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WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL

Homeless Strategies Workgroup

Friday, October 23, 2020 Meeting #30 – Meeting Summary

Time: 1:30 p.m. – 2:50 p.m.

Location: Remote online meeting, for more information visit

Members in attendance:

Barry Buchanan, Chair, Whatcom County Councilmember
Hannah Stone, Bellingham City Council Member
Michael Lilliquist, Bellingham City Council Member
Seth Fleetwood, City of Bellingham, Mayor
Riley Sweeney, City of Ferndale
Bridget Reeves for Hans Erchinger-Davis, Lighthouse Mission Ministries Representative
Mike Parker, Opportunity Council Representative
Ann Beck, Whatcom County Health
Jenn Daly for Dean Wight, Northwest Youth Services Representative
Dave Crass for Florence Simon, Bellingham Police, Deputy Chief
Mike Hilley, Whatcom County EMS
Guy Occhiogrosso, Bellingham/Whatcom Chamber of Commerce Representative
Markis D. Stidham, Homeless Advocate
Joel Kennedy, Homeless children and families
Emily O'Connor, Homeless children and families
Michael Berres, Special populations
Lisa Marx, Schools

1) Welcome

Councilmember Buchanan welcomed members and guests.

HSW members approved the meeting summary: Meeting 29 – October 9, 2020.

2) New Strategies Matrix

Emily O'Connor presented a draft document (see meeting packet). The first page is an overview of the group principals, values, and purpose. The second page starts an action plan. Item 6, Interim Housing, includes several work priorities for the Homeless Strategies Workgroup such as unsheltered persons, families with children, youth, and severe weather shelters.

Members discussed previous matrix, including how it was originally created through a workshop of members in 2017/2018, and how members may work together to refine the new matrix/list. Councilmember Buchanan will set up a meeting with Emily, Joel, Cathy and IT staff to discuss opportunities and ways to gather input.

3) Identify location and partner for safe parking

Rick Sepler provided an update that the City of Bellingham has not received any submittals and the RFP closes next week.

4) Year-round sheltering for families with children

Emily O'Connor detailed the waiting list is 120 families waiting for shelter. Half of those are unsheltered

families with children. This list doubled and there will be more. When families are unsheltered, we often don't know where they end up. The turnover rate is really slow and families can't transition into housing.

Mike Parker discussed the housing list pre-COVID was in the 50s and is now more than double. We have a housing crisis on the horizon.

Emily O'Connor calculated that \$1.6M is the amount it would take to clear the waiting list for families with children. The funding would go to rapid rehousing and permanent supportive housing, evenly split. Funding would be needed for Case Management and rental subsidies. Some families have preferences for locations (e.g. in Bellingham) because of access to transportation or other support systems.

Markis Stidham mentioned there are children in cars.

5) Winter Shelter – temporary and emergency

Ann Beck discussed that the health department is reaching out to potential partners, but most are at capacity.

Bridget Reeves discussed the communications plan information distributed to Bellingham and Whatcom County councilmembers.

HSW members discussed winter shelter needs, including the following:

- Trends show a higher need for shelter this year is anticipated
- 70% of people seeking services at Basecamp are from Whatcom County
- Some Basecamp guests rely on consistency, other can handle a change of location to another shelter location if it were available (e.g. CTK operated shelter at Drop-In center)
- Staff at Basecamp know the people who stay there
- A variety of shelter types would serve more people
- Volunteer support needs
- Goal to have enough shelter to not have a need for emergency winter shelter space

6) Encampment clean ups

Councilmember Stone updated the group on updates on encampment clean up, including the recent release of a procedures document, which will be distributed to HSW members. Regarding encampments in the city, under COVID, camps are being left in place if there are no safety or health concerns for the residents of the camps or adjacent residents. In light of capacity issues at Basecamp, all encampment clean ups of occupied camps are suspended. Clean up teams are focused on abandoned camps. Council Member Stone offered to research and share data on the frequency of clean ups.

HSW Members discussed the following:

- Increasing shelter capacity can limit the need for encampments
- HOT team is distributing food to camps as well as masks and hand sanitizer
- Lighthouse Mission outreach teams go out in the evenings to camps in the downtown areas
- A challenge for partners is the 3% administrative cost associated with running a program. It is not enough to pay staff for the work.
- RFQ and competition for the same site
- A warming bus as an option for winter

7) Public Comment

The following speakers provided comments:

- Shari Lapoff
- Heather Katahdin
- Doug Gustafson