

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL  
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Todd Donovan  
Ben Elenbaas  
Carol Frazey  
Kathy Kershner

## WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL

# Homeless Strategies Workgroup

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## Meeting Summary – Meeting #27

Date: Friday, September 11, 2020  
Time: 10:30 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.  
Location: Remote online meeting, for more information visit

### Members in Attendance:

Barry Buchanan, HSW Chair, Whatcom County Councilmember  
Michael Lilliquist, Bellingham City Council Member  
Seth Fleetwood, City of Bellingham, Mayor  
Riley Sweeney, City of Ferndale, Communications Officer  
Ann Beck with Anne Deacon, Whatcom County Health Department  
Jenn Daly for Dean Wight, Northwest Youth Services Representative  
David Crass for Florence Simon, Bellingham Police, Deputy Chief  
Mike Hilley, Whatcom County EMS  
Markis D. Stidham, Homeless Advocate representative  
Joel Kennedy, Homeless children and families representative  
Emily O'Connor, Homeless children and families representative  
Michael Berres, Special populations representative  
Lisa Marx, Schools representative

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### **1) Welcome, HSW Chair, Whatcom County Councilmember Barry Buchanan**

Councilmember Buchanan welcomed members.

HSW members approved the meeting summary from Meeting #26, August 21, 2020.

HSW members discussed and agreed on a new meeting time at 1:30pm.

### **2) Ideas for Strategies Chart**

HSW members discussed the List of Alternative Strategies & Responses, including the following ideas:

- Rest stops: Greg winter from the Opportunity Council indicated the project is still underway to create a rest stop but has been delayed by the COVID-19 emergency.
- State funding: Members discussed a need to put together a proposal to seek state funding.
- Shelter funding: a \$1.2M grant is available to Whatcom County with a portion dedicated to Bellingham. An RFP was issued to request shelter providers. Funding will be available over the next 3 years. County Health Department staff reached out to partners and are waiting for RFP responses to come in next week. Shelter beds must be 24 hours and fully operational by December of this year. Tent encampments are eligible for the grant, but must comply with all city codes, including zoning, and be operational 365 days per year.
- 1406 funding: Members discussed this funding is for permanent housing and not for temporary shelter.
- Pallet Shelters: Markis Stidham discussed these prefabricated structures that be used for encampments.

- Asset Map: Lisa Marx discussed a need for an asset map and a master list of community partners.

Councilmember Buchanan asked members to be prepared for a more in-depth discussion at the next meeting.

### **3) Identify location and partner for safe parking**

Rick Sepler (City of Bellingham) indicated that the planning department has had inquiries regarding safe parking and an RFP will be coming out soon. The safe parking location will not be a permanent residential location; it will be more of an overnight facility. Rick Sepler will provide an update on the RFP at the next HSW meeting.

Members discussed concerns about safe camping locations, especially for people who don't have cars to participate in a safe parking program. Additional discussions were about the potential of combining a tent or tiny home encampment with safe parking.

### **4) Year-round sheltering for families, Emily O'Connor**

Emily O'Connor provided an update to HSW member regarding the state of emergency shelter options for families with children, including the following:

- 81 families are currently on a waiting list for housing. This is an increase from several years ago when the number was in the teens.
- Motel stays is the main options for emergency shelter for families, at a cost of \$300,000-\$400,000 per year. Some families are in motels for 5 months. Motels are not good places for kids. There are no kitchens or places to play.
- Options for buying an apartment building may be better suited for permanent supportive housing, and something else is needed for families who aren't ready for a 1-year lease.
- Family Promise provides shelter for families but there are limited spaces and requirements some families can't meet.
- Often families will separate and place kids in a safe place while parents sleep in a car or elsewhere.
- As a community, we need to ask ourselves if we are okay with the options we have for families experiencing homelessness

Members discussed the need to take childhood trauma out of homelessness.

Michael Berres, Joel Kennedy, Emily O'Connor, and Lisa Marx volunteered to research best practices and examples from other communities and presenting research at the next meeting.

### **5) Winter Shelter – temporary and emergency**

Members discussed current shelter beds available including 200 beds at Basecamp (Lighthouse Mission Ministries) and another 35 beds at Christ The King (specific population to be determined.) Another church is considering sheltering and in discussions with the Health Department staff. Any HSW members should reach out to Ann Beck if they know of any other interested parties.

Northwest Youth Services will not be having a winter shelter for young people because there is no funding through the City of Bellingham this year.

#### **6) Additional Action Items**

Members discussed the activities related to Bellingham Police Department camp clean ups and procedures in place for determining if a camp requires clearing. David Crass indicated that BPD and Councilmember Stone are finalizing draft documents next week. Seth Fleetwood asked that an update from BPS be provided at the next HSW meeting.

#### **7) Public Comment**

The following speakers provided comments:

- Doug Gustafson
- Krystal Rodriguez
- Mary MacIntosh
- Audrey Douglas
- Shari Lapoff