



Whatcom County Housing Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes

Meeting Date/Time/Location: 6/8/2023 / 8:30-10:00am / Hybrid: Civic 1st Floor Conference Room & Zoom

Committee Members Present: Adrienne Renz, Ann Beck, Ashley Thomasson, Brien Thane, Bruce Bosch, Dan Dunne, Dawna Morse, Dean Fearing, Diana Phair, Samya Lutz, Teri Bryant, Von Ochoa

Committee Members Absent: Kayla Schott-Bresler, Tara Sundin

WCHCS Staff/Guests: Ashley Geleynse, Chris D'Onofrio / Mike McAuley, Debbie Paton, Paul Schissler, Katherine Orlowski, Hillary Pritchard, Helen Campbell, Markis Dee Stidham, Michi Marcher, John Moon

Agenda Item	Report/Discussion	Action/Who
1. Call to order, introductions, and roll call	Introductions commenced and quorum present.	Brien
2. Approval of April 2023 minutes	Samya moved that the minutes from the February 2023 meeting be approved, Ann seconded the motion. The motion passed.	Brien Yes: 12 No: 0 Abstain: 0
3. Agenda review	Dan asked if the committee could receive more information about the County's Economic Development Investment Funds. Brien indicated that information would probably need to come from Kayla who was absent from the meeting.	Brien
4. Funding for services	A lot of pandemic services funding is expiring this year so looking at a cut in services funding in 2024. Waiting to hear from Commerce on what they will allocate in additional funding to help offset some of the funding that will be expiring. County staff will provide an overview of the funding picture in August. The allocation strategy that the committee reviewed last meeting accounted for \$393k of \$656k of 1406 for PSH support and rental assistance. This amount could be adjusted if needed in the future. There is also a surplus of about \$1.5M that's been unallocated that can be used for rental assistance or development. 1406 funds have the potential to be used for rental assistance, although another eligible use is for building affordable housing. If more used for rental assistance, it frees up other funding for operations. The City of Bellingham's perspective is that the majority of the surplus of 1406 funding be used for rental assistance in Bellingham because there are other funds available for development. Unless County staff want to go a different direction with the proportions outlined in the fund allocation strategy the committee supported last meeting, a formal vote is not needed to spend the surplus	Chris



	<p>accordingly. The committee discussed what other funding may be available going forward to fill the gap of expiring funds, including the Housing Trust Fund (capital) and the back-filling of document recording fees from the Department of Commerce, and urged County staff to deploy 1406 for rental assistance because there is such a high need in the community. Brien also spoke to the impact of the debt ceiling deal and how that will negatively impact the housing choice voucher system.</p> <p>County staff will also be looking to allocate \$200k in ARPA funds to help with winter/severe weather sheltering activities and will have more to report in August.</p>	
<p>5. Point-In-Time Count update</p>	<p>Chris shared preliminary numbers from the Point-In-Time Count that will be published early next week. In total, 1,059 people were counted, which is a 27% increase from last year. The sheltered population increased by 9% and the unsheltered population increased by 91%. Some considerations include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The count is a survey of people experiencing homelessness on a specific night as defined by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). • The County acknowledges that the headline number is an undercount and that there are more people who are experiencing homelessness or housing stability that isn't defined by HUD to be literally homeless. • There are double digit increases of people experiencing homelessness across the state. • We're seeing an increase in the rate of certain populations experiencing homelessness increase, including seniors, people with disabilities, people who otherwise experience discrimination. People who are experiencing homelessness are more often than not up against other challenges too. <p>Teri added that there has been a significant increase in the number of intakes into Coordinated Entry, which directly correlates to the increase in number of people counted this year. Additionally, with regards to seniors, there are two things happening: people are becoming older while they're homeless and there are seniors becoming homeless.</p> <p>Committee members asked questions and discussed messaging and communication efforts around the report and from Health and Community Services.</p>	<p>Chris/Teri</p>
<p>6. Justice Project Implementation Plan update</p>	<p>The Justice Project Implementation Plan comment period is open through June 11th.</p> <p>Chris relayed that Kayla was interested in getting feedback from the committee in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The relationship between people with substance use disorder and the criminalization of homelessness due to the lack of 	<p>Chris</p>



