



WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL

Homeless Strategies Workgroup

Friday, March 5, 2021

Meeting #39 SUMMARY

Time: 1:30 p.m. – 2:50 p.m.

Location: Remote online meeting

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
Teri Bryant for Mike Parker, Opportunity Council Representative
Anne Deacon for Ann Beck, Whatcom County Health
Karen Burke, Housing Advisory Committee Member
Jason McGill, Northwest Youth Services Representative
David Crass for Florence Simon, Bellingham Police, Deputy Chief
Guy Occhiogrosso, Bellingham/Whatcom Chamber of Commerce Representative
Markis D. Stidham, Homeless Advocate
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.

HSW Members approved Meeting Summary (Meeting 38 – February 19, 2021) (Markis Stidham abstained).

2. Scope and Purpose of HSW

Anne Deacon led members in a discussion of the short-term goals:

A. Tiny home villages:

- i. Unity Village 25
 - ii. Swift Haven 25
 - iii. Garden View Village - New site with LIHI and Road2Home, opening end of May 2021
 - iv. Finding a more permanent place for any of these locations
- In total, between the three sites there will be 80 -85 structures available in the community.

Tara Sundin answered questions from members regarding Garden View Village:

- Delivery of 20 tiny homes from Whatcom County via 360 modular. LIHI requested units be 8x12 minimum.

- Five (5) 8x8 units received from Whatcom County via 360 modular used for office/storage space (1 goes to HomesNow and 4 to Garden View Village)
- Another 15 structures at Garden View Village will be built on site by community volunteers
- Qualify for residency through the Homeless Services Center coordinated entry
- Goal is to move residents into housing, and an on-site case manager will assist with this
- Garden View will be staffed and enrollment will depend on needs of the population. With staffing, Garden View can accept higher need individuals than HomesNow is able to accept.
- Cost of operating a staffed site with case management at approximately \$500,000 per year, serving around 30-36 households (30-50 people)

Emily O’Conner highlighted that the cost to permanently rehouse a household is a little less than \$11,000, whereas a staffed emergency shelter tiny home site for a year is around \$15,000. Tara Sundin clarified the goal is 6 month stays and the hope is that per household it will be cheaper than a 12-month cost.

B. Hans Erchinger-Davis discussed the work of the Lighthouse Mission (310 year-round beds, plus 39 severe weather beds), including the following:

i. Outreach includes:

- Shower Trailer
- Street Connect Van
- Joy Riders – electric scooters with backpacks of coffee
- Laundry trailer
- Basecamp – meet basic needs (190-200 spaces, men and women, 24 hour operations). Beds/storage – delivered at the end of the March
- 39 Beds at Drop-In Center, operated by Christ the King (severe weather shelter)

ii. Recovery Programs include:

- Agape – 60 women, including 16 kids currently
- Ascent – 40, with additional 10 beds for mental health needs

iii. Restoration

- Services aimed at getting people back into housing and school after they’ve been housed

C. Other shelters

- Sun House Community services
- Domestic Violence Shelter
- Interfaith Coalition (families)
- PAD at Northwest Youth Services
- YWCA, added shelter capacity for older women and now has both emergency housing and longer term transitional housing. Recently YWCA opened the ballroom
- Motels provide additional shelter capacity (for families)

HSW members requested a complete list of shelter beds from County and City staff, including information from partners about gaps in shelter. Members identified some people don’t need to go to emergency shelter, they could start with rapid rehousing – the entry system doesn’t always have to start with emergency shelter.

HSW members discussed the tools for families:

- Rapid rehousing and permanent housing are the best options.
- Additional case managers are needed to address family needs.
- Priority of families with children first.

HSW members discussed collecting and reviewing shelter numbers and data to better understand what are the best next steps.

Anne Deacon discussed the need to communicate needs, best practices, and approaches, and she announced a new communications specialist position at the County to start in the next couple of weeks.

HSW members discussed taking a 4-to-6 week break to allow staff to collect information and data and put together a draft set of recommendations for the committee.

Riley Sweeney discussed a Ferndale Home fund planned for the ballot.

Motion carried: HSW recommends that County Council to take up a resolution on HB1590 sales tax countywide (rather than just in the City of Bellingham).

(Emily O'Conner moved, Michael Berres seconded, passed unanimously)

3. Public Comments

The following speakers provided comments:

- Doug Gustafson
- Behnoosh Armani
- Desiree Espericueta

Subject: Regarding HSW subcommittees
Date: Friday, March 19, 2021 8:22:52 AM

Dear Homeless Strategies Workgroup:

I recently heard that possibly your subcommittees have not been meeting over the last two weeks. If this is true, during this time that the workgroup itself is not meeting, and when it is still extremely dangerous for unsheltered community members to be sleeping outside, with their suffering and level of crisis impacting the broader community, it seems vital that workgroup committees be making progress on their specialty solutions.

I understand and am grateful that workgroup members all have their own related work in the community that they are doing, but group members working together to address specific gaps in sheltering solution components would advance progress that otherwise will likely not come to fruition.

