



WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL

Homeless Strategies Workgroup

Friday, March 5, 2021

Meeting #39 SUMMARY

Time: **1:30 p.m. – 2:50 p.m.**

Location: Remote online meeting

Members in Attendance:

Barry Buchanan, Chair, Whatcom County Councilmember
Rud Browne, Whatcom County Councilmember
Michael Lilliquist, Bellingham City Council Member
Gene Knutson, 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
Teri Bryant for Mike Parker, Opportunity Council Representative
Anne Deacon for Ann Beck, Whatcom County Health
Karen Burke, Housing Advisory Committee Member
Jason McGill, Northwest Youth Services Representative
David Crass for Florence Simon, Bellingham Police, Deputy Chief
Guy Occhiogrosso, Bellingham/Whatcom Chamber of Commerce Representative
Markis D. Stidham, Homeless Advocate
Emily O'Connor, Homeless children and families
Michael Berres, Special populations
Lisa Marx, Schools

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

Councilmember Buchanan welcomed members.

HSW Members approved Meeting Summary (Meeting 38 – February 19, 2021) (Markis Stidham abstained).

2. Scope and Purpose of HSW

Anne Deacon led members in a discussion of the short-term goals:

A. Tiny home villages:

- i. Unity Village 25
 - ii. Swift Haven 25
 - iii. Garden View Village - New site with LIHI and Road2Home, opening end of May 2021
 - iv. Finding a more permanent place for any of these locations
- In total, between the three sites there will be 80 -85 structures available in the community.

Tara Sundin answered questions from members regarding Garden View Village:

- Delivery of 20 tiny homes from Whatcom County via 360 modular. LIHI requested units be 8x12 minimum.

- Five (5) 8x8 units received from Whatcom County via 360 modular used for office/storage space (1 goes to HomesNow and 4 to Garden View Village)
- Another 15 structures at Garden View Village will be built on site by community volunteers
- Qualify for residency through the Homeless Services Center coordinated entry
- Goal is to move residents into housing, and an on-site case manager will assist with this
- Garden View will be staffed and enrollment will depend on needs of the population. With staffing, Garden View can accept higher need individuals than HomesNow is able to accept.
- Cost of operating a staffed site with case management at approximately \$500,000 per year, serving around 30-36 households (30-50 people)

Emily O’Conner highlighted that the cost to permanently rehouse a household is a little less than \$11,000, whereas a staffed emergency shelter tiny home site for a year is around \$15,000. Tara Sundin clarified the goal is 6 month stays and the hope is that per household it will be cheaper than a 12-month cost.

B. Hans Erchinger-Davis discussed the work of the Lighthouse Mission (310 year-round beds, plus 39 severe weather beds), including the following:

i. Outreach includes:

- Shower Trailer
- Street Connect Van
- Joy Riders – electric scooters with backpacks of coffee
- Laundry trailer
- Basecamp – meet basic needs (190-200 spaces, men and women, 24 hour operations). Beds/storage – delivered at the end of the March
- 39 Beds at Drop-In Center, operated by Christ the King (severe weather shelter)

ii. Recovery Programs include:

- Agape – 60 women, including 16 kids currently
- Ascent – 40, with additional 10 beds for mental health needs

iii. Restoration

- Services aimed at getting people back into housing and school after they’ve been housed

C. Other shelters

- Sun House Community services
- Domestic Violence Shelter
- Interfaith Coalition (families)
- PAD at Northwest Youth Services
- YWCA, added shelter capacity for older women and now has both emergency housing and longer term transitional housing. Recently YWCA opened the ballroom
- Motels provide additional shelter capacity (for families)

HSW members requested a complete list of shelter beds from County and City staff, including information from partners about gaps in shelter. Members identified some people don’t need to go to emergency shelter, they could start with rapid rehousing – the entry system doesn’t always have to start with emergency shelter.

HSW members discussed the tools for families:

- Rapid rehousing and permanent housing are the best options.
- Additional case managers are needed to address family needs.
- Priority of families with children first.

HSW members discussed collecting and reviewing shelter numbers and data to better understand what are the best next steps.

Anne Deacon discussed the need to communicate needs, best practices, and approaches, and she announced a new communications specialist position at the County to start in the next couple of weeks.

HSW members discussed taking a 4-to-6 week break to allow staff to collect information and data and put together a draft set of recommendations for the committee.

Riley Sweeney discussed a Ferndale Home fund planned for the ballot.

Motion carried: HSW recommends that County Council to take up a resolution on HB1590 sales tax countywide (rather than just in the City of Bellingham).

(Emily O'Conner moved, Michael Berres seconded, passed unanimously)

3. Public Comments

The following speakers provided comments:

- Doug Gustafson
- Behnoosh Armani
- Desiree Espericueta