

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

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL

Homeless Strategies Workgroup

Friday, January 8, 2021

Meeting #35 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
Rud Browne, Whatcom County Councilmember
Michael Lilliquist, Bellingham City Council Member
Gene Knutson, Bellingham City Council Member
Seth Fleetwood, City of Bellingham, Mayor
Riley Sweeney, City of Ferndale
Michael Shepard, Port of Bellingham, Commissioner
Hans Erchinger-Davis, Lighthouse Mission Ministries Representative
Mike Parker, Opportunity Council Representative
Ann Beck, Whatcom County Health
Dean Wight, Northwest Youth Services Representative
David Crass (for Florence Simon), Bellingham Police
Mike Hilley, Whatcom County EMS
Guy Occhiogrosso, Bellingham/Whatcom Chamber of Commerce Representative
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

HSW members approved the Meeting Summary: Meeting 34 – December 18, 2020 (with abstention from Gene Knutson and Rud Browne). The next meeting will be held virtually on Friday, January 22, 2021 at 1:30 p.m.

2. Discussion and Planning for Tiny Homes

Mayor Fleetwood reported on recent efforts regarding tiny homes including:

- 8 additional tiny homes delivered today to Swift Haven for a total of 25 units,
- 20 people (80%) came from the encampment at City Hall,
- City is waiting for a response on a group to operate a potential site on Port property

HSW members discussed:

- Pallet shelter purchase considered on 12/31 by the City of Bellingham has not been purchased yet as it is subject to identifying an operator.

3. New Strategies Matrix

- Updates from subcommittees (including action items and ideas to engage community members)
 - Unsheltered (year-round)
 - No chair identified
 - Winter/Severe Weather
 - No chair identified
 - Consider different approach next year, regarding meeting criteria for Christ the King back up shelter to open
 - Youth (year-round)
 - Members met last week
 - Will continue meeting every two weeks and including community members
 - Families (year-round)
 - Met this week again
 - Members are looking at needs: e.g. currently spending 150,000 per month on motel stays
 - Tara Sundin reported that the County is receiving almost \$7 million to fund rental assistance. The City of Bellingham has added another \$50,000 to motel stays.
 - Funding Strategies
 - Met this week and scheduling next meetings
 - Discussed funding for community health as well as homelessness
 - Looking to identify funding mechanisms and recommendations
 - Communications
 - Adding County and City Communications staff to the committee
 - Received requests for members of the community to join, but waiting until work is better defined
 - Committee is not a messenger or mediator, but is focused on recommending communications strategies
 - Markis Stidham requested that HSW meetings be more accessible to the public
 - Mike Parker suggested a gap analysis for communications
 - Riley Sweeney discussed the biggest gap related to public perception of work being done and the impacts of efforts underway.
 - Emily O'Connor and Mike Parker shared that 2,200 individuals (1,300 households) in 2019 are served through coordinated entry system each year. The challenge is that there are not enough resources to address the needs of everyone. What people see is the people whose needs are not being addressed.

4. Winter Shelters

Mayor Fleetwood discussed the encampment at City Hall including:

- Encampment in operation for two months (Nov 11th),
- Shelter space is available at Basecamp (70-80 beds), new Swift Haven site at Civic Field, and the Byron Ave Isolation and Quarantine Facility,
- Work on an additional tiny home site,
- A commitment to discussing longer term solutions and responses to homelessness,
- Impacts to City and County staff working in the area,
- A specific date for when the camp will be cleared is not yet determined,

- Case management services being offered to encampment guests, and
- A hope to create a peaceful transition.

Hans Erchinger-Davis reported that there is currently capacity for 130 people at Basecamp and the overflow shelter combined. Unity Care NW has provided quick COVID tests. Guests are accepted via walk in. Lighthouse Mission worked with Health Department to coordinate testing and transfers of COVID positive guests to the Bryon I&Q facility. Lighthouse Mission staff are getting vaccinated next week. Everyone is welcome.

HSW members discussed:

- City Hall encampment and participation of the community in providing services, volunteers bringing needed supplies, and
- Point-In-Time count and plans for this year, to be discussed further at the next HSW meeting.

5. Public Comment

The following attendees provided public comment

Doug Gustafson
Hannah Stone
Aida Cardona
William Shenken
Melissa Wisener
Shari Lapof
Arrissia Owen Turner
Heather Katahdin
Jonah Lawhorn