

From: dbobena@yahoo.com
To: SAC
Cc: Council; Todd Donovan; Kaylee Galloway; Barry Buchanan; Carol Frazey; Kathy Kershner; Tyler Byrd; Ben Elenbaas; Satpal Sidhu; ccmail@cob.org; mayorsoffice@cob.org; Health; Public Health Advisory Board
Subject: Prioritize focus to generate restorative services
Date: Monday, September 5, 2022 6:45:24 PM

Dear Stakeholder Advisory Committee:

I read the Cascadia Daily News article from their August 24, 2022 print edition that highlighted content shared in the July 14, 2022 letter from all seven mayors of the incorporated cities in Whatcom County. This is a link to the online version of the article: <https://www.cascadiadaily.com/news/2022/aug/23/whatcom-mayors-to-jail-planners-action-is-needed-now/>

I just located a copy of the letter that is posted on the City of Blaine website, and wonder if the Stakeholder Advisory Committee did not receive a copy of it, because it is not listed on the "Comments on Justice Project" page. <https://www.ci.blaine.wa.us/DocumentCenter/View/18521/Email-from-Samuel-Crawford-dated-07-14-22>

In reviewing the letter, I understand that it was directed to Whatcom County Council Members. Meanwhile, the mayors did request in the letter that the Stakeholder Advisory Committee come up with a recommendation for size and location of a jail facility by September 1. Since this is the case, I request that a copy of the letter be added to the Justice Project comments page.

Regardless of why the letter has not been posted in the Justice Project space online, it is alarming to me that the mayors are making an effort that threatens to at least partially circumvent the process of submitting decisions regarding new behavioral health and/or jail facilities to the public for a vote.

The mayors expressed their belief there is a need to "dramatically accelerate plans to construct that new jail facility." But pushing their community members to the side while claiming that they "believe" their citizens (as if it is all of them, while having no idea if it is a majority of them) demand a "date certain" for constructing a jail facility, poses a danger of us reliving unfortunate jail history, namely: the construction of a jail with not enough services supporting restoration and well-being, while what little services that had been provided were gutted in favor of incarcerating people in those previous service spaces. (By the way, it was the mayors themselves that pointed out in April how, in the past, services had been removed from the current jail in order to be able to incarcerate more people in it. <https://www.whatcomcounty.us/DocumentCenter/View/66119/2022->

[04-18---Small-City-Caucus---WC-Mayors-New-Jail-Letter-](#))

We are in a unique period where many failures of our existing systems are colliding to create an even greater level of injustice than usual. This is all the more reason to focus, not just within the SAC, but government-wide, on taking unprecedented action to develop an increasingly trauma-informed justice system and promoting abundant community-driven services, instead of falling back on the instinct to just hurry and make space to lock lots more people up and perpetuate old, damaging, and unjust practices.

Making additional space to lock up greater numbers of people - on top of nearly 300 people estimated recently to be in the jail who have not yet been convicted and are awaiting trial, for example - is a scary prospect on many levels. It does nothing to address the horrid situation of people being denied a speedy trial, and if anything, makes it possible for even more people to be held in the jail while being denied their rights.

The unfortunate struggles at the 22 North permanent supportive housing residential community in Bellingham make one thing very clear. Just delivering a space, however good the mission of the project, will not deliver on providing safety and justice to the community. There is a critical need for continued support and partnership in the project that includes investing the level of funds needed to realistically fulfill the mission, and most of all, generating staff and community participation that provides services to fulfill essential needs and create well-being.

In closing their July 14 letter, the mayors warned that "The time to act is now, before the significant risks posed to our community by the current situation become insurmountable."

However, taking action to rush the construction of a jail in the interests of making a place where a greater number of people can be locked up, whether or not individuals legally and morally should be there, only ensures an increase in trauma and injustice.

We are severely lacking services in Whatcom County that include mental and behavioral health, restorative justice, and community well-being services. Without accelerating connections with and empowerment of community members to provide them, we can end up facing a more tragic future of injustice and threats to health and safety than the tragic history many in our community have been subjected to, over past decades and right up to the present.

A measure of some kind should be set to ensure that incarceration is only an endgame for people for whom effective restorative services have not yet been identified. For example, it can be required that any action taken to create a facility that incarcerates one person must be accompanied by

action to create facilities to provide services to multiple individuals based on a projection of needs for those services. In other words, if we incarcerate 200 people in our jail, we can require that we must additionally provide diverse services such as those listed in the Sequential Intercept Model, and others the community identifies a need for, that can effectively supply the needs of a number - such as 2000 - in a way that restores them to health and well-being while it restores justice to the community.

I call on you all to continue to consult your community for data, input, and engagement. I call on you all to advise the County Council to not ignore the many gaps in services of which you all have been recently made aware and to answer the call of community members for services which will effectively provide justice and well-being.

Sincerely,
Dena Jensen
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