



Whatcom Co. Housing Advisory Committee MEETING AGENDA

Thursday December 8, 2022 8:30-10:00 AM

Hybrid: Garden Level Conference Room,
322 N Commercial St in Bellingham, Bottom Floor & Zoom

Agenda Items		Time
1.	Call to order, introductions and roll call of members present (Chair)	5 min
2.	Agenda review (Chair)	
3.	Action item: Approval of October 2022 minutes (Chair)	
4.	Action item: Member vacancies and call for volunteers for app. review committee (Ashley G)	
	Reports/Discussion A. <i>Local Plan Update (Barbara)</i> B. <i>Funding Resources & Demand for Services (Chris)</i> C. <i>Possible Action Item: Affordable Housing Funds Strategy Discussion (Chris)</i> D. <i>Possible Action Item: Proposal for Telegraph Townhomes Use of 1406 Funds (Dean)</i> E. <i>Severe Weather Shelter Update (Amanda)</i> F. <i>WCHD Housing Program Updates (Ann)</i> G. <i>City of Bellingham Update (Samya or Tara)</i> H. <i>Whatcom Homeless Service Center Update (Teri)</i>	80 min
	Public Comment (2 minutes per person)	5 min
	Next meeting date: Thursday, February 9, 2023, 8:30am to 10:00am	
	Adjourn (Chair)	

Community members who require special assistance to participate in a committee meeting are asked to contact the meeting facilitator at least 4 business days in advance.
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Summary of 2022 Annual Update to Whatcom County Local Housing Plan: Nov. 2022

This summary is based on the 2022 Annual Update to the Whatcom County Local Housing Plan. The full plan can be accessed at this link: <https://www.whatcomcounty.us/DocumentCenter/View/71253/2022-Annual-Update-to-Local-Housing-Plan>

Current Condition of Homelessness in Whatcom County

- Rent costs and housing prices increased significantly since 2021, impacting a range of county residents experiencing homelessness and housing instability
- \$31.1M in eviction prevention resources from CARES Act and American Rescue Plan have ensured many county residents avoided eviction
- Home prices have softened and rental prices flattened out recently, but the economic outlook is mixed in 2022 for Whatcom County

2022 Whatcom County Point in Time Count

- 832 persons were counted as experiencing homelessness during the 2022 count in Whatcom County, a small reduction from the 2021 PIT Count of 859 persons
- Individuals in emergency shelter and transitional housing increased slightly to 650 sheltered individuals in 2022, compared with 641 persons in shelter in 2021
- Coordinated Entry staff have reported they have recently seen an unprecedented high number of requests for housing assistance by persons experiencing homelessness

Performance Meeting Goals of 2019 Local Plan: Five Statewide Objectives

- **Quickly identify and engage people experiencing homelessness:** An unprecedented amount of funding has been committed for motel stays for families with children experiencing homelessness (\$1.8M annually by City of Bellingham and Whatcom County.)
- **Prioritize housing for people with the greatest need:** Coordinated entry prioritizes households based on risk of harm; street outreach has added capacity and positions to provide increased support, but workforce challenges hamper ability to hire and retain staff.
- **Operate an effective crisis response system to move people into permanent housing:** Exits to permanent housing remained relatively steady between July 2019 to June 2022.
- **Project impact of local plan on numbers housed and unsheltered:** Model-based projections in the 2019 Local Plan did not anticipate impact of global pandemic, and deepening of housing affordability crisis; the reduction in PIT Count can be impacted by variables other than an actual reduction in homelessness.
- **Address racial disparities:** By and For organizations will continue receiving eviction prevention allocations at reduced amounts; the Coordinated Entry Governing Body will focus on removing racial inequities in CE.

Foundational Pillars and Locally-Identified Strategies of the Local Plan

1. Collaboration: There are many collaborative housing partnerships in Whatcom County, such as the YWCA's with First Presbyterian Church adding 8 new winter shelter beds for single women; and another between Mercy Housing Northwest, the City of Bellingham, and Whatcom County partnership to support 16 new units of supportive housing for families with children in a new affordable housing development, with a YMCA early

learning center on-site. A new permanent supportive housing facility for families with children was opened by Lydia Place and also features a childcare component in partnership with the YMCA.

