

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL
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Ben Elenbaas
Carol Frazey
Kathy Kershner

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL

Homeless Strategies Workgroup

Friday, December 18, 2020

Meeting #34 MEETING SUMMARY

Time: 1:30 p.m. – 2:50 p.m.

Location: Remote online meeting, for more information visit

Members in Attendance:

Barry Buchanan, Chair, Whatcom County Councilmember
Tyler Schroeder, Whatcom County
Michael Lilliquist, Bellingham City Council Member
Hannah Stone, Bellingham City Council Member
Seth Fleetwood, City of Bellingham, Mayor
Michael Shepard, Port of Bellingham, Commissioner
Hans Erchinger-Davis, Lighthouse Mission Ministries Representative
Ann Beck, Whatcom County Health
Jenn Daly for Dean Wight, Northwest Youth Services Representative
Dave Crass Florence Simon, Bellingham Police, Deputy Chief
Markis D. Stidham, Homeless Advocate
Joel Kennedy, Homeless children and families
Emily O'Connor, Homeless children and families
Michael Berres, Special populations
Lisa Marx, Schools

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

Councilmember Buchanan welcomed members and guests. HSW members approved the meeting summary: Meeting 33 – December 4, 2020. The next HSW meeting will be held virtually on Friday, January 8, 2021; 1:30pm.

2. Discussion and Planning for Pallet Shelters (Tiny Homes)

Tyler Schroeder provided an update regarding the County shelter purchase including:

- Proclamation of emergency by executive last week,
- Contract with Modular 360 for 25 units (with potential to purchase 25 additional),
- Site identified at Geri Fields next to Civic Field,
- Construction of units is underway and delivery will be by the end of the year, and
- Lead time for future orders varies based on when they are received.

HSW members discussed the following:

- Site locations and operations of the Geri Field site (by Homes Now),
- Additional operator and location to be identified,
- City shelter RFQ for longer term shelter includes \$500,000 for units and operations,
- Pallet Shelters as an option to continue to consider,
- Expanding shelter opportunities is a strategy to address needs of individuals at city hall camp
- City Hall campers that meet Homes Now entry requirements will be considered for entry (with space for up to 28 people) at the Geri Field location.

- Basecamp has around 81 spaces available and processes 5-10 people each day for check in, which includes a COVID test. If the camp at City Hall were disbanded or severe weather hits, Basecamp will increase the number of people processed each day.
- Drop-In Center space opens if criteria is met. Drop-In Center will be for overnight stays only and guests will be shuttled back to Basecamp for daytime services.
- Policymakers need to discuss spending more public funds for pallet shelter.

3. New Strategies Matrix

HSW members discussed updates from subcommittees:

- Unsheltered (year-round) Subcommittee
 - Need to identify a chair, have not held their first meeting yet
- Winter/Severe Weather Subcommittee
 - Need to identify a chair, have not held their first meeting yet
- Youth (year-round) Subcommittee
 - Jenn Daly (Chair) reported the group is scheduling their first meeting
- Families (year-round) Subcommittee
 - Emily O'Connor (Chair) provided an update that funding for motel stays is running low. There are 60 families in motels now and an additional 20 families likely in the next few months. The monthly bill for motel stays is approx. \$100,000 a month, and this is not a good location for families or a good use of resources.
- Funding Subcommittee
 - Michael Lilliquist (Chair) provided an update that the Funding Subcommittee has met and shared materials to review. Members are looking at what is currently being spent now and how great is the need. The next meeting will be in early January.
- Communications Subcommittee
 - Joel Kennedy (Chair) reported the subcommittee has met a few times, and discussed communications needs such as a uniform data network and communication to the general public about what is being done to reduce homelessness, what's working, and what are remaining needs.
 - HSW members discussed a need for more coordination of communications to the general public about what is happening to address homeless (actions, successes, needs) and a need to include City and County staff in messaging as well as people experiencing homelessness so they know where to find resources.

