

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

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



COUNCILMEMBERS
Rud Browne
Barry Buchanan
Tyler Byrd
Todd Donovan
Ben Elenbaas
Carol Frazey
Kathy Kershner

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL

Homeless Strategies Workgroup

Friday, January 22, 2021

Meeting #36 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
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
Bridgett reeves Hans Erchinger-Davis, Lighthouse Mission Ministries Representative
Teri Bryant (for Mike Parker), Opportunity Council Representative
Ann Beck, Whatcom County Health
Jenn Daly for Dean Wight, Northwest Youth Services Representative
David Crass for Florence Simon, Bellingham Police, Deputy Chief
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

Councilmember Buchanan welcomed members and guests. HSW members approved the Meeting Summary for Meeting 35 – January 8, 2021. The next meeting is Friday, February 5, 2021; 1:30pm

2. Point-In-Time Count

Ann Beck indicated that the Point-In-Time count is not required by state or federal agencies this year, as a result of the pandemic. However, Whatcom County will still be doing the count this year. Paid staff and trained volunteers from previous counts will do the count, which will take place during the week of January 28 – February 4th. When information is available, data will be shared.

3. Discussion and Planning for Tiny Homes

Seth Fleetwood reported on the following:

- Swift Haven is running with a total of 25 residents (at Geri Field)
- Port of Bellingham offered a site for additional tiny homes

- City of Bellingham is in discussions with “The Collective” regarding operations of the site. An offer from the City was rejected by The Collective because it was not enough units proposed for the site.
- Homes Now is willing to operate a 3rd site but don’t have enough capacity to do that right now
- City RFQ for a 2- to 5-year temporary encampment at a site to be determined on city property. The City budgeted funds to set up and pay for operations. The timeline for this is an opening date in May (approximate timing).
- Basecamp has space currently

Bridget Reeves reported on the following:

- 133 stayed at Basecamp last night with 67 unused beds.
- Christ the King Church will open the Drop-In Center overflow shelter on Sunday and stay open through the following Saturday night, providing an additional 39 beds. Check in will be at Basecamp. Communications about opening additional shelter is through partners, Bellingham Herald, and online information.

HSW members discussed the following:

- Total campers at Camp210 includes approximately 100-110 people
- More people are going to Camp210 for supplies and staying elsewhere
- City is not prepared to run a shelter themselves – City staff do not have expertise – and the City focuses on funding others to operate shelters
- Solutions are in the 25- to 50-unit shelter options, each a step in the right direction. Barriers to sheltering all or none requests.
- Benefits of a ‘four-square’ shelter configuration - 25 units in four villages with central kitchen.
- Beds are available at current shelters, but recognize people choose not to use those shelters. Some people are restricted from Basecamp because of violent offenses but are welcomed back if they can show progress towards improvement.
- Options for government agencies to buy a hotel or motel to have a shelter
- Government will not meet individual wishes of all Camp210 guests, but we can offer something. There is more shelter capacity this year than ever before.
- Safety is a concern for not only county staff but also contracted organizations and more vulnerable campers.
- Government will not create a shelter environment without a code of conduct.
- Campers are refusing services when offered to them.
- Lighthouse Mission was asked by campers to not visit Camp210 and were told by campers they are not welcome. Some campers have come back to Basecamp and they are welcome.
- Previous HSW work to locate a 200-bed shelter, resulted in agreement that a large-scale shelter is not the best choice. A better choice is small shelters addressing specific needs (e.g. elderly/medically fragile, families, etc.)
- HSW goal is to increase shelter capacity in Whatcom County. Long-term solutions are important but so are near term solutions to address current needs.
- Basecamp allows animals with limited restrictions

Markis Stidham moved that the HSW votes to advise the County to make purchase of 50 more tiny home shelters with the intent to use shelters for another site. Joel Kennedy seconded the motion.

- HSW members discussed the motion, including the following:
 - County Council approved funding for 50 tiny homes of which half have been delivered and the other half will be delivered next month.

- County’s responsibility to address severe weather shelter needs
- What location in the City would be offered and what the City would provide in terms of security.
- County does not run Severe Weather shelters. County finds an operator and funds the shelter set up and operations.
- City and County are partnering on the work now. There are sites in the City and County that are under consideration. If the motion passed, it wouldn’t be a dramatic change in the current direction.
- Motion fails: 8 yes, 6 abstain, 2 no

Lilliquist moved to add an agenda item to the next meeting to discuss growing capacity in the provider arena in our community, what can be done to expand the pool of provider talent in Whatcom County. Michael Berres seconded.

- Motion passes: 17 yes
 - Yes (Buchanan, Browne, Lilliquist, Shepard, Fleetwood, Beck, Bryant, Daly, Crass, Hilley, Stidham, Occhiogrosso, Stidham, Kennedy, O’Conner, Berres, Marx)

Michael Berres requested to add to next agenda a discussion of Markis’ motion and possibly get more information. Additionally, he recommended that the HSW discuss its purpose on the next agenda.

4. Public Comment

- Nadelyn King
- Doug Gustafson
- Finn Calvert
- Amy K
- Lauren Boushey
- Hasina Shah
- Amy Glasser
- Alyssa Parris
- JC Mansfield
- Timothy Kraft
- Patricia Suarez
- Eve Samson-Marcus
- Aida Cardona
- Alysia Spencer
- Heather Katahdin
- Kate
- Sarah
- Tyler Byrd
- Dena Jensen