2. Quality Assurance: New reporting tools and improved system report tracking of programs will provide more insight into progress meeting performance targets. Bonuses provided for case management and other direct service providers encouraged retention of key positions.

3. Case Management: Case managers faced new barriers alongside those served; many resigned, leaving gaps in services. There is recent progress filling these gaps. RFP's were issued by the County for case management and awards for funding included new case management services for people with a significant history of homelessness, living in permanent supportive housing in scattered-site units. Existing case management programs were awarded modest funding increases.

4. Whatcom Homeless Service Center: Staff administered a record-high amount of rental assistance in 2022 for rapid re-housing. County funding added resources, such as a vehicle for street outreach, a resource coordinator position, compensation for people with lived experience of homelessness who participate in key meetings, and development of Language Access Plan for households for which English is not a primary language.

Highlights of Seven Local Strategies in Meeting Plan Goals and Objectives

1. Centralized Point of Entry: The CE Governing Body was created to collaborate with WHSC to provide input and guidance for CE policies and processes.

2. Rapid Re-Housing: Significant new rental assistance resources for this evidence-based intervention came through the Emergency Solutions Grant-COVID, offering new financial resources for families with children.

3. Supportive Housing: Some programs struggled with staff vacancies, reduced support from law enforcement, and insufficient behavioral health support. Recent reports indicate hiring is progressing and programs are stabilizing.

4. Increase Affordable Housing: Whatcom County filled a new Affordable Housing Specialist position. Investments were made to create homeownership opportunities and preserve affordable rental units.

5. Homelessness Prevention and Diversion: ESG-CV funding added support for these interventions, which will be ending later in 2023, along with significant ERAP and TRAP funding ending in 2023.

6. Interim Housing: Tiny homes villages offered capacity to serve at least 78 people; cold weather shelter planning and resources for unsheltered individuals has been improved. Some shelter funding from state and federal government will be ending, leaving gaps in late 2023.

7. Economic Security: Economic security came in the form of additional resources for eviction prevention and rental assistance. Economic insecurity resulted from job loss, layoffs, reduced income, and rising costs in rent and other essential since early 2020.

Significant Changes to 2019 Strategic Plan: Funding opportunities broadened during the pandemic through federal, state, and local funding sources, creating new partnerships and opportunities for those struggling during the pandemic. A significant amount of this funding will expire in 2023 and is not expected to be fully replaced by other resources. Partnering with the WA Low Income Housing Alliance and other statewide entities will hopefully generate support to proactively fill gaps.

*Whatcom County is only one of multiple local funders for homelessness. The City of Bellingham and the Bellingham-Whatcom County Housing Authority offer significant resources for homelessness and affordable housing, and other housing partners contribute significant resources including grants, and donations from the private sector, to Whatcom County's housing system.

1406 Recap

Since 2020, 1406 funds have gone to support the following services in Whatcom County:

- Opportunity Council's Homeless Service Center for rental assistance when no other funding source can be used,
- Lydia Place's Heart House, and
- Mercy Housing Northwest's Trailview Apartments.

To date, 1406 funds have not been used to support a capital project.

April 2020 – Motion approved: Majority of 1406 funds budgeted for next three months go to RA

January 2021 – Motion approved: Set aside 40% of 1406 revenues from 2020-2024 for a capital project outside the COB

February 2021 – Motion approved: City and County staff bring back proposal that focuses 60% of 2020 and 2021 1406 funds on serving families with children

June 2021 – Motion approved: Have 10% reserve in 1406 fund balance over 2021 and 2022 for rental assistance, to be refilled as needed to maintain a reserve of 10%

June 2021 – Motion approved: Utilize \$525k of 1406 funds to fill funding gap at Samish Commons with ask that County administration discuss utilization of ARPA dollars as substitute (used ARPA)

August 2021 – Motion approved: To support Mercy Housing NW's request for case management funding to serve household at Trailview and Millworks, and leave the final amount up to County staff