

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL
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Barry Buchanan
Tyler Byrd
Todd Donovan
Ben Elenbaas
Carol Frazey
Kathy Kershner

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL

Homeless Strategies Workgroup

Meeting Summary

Meeting #25

Date: Friday, July 17, 2020
Time: 10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Location: Remote online meeting

Members in attendance:

Barry Buchanan, Chair, Whatcom County Councilmember
Rud Browne (for Carol Frazey), Whatcom County Councilmember
Michael Lilliquist, City of Bellingham Councilmember
Seth Fleetwood, City of Bellingham, Mayor
Michael Shepard, Port of Bellingham, Commissioner
Ann Beck (with Anne Deacon), Whatcom County Health
Dean Wight, Northwest Youth Services Representative
Florence Simon, Bellingham Police, Deputy Chief
Guy Occhiogrosso, Bellingham/Whatcom Chamber of Commerce Representative
Markis D. Stidham, Homeless Advocate (County Council-appointed)
Joel Kennedy, Homeless children and families (County Council-appointed)
Emily O'Connor, Homeless children and families (County Council-appointed)
Lisa Marx, Schools (County Council-appointed)

1) Welcome

Councilmember Barry Buchanan welcomed members and attendees and reviewed the purpose of the Homeless Strategies Workgroup.

Members approved meeting summaries, including Meeting 21 – February 14, 2020, Meeting 22 – February 28, 2020, Meeting 23 – March 30, 2020, and Meeting 24 – May 29, 2020.

Councilmember Buchanan welcomed three new HSW Members, appointed at the July 7, 2020 Council meeting: Emily O'Conner, Joel Kennedy, Lisa Marx. New members introduced themselves and provided brief statements about their experience and interests.

Members agreed on a future meeting schedule: every third Friday of the month, starting on August 21st, from 10:30 a.m. to 12 p.m.

2) CARES funding for homelessness/sheltering, Anne Deacon

Anne Deacon discussed COVID-19 related funding for housing and shelter – see attached *Whatcom County new COVID and Shelter Housing Resources*.

HSW Members further discussed ideas about opportunities to use funding, including tent encampment locations, opportunities to transition from tent encampments to tiny homes, and providing specialty shelters. Ann Beck clarified that any providers would need to participate in reporting numbers to the state.

HSW members also discussed the extension of the Unity Village tiny home site and withdrawal of the permit for the Clean Green tiny home site.

Anne Deacon discussed an anticipated 20% reduction in sales tax collections resulting in almost \$700,000 in reduced funding for behavioral health and housing services.

HSW members discussed the important role of case management in not only housing services but also the next steps of connecting people to additional needed services.

HSW members discussed previous work with LIHI, including the role of residents in building and setting up tiny home villages and the importance of an outside agency handling community management rather than residents.

3) Update on Byron Ave Quarantine and Isolation Facility, Anne Deacon

Anne Deacon updated members on the current facility use, including the following details:

- To date the facility has been used by 70 people.
- No COVID-19 outbreaks reported in the drop-in center
- County has extended site lease through November
- The facility has mostly been used by farm worker families
- 10-13 people are currently at the facility
- Over time there has been a range of people there, from 1-25 people at one time

4) Drop-In Center move (BHS to Cornwall Ave), Rick Sepler

Rick Sepler provided an update on the relocation of the Drop-In Center. Today, the Bellingham High School site closes and the new 200-bed Cornwall site opens. The lease is for 3 years with an option to renew for one additional year if needed. Fencing and landscaping will be installed around the site. The facility includes basic storage and capacity for a hot room. The site is an emergency COVID shelter site, which is in operation as long as the COVID emergency is in place. Permitting for the shelter for after the emergency is over is underway.

5) Preparing for winter shelter needs

Ann Beck discussed winter sheltering, indicating that once contracts are in place for shelter and rental assistance through emergency COVID funding sources, staff will assess shelter numbers from previous years in comparison to available space to determine potential needs.

6) Public Comment

The following speakers provided comments: Doug Gustafson, Tina Hayes, Dena Jensen

Whatcom County new COVID and Shelter Housing Resources					
Source	Funding Type	Amount	Current Commitment of Funding	Rent Assistance Operations	Shelters
COVID-19 Outbreak Emergency Housing Grant	WA State Department of Commerce	\$905,821	Committed for relocation costs of LMM Drop-In Center ("Base Camp") to Cornwall site. 3/15/20 – 9/30/20*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
				Promote social distancing and hygiene access in emergency low-barrier shelter. Allowable costs include deposit and lease payments, leasehold improvements, and operations	
CARES Act Housing Assistance	Federal funding passed through Commerce to Whatcom County	\$700,000 committed from the \$2 million for Human Services	Housing Assistance and staffing to confirm eligibility of households for financial support 3/1/20 to 10/31/20*	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
				Provide rental/mortgage assistance to eligible households with up to 80% AMI who are experiencing difficulty in covering housing costs due to reduced income as a result of COVID-19	
Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG-CV) "ESG #1"	Federal funding passed through from WA State Dept. of Commerce	Pending notification from Commerce; estimated at \$494,112	Support for specialized shelters and rent assistance 7/1/20 – 09/30/22	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
				Rental assistance, street outreach, HMIS, prevention assistance, rapid rehousing, and emergency shelter operations and expansion to ensure social distancing and safety related to COVID-19 pandemic.	
Commerce Shelter Grant	WA State Department of Commerce	\$1,194,211	Will reimburse for new beds created on and after 1/1/20. Use of some of these funds will cover lease costs for LMM Base Camp lease. RFP will be issued for remaining dollars. August 2020 through June 2023	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
				Expansion of shelter bed capacity to include focus on special populations such as elders, medically fragile, youth/young adults. Shelter beds must be operational in December 2020 to qualify for funding.	
Commerce CARES Eviction Prevention Assistance	Federal funds from the WA State Dept. of Commerce	\$2,689,237 & \$304,646 NWYS	Eviction prevention assistance 3/1/20 – 10/31/20*	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
				Rent assistance for households with up to 50% AMI to prevent loss of housing due to COVID economic impact	
Total of new county funds dedicated to Housing Assistance		\$6,288,027			

This chart can be distributed to the Homeless Strategies Workgroup, with the notice that this information may change. For instance, Commerce is considering an extension to the amount of time we have to distribute these funds to the community. It is possible that we may have until December some time to distribute the funds where the end date has an *.