I also understand that during this time, some people in County and City agencies will be assembling some materials for information that workgroup members feel is important for their goals. But I hope that workgroup members who are not directly involved in this will imminently reach out to each other to gather to work on communications, funding strategies, and interim housing/sheltering in various categories.

I could not find a recent or finalized copy of subcommittee members posted on the HSW meeting materials page. I ask that Ms. Halka or the appropriate person please point me to where I can find that, or send me a copy. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Dena Jensen
Birch Bay, WA

From: Kelly Bachman
Subject: Homeless Strategy in Sacramento
Date: Sunday, April 11, 2021 9:45:49 AM

Sacramento has a great idea for Bellingham. Tiny pallet shelters look to be a cheap and effective way to help the homeless who have a legitimate need for a secular alternative to the Base Camp congregate living arrangement. They wouldn't have any more square feet than they do at Base Camp, but they would have privacy and a place for their stuff. Plus it would make all of us in Bellingham safer. According to the Sacramento Bee on March 27:

For years, dismayed Sacramento city officials watched as unhoused people set up disheveled tent cities under downtown freeways. Now, in a strategy shift, the city is inviting some homeless to do just that — but in a controlled fashion.

Saturday, under a newly bolted “Safe Ground” sign on a pole in a parking lot at 6th and W streets, crews setup up a row of port-a-potties and cleaning stations, and city officials put out the word:

“This is a place where not only you can stay without being asked to move every day, but we can ramp up case management and make this a full-service triage center,” Councilwoman Katie Valenzuela, who represents downtown, said.

The City Council recently voted [to set up a series of indoor or outdoor triage centers](#) citywide where the unsheltered can come for services and, in this case, set up residence.

There will be room for 100 to 150 unhoused at the site under the W-X portion of the Capital City Freeway, Valenzuela said. She, Mayor Darrell Steinberg and Bridgette Dean, the city's new director of the Community Response Office, were there Saturday overseeing set up.

Steinberg said the city hopes in a week or so to erect the first row of 30 pallet homes on site, also known as “tiny homes,” which are hardly bigger than a large closet and can be assembled or disassembled in an hour.

“This is a part of what we’ve been pushing for for years,” Steinberg said. It’s the simplest form of having a roof overhead, he said, but if it is combined with an onsite counseling trailer and overseen by trained formerly unhoused people, it could become the first of a series of city-sponsored sites where people experiencing homelessness can stay and get help to fix the problems that put them on the street in the first place.”

Thanks for working to address the homeless situation,

Kelly Bachman

IDENTIFIED SHELTER NEEDS AND GAPS

POPULATION/ISSUE	SUPPORTING INFORMATION
1. Families with Children	65 – 85 FWC residing in motels currently is not conducive to long-term well-being of children
2. Young Adults (18-24)	Young adults are more vulnerable living unsheltered. Last year approximately 20 young adults utilized a shelter dedicated to their age group.
3. Elderly women (55+)	This population has experienced an increase in living unsheltered and tend to be more vulnerable.
4. Medically Fragile and/or cognitive decline (Alzheimer's, dementia, etc.)	Medical care at an inpatient level is no longer needed, but exiting to homelessness may exacerbate one's condition. Need a step-down facility to extend care at a lower level.
5. Special Populations at risk	Some populations face higher risk of harassment and potential harm and would benefit from shelter opportunities that promote safety and security. (LGBTQ, BIPOC, Disabled)
6. Small Tent Encampments	Approximately 80 – 90 small encampments are located throughout the county. Access to waste removal and toilet facilities is limited or non-existent. A number of people who are camping may not be interested in accepting other forms of shelters offered by government or private organizations.
7. Tiny Homes	In order to qualify as "shelter" as defined by HUD/Commerce, the following criteria must be met: a) ability to adjust living structure to climate (heat, opening window, fan); b) semi-permanent structure to prepare or eat food; c) living structure must have four walls, ceiling and a door that closes (lockable?); d) must have reasonable access to sanitation facilities (less than 100 yards away, with ability to shower, with hot & cold running water, and toilets; e) electricity to the living unit.
8. Local Governments may not be able to provide every type of shelter desired	Need to identify humane responses to people living unsheltered who may not utilize shelter options that are available to them.
9. Under-utilization of available shelters	During the past winter as many as 80 beds on a given night were not utilized.
10. Methamphetamine Use	Use of methamphetamine poses unique challenges to offering shelter and housing to people who use the drug. Symptoms of use include aggression, volatility, and contamination of living/shelter units.
11. Shelter availability in neighboring counties	Skagit County does not have a night-by-night/quick access shelter for its residents similar to Base Camp. (They have increased access to motel stays, created access to shelter for 12 FWC, purchased 80 tiny homes, and other efforts.) Skagit residents are referred to Whatcom resources at times.
12. Point in Time (PIT) Count	2021 count of people living unsheltered mirrored the 2020 count. 218 living unsheltered. (NOTE: ~80 vacancies in shelter spots during count). Had 171 more spots available in 2021. See Data.