	<p>inpatient treatment resources and/or a home in which to use substances privately.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • System gaps around discharges and re-entry as the HUD definition of homelessness excludes those who have been in an institution for 90 days or longer. • Dedicated housing for people who are exiting the jail. 	
<p>7. Affordable housing development fund allocation approach</p>	<p>In relation to the development fund allocation approach, County staff plan to bring a draft of a Request for Proposals (RFP) to the committee for review in August. Also, as the County is looking to split the informal Affordable Housing Planning Group into the different buckets outlined in the allocation approach, with the addition of homeownership and land banking focuses, Chris recommended that this committee assume a more direct role in tracking the pipeline of projects that intend to apply for and utilize for 9% Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) going forward. This committee is already recognized by the Housing Finance Commission as the official body responsible for designating the preferred 9% LIHTC project, so this will streamline the process and make it more transparent. The committee discussed the LIHTC credit process and the different focus groups across the development continuum.</p> <p>The Bellis project, championed by Opportunity Council is currently the only 9% LIHTC project in the pipeline for the 2024 selection. Opportunity Council is getting ready to apply for 9% LIHTC and to the Housing Trust Fund for at least 60 units of family housing on one of the Bellis Fair sites. The project is behind schedule on getting split from the larger Bellis Fair property which is needed in order to move forward. As this is the only project in the pipeline this year, the committee will vote on whether or not to support the project in August.</p> <p>Chris briefly reviewed the framework for funding low-income housing developments, acquisition and rehabilitation that was initially developed for new 1406 funds. The framework contains guiding assumptions that can help inform the development of the RFP for local development funds and County staff is looking to the committee for needed updates, if applicable. Committee members discussed the pros and cons of requiring Evergreen Sustainable Design because it can promote project sustainability, but also create more barriers for developers.</p>	<p>Chris/Samya</p>
<p>8. City of Bellingham update</p>	<p>The City of Bellingham has passed its five-year Consolidated Plan which explains how the City will spend resources related to housing and services both from federal and local sources. There are five priorities in the plan: affordable housing, services, basic needs, shelter, and fair housing supports. There is more focus on priority populations in the plan this time because there aren't enough resources to meet the need.</p> <p>There was a celebration at Recovery House, a house that Opportunity Council developed in conjunction with Lifeline Connections, who operates the program. They've been operating for a year and are fully</p>	<p>Samya</p>



	<p>occupied with 18 residents. The low-intensity residential treatment program is time limited and receives referrals from therapeutic courts.</p> <p>There was an email sent out to the committee related to statewide housing investments. The Department of Commerce is asking for feedback on its investment strategy of the unprecedented number of funds over the next couple of years. Also included in the email was a housing and homelessness legislative document outlining what happened during the legislative session.</p> <p>Samya acknowledged the various housing projects that are being constructed and occupied including Samish Commons and Trailview Apartments, where there will be a grand opening celebration on July 6th.</p>	
9. Whatcom Homeless Service Center update	<p>Permits have been issued for the Way Station project that Opportunity Council is working on with the County, Peace Health, and Unity Care. Construction will be done by the County and will take about a year to complete.</p> <p>The Homeless Outreach Team has partnered with Public Works on a program to assist RVs to empty black water tanks.</p> <p>There are openings for positions in Coordinated Entry and Outreach. Information about how to apply can be found on Opportunity Council's website.</p> <p>The Homeless Service Center is entering into an agreement with Lighthouse Mission Ministries to operate their shower trailer on a limited basis.</p>	Teri
11. County update	<p>New staff members have been hired into the Community Health and Human Services division, including a Child and Family Supervisor overseeing the Healthy Children's Fund, and a Capital Projects Manager that will be focused on projects related to childcare, behavioral health, and affordable housing. Interviews for a Housing Program Specialist will be occurring this week. This position will have a focus on interim housing and severe weather shelter.</p>	Ann/Chris
13. Public Comment	<p>Dan has ten 20-foot shipping containers that could be used for housing or shelter if anyone is interested.</p> <p>Samya suggested adding a new business item to the agenda prior to public comment to allow for ideas and discussion.</p>	Brien
14. Adjourn	<p>The meeting was adjourned.</p>	Brien

Next Meeting: Thursday, August 10, 2023, 8:30-10:00am