



WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL

Homeless Strategies Workgroup

Meeting Summary - Meeting #26

Date: Friday, August 21, 2020
Time: 10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Location: Remote online meeting

Members in attendance:

Ann Beck (with Anne Deacon), Whatcom County Health Department
Michael Berres, Special Populations
Barry Buchanan, Chair, Whatcom County Councilmember
Karen Burke, Housing Advisory Committee Member
Jenn Daly for Dean Wight, Northwest Youth Services Representative
Seth Fleetwood, City of Bellingham, Mayor
Mike Hilley, Whatcom County EMS
Joel Kennedy, Homeless children and families
Michael Lilliquist, City of Bellingham Councilmember
Emily O'Connor, Homeless children and families
Mike Parker, Opportunity Council Representative
Bridget Reeves for Hans Erchinger-Davis, Lighthouse Mission Ministries Representative
Markis D. Stidham, Homeless Advocate

Meeting summary prepared by Cathy Halka.

1) Welcome

Whatcom County Councilmember Barry Buchanan welcomed members.
Staff called the roll of members in attendance – see above.
Members approved the meeting summary for Meeting 25 – July 17, 2020.

2) CARES funding for homelessness/sheltering, Anne Deacon

Ann Deacon discussed the \$16M CARES dollars available to the County, of which \$700,000 is dedicated to housing and mortgage assistance for households with 50-80% area median income. A request for proposals is coming out soon for shelter providers, with \$400,000 of funding available, and County staff has alerted area organizations to the upcoming RFP release. CARES ACT funding ends in October. Shelter grant will last a few years and provide long term opportunities. Members discussed funding does not exclude services for LGBTQI persons. Mike Parker suggested members submit comments to HUD rules regarding including LGBTQ persons as eligible for services providing through funding.

3) Update on Byron Ave Quarantine and Isolation Facility, Anne Deacon

Anne Deacon discussed that currently there are no occupants at the facility, but it has been occupied by at least one person for most of its operation. Deacon mentioned that the County will have to decide how to move forward when CARES funding runs out as it is a very expensive facility to run.

4) Drop-In Center move (BHS to Cornwall Ave), Bridget Reeves

Bridget Reeves discussed the Drop-In Center including the following:

- Drop-In center moved from BHS to the Public Market building on July 17th. The new shelter site is named Base Camp.
- Lighthouse Mission is seeing an increase in shelter populations since April with a 21% increase this month compared to last year. The shelter population has been steady over the last 4-5 months. Base Camp has hosted around 160 adult individuals each night and 2 families (single parents with children).
- Lighthouse Mission meets every two weeks with a neighborhood advisory forum.

Members discussed the need for long-term solutions for people using shelters and how because of COVID there are people using shelters for multiple months. We didn't have enough housing before and now there is no place for additional people.

Members also discussed shelter locations not meeting the needs of families and dedicating time on the next meeting agenda for a more in-depth discussion and strategy session.

Members discussed a need for the Workgroup meet more frequently and focus more on action items and less on updates. Members approved meeting every two weeks for an hour with additional time for public comments.

5) Preparing for winter shelter needs

Members discussed winter shelter needs based on activities last year and trends in shelter needs this year, including the following:

- Volunteer needs may arise this year due to older populations limiting risks of COVID exposure;
- County funds spent last year were around \$20,000 because many partner organizations did most of it on their own;
- There is a need to focus on a severe weather shelter;
- Communications to those needing services can be improved;
- A safe parking location can fill an important need and link people to other services. City of Bellingham has \$200,000 funding available for a host and operator, and is still looking for partners. It is possible that HSW Members could help identify a partner;
- Camping options and challenges such as site clean ups.

6) Public Comment

The following speakers provided comments:

- Doug Gustafson
- Katherine Orlowski
- Marisa Schoeppach
- Justin Woodum
- Heather Dalberg
- Shari Lapoff
- Dena Jensen
- Lynn Allen