Point-in-Time Count Data

Where staying	2021 Households	2020 Households	2021 Persons	2020 Persons
ES	355	308	551	380
Transitional housing	79	71	93	109
Unsheltered	191	176	218	218
Grand Total	625	555	862	707

Where staying, including motel separate from ES	2021 Households	2020 Households	2021 Persons	2020 Persons
Emergency	267	300	299	356
Emergency - Motel	88	8	252	24
Transitional	79	71	93	109
Unsheltered	191	176	218	218
Grand Total	625	555	862	707

WHATCOM COUNTY SHELTER/INTERIM HOUSING INVENTORY

Provider Agency	Program Name	Description	Nightly units or beds available	Population served/ Barrier Level?	Drop-in or scheduled admission	Location	City/ County Funding
DVSAS	Shelter Program	Large communal-living house & apartments	17 units (37 individuals max)	Survivors of DV; Low Barrier	Drop-In	Bellingham	Yes
Engedi Refuge	Engedi House	Privately funded and faith-based. Shared home for survivors of sexual exploitation	6 beds	Survivors of sex trafficking; medium barrier	Referrals from network	Lynden	No
Homes NOW	Unity Village & Swift Haven	Tiny home encampments with shared kitchen and porta-potties	45 beds	Single adults; medium barrier	Application required; intake screening	Fairhaven and Bellingham	In-kind donation (land)
Interfaith Coalition	Family Promise / Emergency Shelter	Houses for families experiencing homelessness	4 family units	Families with Children; Low Barrier	Coordinated Entry	Bellingham, Ferndale	Yes
Interfaith Coalition	Transitional Housing	Transitional family housing	1 family unit	Families with Children; Low-Barrier	Coordinated Entry	Various	Yes
LMM	Agape Program	Private bedrooms for moms with kids and double rooms for single women; shared kitchen & bathroom; meals provided; 1 medical respite bed	8 units for moms w/ children and 22 beds for single women (60 beds total)	Single moms w/ kids; single women without kids; medium barrier	Application Required; intake screening	F & Holly St.	No
LMM	Base Camp	Large night-by-night facility for adults; men's and women's sleeping areas, shared bathrooms & laundry service; meals provided	190 Beds	Adults; Low Barrier	Drop-In	Cornwall Ave.	Yes

WHATCOM COUNTY SHELTER/INTERIM HOUSING INVENTORY

LMM	Ascent Program	Shelter and services for people in recovery from SUDs; a specialized care dorm for people with behavioral health needs; 1 medical respite bed; meals provided	43 beds	Adult men; medium barrier	Application required; intake screening	F & Holly St.	No
CTK	Winter Overflow	Overnight shelter during the winter months at former Drop-in Center location	30 beds	Singles typically; Depends on operator	Drop-In	Holly Street	Yes
Lummi Stepping Stones	Emergency Shelter	Program uses a pair of large homes with bunk beds		Tribal adults and families with children; low barrier	Drop-In	Lummi Nation	No
Lummi Victims of Crime	Emergency Shelter	?		Tribal survivors of DV, including children; low barrier	Drop-In	Lummi Nation	No
Lydia Place	Gladstone Campus	Transitional housing for up to 18 individuals (women w/ children) who are members of 5 households.	5 units (maximum of 18 people)	Women with children; low barrier	Coordinated Entry	Bellingham	Yes
New Way Ministries	Housing Program	Privately funded and faith based. Transitional Housing	23 families	Screened by New Way; Medium Barrier	Application through New Way Ministries	Lynden	No
NWYS	PAD Shelter	Private bedrooms with shared facilities	4 (during COVID)	Minors (13-17 years old); low barrier	Drop-In	Bellingham	Yes
NWYS	Husly Shelter	4 bedroom home used for transitional housing	4 beds	Young adults (18-24); low barrier		Bellingham	Yes
Opportunity Council	Partnership House	2-unit duplex for transitional housing	2 units	Families with children; low barrier	Coordinated Entry	Bellingham	Yes

WHATCOM COUNTY SHELTER/INTERIM HOUSING INVENTORY

Sun Community Services	Sun House	Emergency shelter in large house for adults with mental illness and history of institutionalization	9 beds	Single adults; low barrier	Coordinated Entry	Bellingham	Yes
YWCA	Transitional Housing	Medium-length stays; single adults have private bedrooms and shared facilities	27 beds	Single adult women; low barrier	Coordinated Entry	Bellingham	Yes
YWCA	Emergency Housing	Short-length stays; single adults in "alcoves"; shared facilities	9 beds	Single adult women; low barrier	Coordinated Entry	Bellingham	Yes
YWCA	Senior Emergency Housing	Short-length stays; single adults in large room w/ dividers	5 beds	Single women aged 55+; low barrier	Coordinated Entry	Bellingham	Yes
TOTAL BEDS or "households" served			454 Household – up to 516 beds depending upon family size				