

January 30, 2021

Dear Homeless Strategies Workgroup:

Because of recent Camp 210 events and the fact that our HSW agenda time constraints often don't allow opportunity for general discussion, I want to share a few thoughts. I've been part of HSW since early August 2020—Lisa, Joel, Emily, and I all joined at the same time.

My first thought is that I strongly agree with Joel's recent letter to HSW. I've learned a lot from all of you...and also the regularly-participating community observers...and have come to partially understand the commitment that you each bring to this work. However, as Joel described, HSW is moving far too slowly given the magnitude and complexity of homelessness in our community. I don't know if HSW's pace has always been slow, but it is certainly slow now.

I think that part of the reason for the slow pace is that some of us (perhaps many?) don't understand if HSW has the actual 'authority' to act on problems or if we are simply a group where agency reps and legislators report back on actions that they've taken between the bi-weekly HSW meetings. Our smaller Child and Family subcommittee (Emily, Joel, Lisa, myself along with newly-joined Mike Parker) has met 7 or 8 times and we keep returning to this bit of confusion—do we have the authority to act or do we just listen? Is our time on HSW well spent? A few days ago, I read Michael Lilliquist's detailed response to a community member in which Michael describes the history of HSW and how the question of "authority" vrs. "listening" has changed over time. Our Child and Family subcommittee did meet with Barry last week to express our need for an answer to this problem.

And parallel to the "pace" question is another that perhaps is confusing only to me: what is it that County and City leaders want HSW to do? As Emily phrases it, what is the "ask" from HSW leaders to the larger group?

Secondly, I offered in one of my first HSW meetings to research working models in this country and abroad of communities that have made significant changes in how housing is addressed for all residents. That was a frustrating research offer because all of my initial findings related to European cities (especially Vienna, Austria and Helsinki, Finland) that fundamentally changed their respective commitments of housing to one where all residents are guaranteed stable, quality housing that is not subject to the whims of eviction, large rental increases, or economic downturns. A few days ago, a Bellingham friend sent information from a US organization—Community Solutions—which among other things, provides many examples from their consortium of 80+ US cities and counties that have each made significant strides in systemic solutions for homelessness. I imagine that some of you already know of this group, but if you don't, I'd encourage you to go through parts of their website—especially the part about their core values and some of the working models around our country. I'm not suggesting that Community Solutions is the best organization serving this purpose—there may be other groups doing comparable work—it's just that they seem to provide a very good resource for the work that we are engaged in here. I personally find a 'working models' approach useful because these changes are taking place in communities that are experiencing all of the same conditions that we experience here (Covid and pandemic troubles, racial justice inequities, inadequate funding for public needs, political turmoil,...). The Community Solutions folks also address many things that HSW folks have raised such as: the inadequacies of a single annual Point-in-Time count; the need to develop "upstream" approaches rather than just "after-the-fact, downstream" reactive supports; and the need for a single overarching Consortium of Care-type organization in each community with the authority to

act. And lastly, I'll just add that their video metaphor of throwing a baseball vrs. guiding a bird is by itself worth watching. The link to Community Solutions is: <https://community.solutions/our-solutions/built-for-zero/>

Lastly, we are each caught up in the intense issues around Camp 210—most of you far more than me. I'll agree one more time with Joel's recent letter by saying that pushing forth simplistic, rhetorical, one-sided proposals/criticisms won't help any kind of solutions. For me, HSW must be able to act in a timely manner on some of the immediate crisis needs, but should never lose sight of the longer-term systemic approach of providing empowering and respectful housing solutions.

Sincerely...and thank you to everyone for your work,

Michael Berres