4. Year Round Sheltering for Families with children

Updates provided in previous section – Families (year-round) Subcommittee

5. Winter Shelters

County Health Dept staff continues to engage with volunteer and faith-based organizations, but no one has stepped up to operate severe weather shelters. (as per Anne Deacon- submitted by email)

6. Public Comment The following members of the public provided comments:

- Brel Froebe
- Doug Gustafson
- Katherine Orlowski
- Melissa Wisener

- Mario Abata
- Kai Rapaport
- A Blythe
- Hiram Joe
- Heather Katahdin
- David Petrie
- Arrisa Owen Turner
- Shari Lapof
- Aida Cardona
- Krissa Joy Kimera
- Louis Burell
- Flip Breksin
- David Petrie (additional time)
- Lynnette Allen
- Benjamin Simons
- Amy Glasser
- Amelia Ireland
- Shari Lapof (additional time)

DRAFT

Homeless Strategies Workgroup

SUBCOMMITTEES

Unsheltered (year round)	Winter/Severe Weather	Youth (year round)	Families (year round)	Funding Strategies	Communications
Mike Parker Mike Hilley Michael Lilliquist Karen Burke Hans Erchinger- Davis	Doug Chadwick Mike Hilley Michael Shepard Hans Erchinger- Davis	Jenn Daly* Doug Chadwick Lisa Marx	Emily O'Connor* Mike Parker Michael Berres Joel Kennedy Lisa Marx	Michael Lilliquist* Guy Occhiogrosso Emily O'Connor Barry Buchanan	Joel Kennedy* Riley Sweeney Emily O'Connor Jenn Daly

* Chair of Subcommittee

Last updated: 01/05/2021

From: Kai
Subject: Homeless Strategy Workgroup Comment 12/18/20: Homes Now
Date: Friday, December 18, 2020 4:47:26 PM

Dear City and County officials, stakeholders of the HSWG,

These are the words I shared in the HSWG today:

My name is Kai and I'm a resident of Bellingham.

I've been volunteering at Camp 210 and have been in active discussions with some campers there and volunteers.

I appreciate the work of this group and the timely topic of pallet shelters.

Like the indicated subject, It makes sense to go ahead with pallet shelters as they are built in this case for emergency situations and can be set up before christmas.

I do think it's important to support local groups, and I think we can add additional shelter come this new year or when it is available.

However, I went to stress that the best time to implement these solutions was yesterday. It seems almost every day I've been getting messages alerting me to: flood watch, major rain, wind reports. It's hard not to empathize with the folks at the camp at City Hall and the houseless all over this community.

Tents are great and we need to support those camping but it is an extremely short term solution for the winter we approach.

I am urging you all to fast track shelters for these campers and the houseless of Bellingham, ideally 150 at the moment could house every single person at the Camp if they wanted. This is a conservative number. The real count of the houseless (750-1000 as you know) is not able to be sheltered in the facilities that we currently have.

There are identified locations to put these shelters like at clean green on Lakeway, there is identified funding, like the cares act, and there is a significant capability of Homes Now as well as the volunteers and especially the campers at Camp 210 to be in the leadership of future housing encampments.

Additionally I would like you to continue to study the buildings that are available that are not being used, like the buildings the lighthouse operated.

This is a public health emergency. The time to act is now. If you do, in a significant way, the

community will have your back, we promise you that.

Lets also get Swifthaven up and running as we can to house as many folks as we can. By doing so we say we have truly serve our neighbors. Winter is coming, and likely soon we will need even more than this as conditions worsen. All the reason to speed up these negotiations. Please do not forget the leadership and voices of the volunteers and especially the campers and continue to find ways to engage them who are doing a lot of your work, for free, without any expectations but to help and house each other.

