

From: Christine Mansfield
To:
Subject: For public comment and public record>>>> Enclosure/Link PETITION Bellingham City Council: DECLARATION OF EMERGENCY - Homelessness Response in Bellingham, WA - Whatcom County
Date: Monday, December 14, 2020 9:19:51 AM

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HSW please review this timeline of crisis responsiveness and identify a Plan of Action for beginning of year, January 2021:

When there are people that exceed the available space for sheltering in CLEAR & PRESENT FULL VIEW, we no longer need a winter weather "TRIGGER" to be the only deciding factor for prompting emergency opening of overflow sheltering (!) The bodies that are PRESENT on City Hall in FULL VIEW give real-time evidence that sheltering is needed. The current KNOWN visible houseless community exceeds Base Camp capacity not only in headcount/bed availability, but in critical urgent care capability and accessibility to and for various demographics of homelessness. Emergency sheltering is an URGENT PRIORITY.

Emergency sheltering is needed for the current visible population headcount in real-time; point-in-time count that is present and viewable exceeds sheltering capacity that is currently available.

TIMELINE-

WA state guideline for ending homelessness (2005 - 2015)

Emergency sheltering was needed in 2016. The City of Bellingham created an emergency ordinance to use the Drop-in Ctr to host emergency overnight shelter for headcount in distress.

Drop-in Ctr was over capacity by 2017. Local unhoused residents testified publicly at City Hall the risk to their health and safety when staying at the Drop-in Ctr. and expressed on public record WHY sleeping outdoors was less a risk to their safety and well-being than sleeping at the Drop-in Ctr.; however, no alternative provision for sheltering was made by local government and campers were directed to go to the Drop-in Ctr. for shelter relief regardless of reported risks. Allegations publicly announced re Drop-in Ctr sheltering included theft, unsanitary restroom access, unsafe personal conditions resulting in physical and mental abuse, and accounts of rape.

Homes Now provided winter weather emergency support 2018. Winter emergency need has prompted Gov to expand a Workgroup for homelessness solutions, Homeless Strategies Workgroup (HSW).

City and County coordination with local agencies to host emergency shelter winter 2019.

Winter sheltering is tentative yearly, as of 2020 dependent on local community partnerships and winter weather conditions.

OVERVIEW-

The PEOPLE have offered multiple solutions for addressing homelessness since 2017. We need the political will to initiate ACTION to house the people stranded outdoors. It's our ethical and moral community responsibility. Initiation of action for sheltering solutions for immediate relief is not debatable; it is a matter of urgent care and human sustainability. Current shelter options are not sustaining our unhoused community who are living in tents throughout Whatcom County.

Base Camp is an expansion of the Drop in Ctr. The Drop-in Ctr emergency ordinance was renewed three years from 2016 to 2019. The expansion of the Drop-in Ctr to Base Camp was initiated to meet Covid19 sheltering guidelines for 2020. This arm of urgent care was executed in alignment with CDC protocol, Whatcom Unified Command partnership, and the CARES Act fund.

Base Camp does not sustain the entirety of our overflowing population in need of sheltering despite intentions to do as much as possible; nor will Base Camp sustain any additional homelessness strain on the city and county as we move into the new year. This is a FACT confirmed by the population currently residing at City Hall in Bellingham, Whatcom County seeking emergency shelter, as well as a decade of debilitating rise in housing costs, and a year of economic stagnation due to global pandemic precautions.

The anticipation of rising costs, unemployment, absent services, and housing evictions must be met with a plan of action if we are to sustain our growing community.

The diverse socioeconomic challenges our city and county faces requires diverse solutions to sustain human life. The constant in the human condition is instability and change which requires opportunity and equitable access to life-sustaining resources. People incapacitated by life circumstances that destabilize their security are relying on the kindness of strangers to respond and intervene on their behalf. Displacement is a human condition. Crisis responsiveness arises from fervent concern for the community at-risk (ex. displacement) to ensure the well-being and security of the community at-large is sustainable.

BOTTOM LINE-

Life is messy. We are all interconnected as beneficiaries of shared resources. Depriving a person of legal space to occupy and shelter themselves in accordance to mutual acts for human survival which we all require and share in common (no matter our personal preferences or lifestyle), is unconscionable.

No human being can sustain their life or livelihood without proper care and resources to do so. Shelter is necessary for all people regardless of mental, physical, or financial status. Improper care impacts us all.

What constitutes "living" is a quality of life, our human occupancy of self and the right to survival, including access to food, water, shelter, and healthcare needs. Poverty is not a crime. Poverty is a default of hardship, hardship that diminishes earning ability which determines economic survival. Displacement is a hardship which destabilizes a person's security and ability to meet their highest potential.

EVALUATE-

How are we providing ongoing opportunities for people to reclaim security and function to the best of their ability when they experience irreversible loss, trauma, and/or chronic pain?

What is the bottom line functionality of the HSW?

I am of the understanding that real time data of assessing the needs of the people, addressing these needs by promoting opportunity, and initiating action to create solutions is the function of the HSW work group.

PLEASE make these considerations:

Local agencies serving the same population of unhoused residents need a United network and registrar to collect all vital data of people in crisis in our region uniformly. Service providers networked together could identify unhoused residents and essentially shoulder the task of also identifying urgent need; ensuring community responsiveness is effective and initiating uniform protocol for responsiveness.

A homeless registrar would serve to assess demographics of need and identify services required that exist or are lacking.

I recognize that some existing agencies do alert the public to shelter locations, housing opportunity, waitlists, applications, and social services via on-site locations and online; however, these points of reference only work in autonomy and semi-connectedly with other corresponding agencies. This network is not harmonized to best serve the public.

An interconnected network of all agencies and services would better connect people to services they need and as such, identify services that are lacking (example: mental health care, assisted living, etc). Missing services could be prioritized based on data of registered homeless population.

HOUSING and homelessness solutions are not a workable formula without coherent data. Where is data being uniformly collected and analyzed?

Current data collection is personified by the autonomy of each agency focused and prioritizing their own arm of homelessness relief. Ideally, the county needs a synchronized system for maximizing effectiveness and interconnect all county (cities) agencies.

*How is current homelessness data uniform? Where is data uniformly entered and collected? (Beyond the annual PIT count...) cross-referenced? charted? reported? analyzed?

These suggestions are a firm reiteration of ongoing public comments that I continue to assert in all venues addressing homelessness in our region.

Public registrar, kiosk, interconnected cooperative of all homeless and housing agencies locally is needed.

REQUEST-

1) Please coordinate a plan(s) of ACTION for our local government to shelter ALL residents; with urgency and

PRIORITY to properly heed public measures that sustain human life.

2) Please assume the task of introducing vital plan(s) of ACTION to city and county councils and offices to initiate

a) immediate sheltering (reaching all demographics of care as identified by population needs)

b) longterm housing (reaching all demographics of care as identified by population needs)

c) uniform data network of all housing and homeless outreach resources (centralized accessible housing and resource website, kiosk, database for public use and critical two-way communication for information distribution and information retrieval to troubleshoot displacement)

Thank you and with best regards,

JC Mansfield
Bellingham, WA resident