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Subject: homeless shelter update
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Homeless Strategies Workgroup:

Thank you for all of the work you have done in support of efforts around homelessness. I want to draw your attention to an article in the Cascadia Weekly yesterday that discusses the proposed 200-bed low-barrier shelter location on Girard Street. After nearly three years of searching for a location, I have come to the realization that locating a 200-bed shelter in the city center will not be feasible. It has proven difficult to find partners, to find a site that meets our criteria, and to overcome the opposition around this controversial land use. I still believe that a shelter is necessary, but no one agency can do this alone, and we have been unable to find a location that all involved agencies can agree on.

While I am disheartened by this development, the existing temporary low-barrier shelter operated by the Lighthouse Mission Ministries in Old Town will stay open for the next three years, and we are still committed to serving this population and to finding solutions to homelessness. We will continue to support our other efforts, such as 22 North, which is currently under construction to add 40 units to serve homeless youth and adults, as well as Northwest Youth Services' PAD program, DVSAS, Sun Community, the YWCA, the Opportunity Council, the Homeless Outreach Team, Lydia Place, and so many others. We may also consider expansion of these programs, and we will continue to partner with the faith-based community, the Lighthouse Mission Ministries, the Fountain Community Church and the Family Promise program in their efforts to provide temporary emergency shelter services.

I look forward to the May 10 Homeless Strategies Workgroup meeting where we can discuss this more fully. At the Bellingham City Council meeting on May 7, I will recommend putting the Bellingham Home Levy on the ballot this fall, because our work is far from over and the levy will allow us to continue our success in funding low-income and homeless housing projects and services. We have many needs and we will be pursuing creative solutions with any and all community partners who are willing to address this critical community issue.

Thank you for standing with me during this ongoing community crisis, and I look forward to our discussion May 10.

Mayor Kelli

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