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Subject: Support for and Comment for Proposed Shelter at 509 Girard

Homeless Strategies Workgroup
311 Grand Avenue
Bellingham, WA 98225

April 19, 2018

Dear Homeless Strategies Workgroup,

I live on C Street and I love my neighborhood. I can walk to a bazillion breweries and everyone's tulips are gorgeous on this April day, but we have also had our mail stolen many times and have found a meth pipe in our front yard. The petty crime is annoying but we accept the annoying parts with the nice parts. I am not interested in living in a neighborhood segregated by income where everyone looks like my family, but it'd also be nice if people weren't sleeping along Whatcom Creek. For this reason it's imperative to devote more resources to helping people who are clearly struggling with addiction/poverty/homelessness and if that means building a low barrier shelter at 509 Girard I support this decision. Solving homelessness (whatever that means) will benefit the Lettered Streets Neighborhood possibly more than any other neighborhood in Bellingham.

It would be great if the City could have used a location closer to the Lighthouse Mission but I recognize that the City doesn't have those options because of other groups expressing NIMBYist attitudes. I will not be one of those people and I do not want my neighborhood to stand in the way of helping others. I'm frankly disturbed at what some of my neighbors have said and how they have demonized the homeless in the name of protecting property values.

I have two kids—2 and 3 years old. The oldest goes to Gabriel Art Kids on D Street, the youngest starts there this fall. We love them with every fiber of our being. We walk with them to school. We walk with them to the library and to the FIG. I look forward to them walking to Parkview, Whatcom Middle and Bellingham High School when the time comes and see no reason why a homeless shelter at the Health Department would threaten their ability to walk to these places, to the library or to downtown. It's very easy to avoid walking by the Health Department. I've seen discussions by other parents that have expressed hyperbolic fears about the safety of their children. I am no criminologist, but I challenge my neighbors to find a single instance of a homeless person abusing a stranger's children. Even if they can find one, there are so many more about family members abusing children they know well. This is what experts in child abuse warn us about, family members not strangers that look different from us. Frankly, if we are really worried about child welfare, we would be more concerned about the children experiencing homelessness directly.

Every person sleeping outside was someone that a parent looked down upon and saw all the hope and love that I feel for my children. None of us are immune to homelessness. All of us are only an addiction, a mental illness, or a traumatic episode away. Our best insurance isn't increasing property values or selfishly exiling those who are poor, but instead relying on our community and building a system that helps (not punishes) those in need. If the cost of doing that is a homeless shelter a few blocks from my house, so be it. I'll accept that it might mean some Amazon packages go missing (I probably didn't need that stuff anyway).

Sharon Shewmake
C street and Cornwall