CARES act.
- Options for sites include leasing or identifying a vacant site for modular buildings.

Michael Shepard discussed shelter location potential on Port of Bellingham property, including the following:

- Properties near the airport are an option but not conveniently located.
- Downtown sites are challenging when their agency's primary objective is economic development.
- Properties under discussion are on F Street, the Organica building on Cornwall, and 600 West Holly Street, among others.

Markis Stidham discussed police enforcement of the sitting and lying ordinance, suggested shelters be located as smaller camps at different locations (rather than a large shelter).

Tyler Schroeder responded to questions about types of facilities, including a 200-individual congregant shelter in an existing structure or on vacant land with temporary buildings.

Anne Deacon noted that the County supports many shelters in partnership with private entities. She further identified a need for an additional youth shelter configured for social distancing.

Councilmember Browne discussed temporary camps with pop-up structures and shared information on a specific temporary tent being used in Vancouver, BC (see handouts).

Members discussed details around potential sites, locations, and configurations as well as the need to find a solution that offers shelter space for the next few years and over the winter with options to comply with social distancing requirements.

HSW members discussed additional information including:

- Using federal dollars (Dept. of Commerce) to pay for the project
- In the next few weeks, City staff will have a few options for sites.
- City and County hope to have a new site open and operational by Aug 10th
- City of Bellingham is the lead agency for site selection and lease negotiations
- City of Bellingham and Whatcom County administrations will make decisions about a preferred site
- HSW can assist with communications efforts once a new site is selected
- HSW members may share any additional feedback or ideas by contacting Cathy Halka

Ann Beck highlighted recent successes in County operations including bathroom and shower management and cleaning of park facilities, as well as County delivery of 900,000 meals during the month of April.