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Sent: Wednesday, February 7, 2018 4:22 PM

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Subject: Low Barrier Homeless Shelter Site

Good Afternoon:

For your review, please find attached a letter from Executive Director John Harmon concerning the low barrier homeless shelter site.

Thank you.

Respectfully,

Vanessa Martin

Executive Services Manager

Bellingham/Whatcom County Housing Authorities

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**BELLINGHAM
WHATCOM COUNTY
HOUSING AUTHORITIES**

Office: 208 Unity Street – Lower Level • Bellingham
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February 7, 2018

To: Members of the Homeless Strategies Workgroup
From: John Harmon, Executive Director/CEO of the Bellingham Housing Authority

I am writing to you with deep concerns about the consideration of 211 E Champion Street as a low barrier homeless shelter site. My concerns are rooted in the fundamental belief that it is the ethical and fiduciary duty of the Bellingham Housing Authority to protect its residents and protect and preserve the properties we own and manage. Simply stated 211 E Champion Street is not an appropriate location for a low barrier homeless shelter.

Our major concern is the adverse effect that the occupants of the low barrier shelter (both in and out of the shelter) will have on the residents of Walton Place One and Two. Many of the residents of Walton Place One and Two are children, elderly, disabled, and some are formerly homeless themselves (who receive case management). The formerly homeless residents mostly came from shelters with services and had to meet certain criteria to be admitted. Many of these residents are vulnerable and live fragile lives. They do not have the ability to easily relocate to avoid adverse impacts. Most of the outdoor views from Walton Place One and Two face to the west and overlook the proposed site under consideration for the low barrier homeless shelter. These spaces provide access to outdoor furniture, decks and outside walkways providing access to apartments. This is where children play. Having a close neighbor such as a low barrier homeless shelter would certainly have a significant adverse impact on the peaceful enjoyment of the premises by the residents and reduce their quality of life. Simply stated, it is not appropriate to locate a low barrier homeless shelter next to a residential complex especially one with is a public asset housing some very such fragile tenants.

From the perspective of the manager of a public asset that has private investors, we and our investors would be very concerned about the impact a low barrier shelter in our backyard would have on residential occupancy and our commercial space. We can accomplish the Housing Authority's mission only when or projects work financially. In our view the low barrier shelter will deter initial leasing and increase turnover in occupancy. We positively impact our community because we carefully site these facilities, build them with private partners and manage them carefully. We leverage private investment to help us accomplish our public mission which benefits all of Whatcom County.

Here, the Bellingham Housing Authority took an old delapidated and largely unused warehouse site and redeveloped the land with the 90 apartments of Walton Place One and Two. The property was developed in two phases and built with a design concept of urban durability and interior and outdoor community space for the enjoyment of the residents. These developments include offices, computer labs, resident parking and commercial space. Our goal was to provide affordable housing in the downtown core and promote the redevelopment of the area with the highest architectural quality we could attain. We reached our goal. We won an Award of Excellence from the National Association of



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Housing and Redevelopment Officials in 2011 for Neighborhood Revitalization. We used all the tools available to us to leverage the \$27 million of funding needed for this endeavor. The Bellingham Housing Authority is proud of the living spaces we created and the contribution we have made to the revitalization of downtown and the safe environment we helped foster.

We well remember the unseemly activities going at the Northern end of Railroad Ave across from the transit terminal at the time of pre-development and worried at the time about the impact the drug dealing and use, and the assembly of large boisterous groups loitering at the corner of Railroad and Champion. We assisted with the Police efforts by pointing the surveillance cameras at the corner of Champion Street and Railroad Avenue which we had mounted on the empty Walton Warehouse for building security (which we owned because of our purchase of the property). We have watched as this end of the downtown has built on its success to become revitalized with new businesses and eating establishments.

Yes, a low barrier shelter may do some good. However, it must be very carefully sited to avoid adverse impact on neighboring businesses and residences. I believe that it is important that the residents of Walton Place One and Two be afforded the same protections, sense of safety and peaceful enjoyment of their homes as any of us associate with our homes. Moreover, as a public facility that is serving a population in need it should not be put at risk simply because the County owns the adjoining property.

For all these reasons, the Bellingham Housing Authority respectfully requests that the 211 E Champion site be withdrawn from consideration.

Sincerely,

John E. Harmon
Executive Director/CEO
Housing Authority of the City of Bellingham