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WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL

Homeless Strategies Workgroup

Friday, February 28, 2020 Meeting #22 Summary

Time: 8:30 – 10:00 a.m.

Location: Whatcom County Civic Center Annex,
322 N. Commercial, Garden Room

Members in attendance:

Ann Beck/Anne Deacon, Whatcom County Health Department
Barry Buchanan (HSW Chair), Whatcom County Councilmember
Hans Erchinger-Davis, Lighthouse Mission
Michael Lilliquist, City of Bellingham Council Member
Dan Hammill, City of Bellingham Council Member
Nick Lewis, Lummi Councilmember
Dean Wight, Northwest Youth Services
Mike Parker, Opportunity Council
Markis D. Stidham, Homeless Advocate

Meeting Summary Prepared By: Cathy B. Halka, AICP, Legislative Analyst, Whatcom County Council

1. Welcome and Introductions

Councilmember Buchanan welcomed the group. A quorum of the members was not present and minutes were tabled for the next meeting.

2. Expanding Membership of the Homeless Strategies Workgroup

Councilmember Buchanan discussed County Council Resolution (Res. 2020-010; February 25, 2020) amending the HSW membership to include new members:

- Special populations representing domestic violence, behavioral health, and/or elder care and medically fragile
- Homeless children and families
- Schools

3. Status Updates on Shelters

Ann Beck gave an update on shelter activity, including the following:

- NWYS and Civic Field shelters had the highest guest count at 41 degrees
- 56 volunteers trained and 52 signed up for shifts
- Average shelter stays was 173 people/night
- 236 additional bed nights during the 9 nights

HSW members discussed the impacts of cold and wet weather on shelter numbers and shelter stays increasing at the end of the month.

Mike Parker discussed the Civic Field shelter including the Feb 28th closing date and efforts to clear out after that as well as a recommendation to start winter shelter planning this summer to be ready for next winter.

Hans Erchinger-Davis discussed anticipated increases in shelter guests at the Mission after the Civic Field winter shelter closes.

Markis Stidham provided an update on HomesNow, which posted a notice of intent at their next site, the Clean Green site.

Councilmember Nick Lewis provided an update on the crisis center opening on Monday, lobbying in Olympia for funding, a resolution to treat homelessness as a public health priority rather than a housing priority, and a shelter in the county to house women and children.

4. HSW Strategies and Action Items

Anne Deacon discussed proposed funding from the state for shelters including knowing the final budget around mid-March and then being able to understand how much funding will be available for Whatcom County.

HSW members discussed shelters needed including for women, medically fragile, and families with children (prioritized by the Family Action Plan).

HSW members discussed the cost and effectiveness of tiny home villages including a comparison with the cost of the women's shelter over three months, paid versus unpaid staff costs, and land costs. Rick Sepler added that providing staffing for three shift per day for seven days a week is \$40,000 a year. Nick Lewis suggested partnering with other to provide on-site management so as to not put the burden on one agency.

Rick Sepler discussed a current project that will look at populations not being served by housing. They are using data and assessments

HSW members discussed a funding opportunity identified in HB 1590 (1/10th of 1% sales tax potential through councilmanic action). Rep. Doglio is the lead sponsor of HB1590, and it includes a housing and mental health component.

HSW members discussed presenting priorities to the Whatcom County Housing Advisory Committee (WCHAC). Anne Deacon discussed a special meeting of WCHAC on March 12th.

Members discussed shelter priorities including for families, elderly/medically fragile, and women.

- Regarding family shelters, HSW members discussed community made a commitment to not let families sleep in cars, what makes a good family shelter, and motel stays for families. They continued to discuss how many homeless families are out there at one time including numbers available through the coordinated entry system, which sees around 50 families with children. Hans Erchinger-Davis discussed Lighthouse Mission's waiting list for family shelter, as well as people that show up after hours who might benefit from the availability of emergency shelter space like Mary's Place (Seattle). Members continued to discuss HomesNow's interest in creating a family camp, definitions for tiny homes versus cottages, master lease options, and the importance of providing services and interventions at each

step.

- Regarding elderly and medically fragile shelters, HSW members discussed coordination with Peace Health and potential state funding for day homes and elder care.
- Regarding women's shelters, HSW members discussed the success of the winter women's shelter, capacity relief it provided at the Mission, and the Point-In-Time county may show the population in need – report comes out May/June.

Anne Deacon suggested a year-round women's shelter and further added that the growing population of people experiencing homelessness includes elderly women

HSW members discussed a City of Bellingham RFP for a safe parking site with funding from \$0-\$200,000 and the City's role.

Councilmember Nick Lewis discussed a poverty report (information to be emailed out to HSW members) and asked that agencies sign a letter of support for the work and send it to the Governor's office. He further discussed Nooksack Tribe's creation of a homeless strategy task force and Catherine Ramiro may be a good contact regarding an upcoming March meeting.

HSW members discussed a focus on communications including a kiosk or App for information, check-ins, finding services, and engaging people in services on their own terms and time. HSW members discussed an estimated 50% of people visiting a shelter have smart phones, but phones are not active unless connected to WiFi. Safe Link – requires an address.

Mike Parker discussed a facilitated ranking exercise as suggested activity for a future HSW meeting.

5. Communications Subcommittee

Ann Beck discussed the communications subcommittee work on the 1-page handout, which is still underway.

The Subcommittee is working on an additional project to develop a scope of work for a larger communication plans for homelessness in the community.

Members discussed communications regarding the HomesNow Clean Green Site and a need for the community meeting to take place in mid- to late-March. Thinking about how community meetings are conducted to foster positive education and communication.

6. Next Steps

The next meeting is March 13th.

7. Public Comment

HSW members heard comments from Carmen Gilmore (Basics PNW) and Markis Stidham read Dena Jensen's comments into the record.