



WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL

# Homeless Strategies Workgroup

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Friday, November 20, 2020

Meeting #32

MEETING SUMMARY

Members in Attendance:

Barry Buchanan, Chair, Whatcom County Councilmember  
Tyler Schroeder, Whatcom County  
Hannah Stone, Bellingham City Council Member  
Seth Fleetwood, City of Bellingham, Mayor  
Riley Sweeney, City of Ferndale  
Michael Shepard, Port of Bellingham, Commissioner  
Hans Erchinger-Davis, Lighthouse Mission Ministries Representative  
Mike Parker, Opportunity Council Representative  
Ann Beck, Whatcom County Health  
Dean Wight, Northwest Youth Services Representative  
Florence Simon, Bellingham Police, Deputy Chief  
Doug Chadwick, Whatcom County Sheriff, Undersheriff  
Mike Hilley, Whatcom County EMS  
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

Location: Remote online meeting, for more information visit

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**1. Welcome, HSW Chair, Whatcom County Councilmember Barry Buchanan**

Councilmember welcomed members. HSW members approved the Meeting Summary: Meeting 31 – November 6, 2020 as amended with clarification on the projected homeless numbers being in addition to what the community is experiencing currently.

**2. Discussion and Planning for Pallet Shelters (Tiny Homes) being purchased by Whatcom County**

Councilmember Buchanan provided HSW members with an update on the recent Council approval to purchase pallet shelters. HSW members discussed the task ahead of identifying a location and operator for additional shelter.

HSW members Emily O'Connor and Mike Parker highlighted the following questions:

- What is the funding source that will pay for pallet shelters?
- Can the purchase and operations occur without drawing down funds from other housing/homelessness efforts?
- What is the right size and fit for how many shelters and where?
- Is there a phased approach phased approach?
  - o Not all 50 shelters mobilized in one day (e.g. start with 15, bring on more incrementally)
  - o What happens in March, are the pallet shelters put away?

- Reserve some shelters for severe weather shelter, set up others for more long-term use
- Not all 50 deployed under the same criteria
- What is the timeline for purchase, delivery, set up, and operations?
- What is the target end user, who is most effectively served? Is this effort a winter shelter during COVID or more long-term villages?
- What is the level of staffing support required?
- What is the ongoing operational cost?

Tyler Schroeder discussed that about 50 pallet shelters can be purchased for \$370,000 including tax. The shelter breaks down and set up quickly and has electrical service (i.e. can be plugged in). There are no bathroom, shower, or cooking facilities so that would need to be arranged for a site. The pallet shelters include a bed and mattress inside. Delivery date is a moving target because companies take orders and deliver on a rolling basis. Pallet Shelter delivery at this time would be a 4- to 6-week timeframe. Modular 360 (Ferndale) provides a modular set up, at a similar price. It is more of a modular steel with more typical residential construction elements, and it doesn't break down as easy as the pallet structure. The assumption is it could last longer or be more durable than a pallet shelter. The Executive recognizes the unanimous support for purchasing pallet shelters and is interested in hearing discussions at the meeting today and continuing coordination with the City of Bellingham. Once we identify a location and operator the Executive can move forward with a purchase.

Joel Kennedy discussed his research on Pallet Shelters regarding delivery date for pallet shelters being a moving target. Purchases are scheduled and delivered in the order they are received.

Mayor Fleetwood discussed the growing encampment outside City Hall, and for health and safety reasons there is a need to find a better option. The City is exploring options for a new managed site, which would bridge the gap between now and next spring to bridge capacity issues existing facilities. The most obvious site being considered is the Winter Haven site behind City Hall. Planning and Legal staff have been identifying basic conditions required for that site. There is a group looking to form an organization to operate and supervise the site. The City is partnering with the County to locate the pallet shelters, and they anticipate finalizing a plan in the coming days and making it operational as quickly as they can. This is not a permanent solution, but it increases capacity and addresses the challenges of winter.

HSW Members discussed an emergent need to roll out shelters as fast as possible and provided feedback on following elements:

- Size
  - Support for shelter areas of 20-25 residents at most.
- Operations
  - City of Bellingham is working on getting an operator and then can move forward to buy shelters.
- Uses
  - Year-round shelter, permanent
    - The community is running into capacity issues.
    - There is a need and space in the community for another tiny home village
    - A long-term site requires more thoughtful planning, rather than rapid response
  - Temporary/Severe Weather
    - There is an emergent need

- More rapid mobilization and set up
- Population served
  - Very diverse community in need
  - Preference to not serve those higher barrier populations, which the Lighthouse Mission already handles very well.
  - Some people are not a good fit for a low barrier shelter
  - Concern to serve those populations camping in the woods
- Locations
  - Winter Haven location behind City Hall
  - Sunnyland site (temporary shelter)
  - County property by the soccer fields
  - Kendall – East Whatcom County
  - Focus on Bellingham, but value to services in the County as well
- Funding
  - County purchase using capital funds (not CARES)
  - Capital purchase does not draw down funds from other services
  - Operations funding is trickier

Anne Deacon provided information about the Byron Isolation and Quarantine (I&Q) facility including:

- There is not an operator for shelter functions of the Byron Street facility
- They cannot use the I&Q operators for the rooms used for sheltering
- Current contract goes through February with an option to extend through May

HSW members discussed the following:

- Health Department is doing good work with contact tracing COVID through the homeless community.
- It's important to be transparent with the resources we are expending and where the operational dollars are coming from.
- Health department has used every dollar available in the housing pool, and it is spent along the continuum to have a balanced approach. Sheltering as an emergent response is very important but the solution is permanent housing.
- Desire for shelter structures to be used now for a rapid response and again later as a more long-term solution.
- There is a point at which emergency shelters will close (e.g. in March) and there should be a plan for where people go next.
- There are efficiencies for an operator to have multiple camps on one site.

Seth Fleetwood discussed an RFQ that is out now looking for a longer-term temporary facility (could be 2 years). That could be operational in the spring. For an operator to deal with the present situation, they are working with a group and meeting with them today to understand how it could work. They will report when they have more information.

### **3. New Strategies Matrix**

Emily O'Connor discussed the proposed subcommittee groups and leaders, as shown in the chart distributed. Clarification was provided that subcommittees can invite other community partners (i.e. non-HSW members) to be part of the subcommittee conversations. She asked HSW members to consider participating on a subcommittee and to look to sign up as a subcommittee chair.

#### **4. Year Round Sheltering for Families with children**

Councilmember Buchanan discussed the recent Council approval of funding for NWYS Ground Floor for the next two years.

Emily O'Connor discussed motel capacity for families with children, anticipating a bigger need this year. Conversation has begun about a permanent facility for families with children.

#### **5. Winter Shelters**

Anne Deacon reported that the County has not been able to identify an operator willing to run a severe weather shelter, but that this year there are more shelter beds available than last year.

#### **6. Public Comment**

The following members of the public provided comments:

- Aida Cardona
- Doug Gustafson
- A Blithe
- Natale Zabbo
- Kainui Rapaport
- Brel Froebe
- Jennifer Mansfield
- Tina Hayes
- David Morris
- Amy Kendi
- Katherine Orłowski
- Heather Katahdin
- Jeremy Backbone