Thank you,

Kai Rapaport,
Bellingham

From: Leslie Deegan
Subject: For everyone on HSW
Date: Saturday, December 19, 2020 9:36:19 PM

To the members of the Homeless Strategies Workgroup,

I have been a resident of Whatcom County for over 20 years now and I have watched the homeless population grow every year in that time. These are our neighbors, the citizens of this county. It is deplorable that there are over 100 people on the lawn of city hall right now and you are dragging your feet when there are 50 shelters ready to go from Pallet Shelters. These people are YOUR responsibility! The shelters run by Hans are not the way to go, it has been shown over and over that lighthouse mission is unsafe and as a religious organization does not cater to everyone. Tiny homes are the answer, it has been shown right here in Fairhaven with Unity Village. Now, we need at least 150 shelters and clean green is the place to do it, with Markis Dee's four square model we can cater to so many people in need with 1 service building. As a taxpayer I am asking my government to use our tax dollars to help our brothers and sisters like they should be. Everything is right in front of you, you are backing the wrong horse with LHM and hotel vouchers. The city will own these tiny homes and they can be used again and again saving so much money.

Do what is right, look out on those people on city hall lawn, how can you sleep at night knowing you hold the key to giving these people warmth, safety and a fresh start yet you leave them out there freezing in a pandemic? Enough is enough. We will not settle for less any longer. We will not watch you abuse the most vulnerable of us any longer. Buy the 50 shelters they have ready at Pallet Shelters, continue the roll out from 360 Modular, get these people in shelter. We don't accept the "we have capacity at Base Camp" or "There isn't money" arguments anymore, it's a smokescreen. LHM only lets in who they deem worthy (which is a small list) and hates the homeless; they are just making money off their backs while they let them be abused and raped. Also, we know the money is there. Use our care dollars for this. 50 by Christmas, at least 150 by February, get to work.

Sincerely,
Leslie Deegan

From: ' H Q D - H Q V H Q

Subject: Regarding topics from your December 18, 2020 HSW meeting

Date: Sunday, December 20, 2020 6:55:50 PM

Dear Homeless Strategies Workgroup:

I recently listened to your December 18, 2020 meeting. It's encouraging to see the subcommittees you all are working to set up and begin participating in. And it's also good to hear some of those groups have started meeting.

Regarding the Communications subcommittee, I understand those who met seemed to be favorable to resuming at a point where the former Communications group left off last year. However, I call on present members to also pursue using at least a portion of their meetings and efforts to also advance addressing short-term communications needs directed toward those who are in crisis. I completely understand the need to set the stage for measures that prevent homelessness in our community, but during this time when homelessness does exist and hundreds of people are enduring crises resulting from it, we cannot ignore that state of crisis just because we understand prevention is also critical. We must address communication that is helpful in addressing the emergencies unsheltered community members find themselves in, as well as communication that helps pave the way for a reduction in the numbers of homeless friends and neighbors.

It was incredibly frustrating during the last hostile weather season, to watch any pre-season preparation to provide severe weather sheltering mostly go to waste because those shelters were never made reasonably accessible by proper communications efforts and reliable availability.

I also hope the communications subcommittee will be seeking input from unsheltered individuals as to what types of communication will most typically be helpful to them in getting their most essential needs met.

Additionally, I wanted to point out something to all HSW members, and Mayor Fleetwood specifically, regarding what one community member remarked upon during the 12/18/20 public comment session at your meeting. Referring to government efforts related to Camp 210 as an "exit plan" or "ending the encampment" communicates, to me, a perspective toward unsheltered people who have made themselves visible by camping at Bellingham City Hall, as an effort that seeks to be rid of them.

I understand that efforts are being made to provide places for those individuals to "exit" to. But I feel the way we speak about people reflects

our priorities, and the priority of ending an encampment that has been protecting people, is neither helpful or even mildly sensitive to those people who are living in crisis. Neither is it helpful to the greater community who needs our help in beginning to view unsheltered people as their own friends and neighbors who need to be provided with conditions that will create a stabilizing influence to help them get out of crisis and be included in and contributing to the umbrella of well-being our community has to offer.

If our goal is to get people housed, rather than get them out of our way, then efforts to invest in enough durable sheltering to house them (whether from local vendors, or volunteer construction) seems like the reasonable action at this time, since tents blowing down or failing in other ways that soon un-houses people again, runs counter to this purpose.

Lastly, I do agree with it being a reasonable expectation that HSW members seek to be *"be fair, impartial, professional and respectful of the public, staff and each other."* I have seen many HSW members be challenged to behave in this way from time to time. You all are people with passionate opinions and are visibly exerting yourselves in many efforts that involve life and death situations. I remind you that apologies and deescalation techniques are helpful when this expectation for workgroup members is not met, as well as doing as much as possible to encourage public participation in your meetings, especially from those who are directly impacted by your actions or inactions. This should help shed light on the fact that no one workgroup member has all the correct answers or behaviors and that everyone deserves to be treated with dignity.

Sincerely,
Dena Jensen
Birch Bay, WA

From: & K U L V W L Q H O D Q V I L H O G
Subject: Fwd: Declaration of Emergency - PNW hazards to unsheltered population
Date: Tuesday, December 22, 2020 1:19:29 AM

COPY to members of Whatcom County Homeless Strategies Workgroup

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Christine Mansfield**
Date: Tue, Dec 22, 2020, 12:52 AM
Subject: Declaration of Emergency - PNW hazards to unsheltered population
To: Satpal Sidhu , Todd Donovan. Tyler Byrd, Carol Frazey, Barry Buchanan, Rud Browne, Ben Elenbaas
Cc: ACLU of WA Legal, Michael W. Lilliquist
Seth Fleetwood

County Executive, Satpal Sidhu and Whatcom County Council,

What is the current status of government planning to initiate response measures to relieve persons at City Hall (also referred to as Camp 210)? Over 100 people in the cold are presenting with symptoms of distress attributed to a lack of shelter and in need of relief. Citizen outreach is relying on county response.

Persons stranded outdoors in tents are at high-risk; PNW cold, rain, snow, and wind pose immediate threat to their well-being. The combination of PNW elements has serious impact to health and safety. People experiencing exposure to the PNW elements with continual ongoing exposure, who are left unsheltered without proper protection, are at high risk of hypothermia, pneumonia, and death.

How does Whatcom County intend to support the sustainability of human life in our region? Where is our emergency response plan for winterization in our area as it pertains to displaced persons?

Where shall we housed citizens direct our unhoused neighbors for dry warm heated safe covering? Where should ANY resident go if stranded outdoors this winter? Where are our local warming centers? What alert system is in place? How are cities activating warming centers in each city region in Whatcom County annually? How is the Dept of Health initiating proper protocol to alert citizens to PNW weather conditions and hazards to promote safety and well-being as part of our general local safety advisory? What is the Whatcom County protocol for securing locations to shelter displaced people in distress?

Does Whatcom County need to request assistance from state and federal government, FEMA, Red Cross, United Way, National Guard, U.S. Army to oversee ACTION to stabilize and sustain a level of humane intervention on behalf of lives at-risk?

The matter at hand is non-negotiable. Lives are at-risk and the citizenry has implored the government sector to initiate humanitarian response to address hazards in real-time.

What is the plan of action for relief? What is the timeline for relief? What is causing inaction to secure functional relief? How are you directing this matter to ensure Whatcom County weather preparedness is inclusive of our most vulnerable citizens who are not in a position to advocate for themselves adequately due to the severity of their situations?

How is Whatcom County initiating a level of response that aligns with the level of critical human need?

Please respond to this message with URGENT PRIORITY in coordination with local citizenry, city government representatives, state government representatives, and federal government representatives for resources to relieve residents in distress in front of Bellingham City Hall. This is not a matter of negotiation or debate; this is a matter of common decency, human sustainability and action. Local citizens are providing emergency care in the absence of Whatcom County preparedness.

Citizens are naturally alarmed and rightfully acknowledging that indefinite inaction means potential loss of life, human suffering caused by gross negligence, and incompetence of Whatcom County elected representatives of the people to act with equitable concern for citizen safety. People without proper heat and proper covering need it! This is a call to action. What is Whatcom County doing to facilitate sheltering relief for the volume of citizens needing it that is currently lacking? Shelter in the PNW is a vital need.

Bellingham, WA
Whatcom County resident

JC Mansfield