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WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL

Homeless Strategies Workgroup

MEMO

Date: May 7, 2020
To: Homeless Strategies Workgroup Members
From: Councilmember Barry Buchanan
RE: Homelessness Activities during COVID-19 Emergency

As you know, the Homeless Strategies Workgroup (HSW) suspended all meetings, and HSW members will instead receive a memo update twice monthly. Memos will also be posted on the [HSW Meeting Information page](#). Please email any feedback, ideas, or questions you may have to Cathy Halka at chalka@co.whatcom.wa.us.

Shelter at Bellingham High School

Lighthouse Mission Ministries (LMM) continues to operate a shelter at Bellingham High School (BHS). During the last two weeks, the occupancy high was 172 people and the low was 135 people. Since opening the shelter at BHS, the highest occupancy was 182 people. No one seeking shelter has been turned away. Food service meals ranges between 150-210 people served per meal.

LMM is working closely with the Whatcom County Health Department and community paramedics to make sure protocols and procedures reflect the most up to date guidance. LMM follows Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines for mat distancing in the gym, see *Interim Guidance for Homeless Service Providers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)*: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/homeless-shelters/plan-prepare-respond.html>. Posted signs show CDC guidelines for social distancing, hand washing, and sanitation. Tapelines on the ground indicate 6-foot separations for food lines and check-in lines. Staff reserves the right to ask someone to leave if they choose to not follow the guidelines. The increase in space provided by relocating the shelter to BHS is one of the most effective contributors to social distancing as it provides considerably larger outdoor space and common areas than at the LMM facility.

LMM and Whatcom Unified Command initiated discussions regarding the process and timeline for moving the shelter back to the LMM site. The current timeline for moving out of the BHS site is undetermined but will be late July or early August at the latest to allow for Bellingham

Public Schools to prepare the site for a fall school reopening. LMM is working closely with Bellingham Public Schools and Bellingham Police to address any concerns regarding the BHS Shelter site.

For more information about LMM and the BHS Shelter, please see the FAQs at <https://www.thelighthousemission.org/news/drop-in-center-faqs/>

New Resources for Housing

The Whatcom County Health Department has identified **\$1,728,914** in new housing resources related to COVID-19:

New Housing Resources Related to COVID-19 Whatcom County 4/28/20				
Source	Funding Type	Amount	Current Commitment of Funding	Purpose
HB 1406	Proceeds from local sales tax	\$210,664	\$210,664 in Whatcom Homeless Service Center contract	Provide rental assistance to households with income 60% of AMI and under, AND inability to pay rent due to COVID-19 outbreak.
Skagit HOME Consortium	HOME Tenant-Based Rental Assistance (TBRA)	\$112,429	\$112,429 committed by Skagit HOME Consortium to the Opportunity Council.	To augment current TBRA allocation; provides low-income families with rental assistance to address immediate housing needs and help prevent spread of COVID-19.
Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG)	Federal funding passed through from WA State Dept. of Commerce	Pending notification from Commerce; estimated at \$500,000	Funding pending receipt of contract from Commerce; none committed.	Rental assistance, street outreach, HMIS, prevention assistance, rapid rehousing, and emergency shelter operations and expansion to ensure social distancing and safety related to COVID-19 pandemic.
COVID-19 Outbreak Emergency Housing Grant	WA State Department of Commerce	\$905,821	\$905,821 committed for relocation of LHM Drop-In Center to BHS; staffing, operations, I & Q motel lease, and laundry for BHS, & admin.	Isolation and quarantine beds; increased safety in emergency shelter by increasing space through social distancing (i.e. relocation, added sites); costs associated with public health needs of people experiencing homelessness or displaced from former housing due to COVID-19.
		\$1,728,914 Grand Total	\$500,000 Uncommitted Funding (ESG)	

Byron Avenue Quarantine & Isolation Facility

The quarantine and isolation facility located at 3701 Byron Avenue opened on April 22, 2020. All contracts are in place for services. Due to the relatively low numbers of infection in our community, the facility is experiencing low utilization.

Additional Resources

- Whatcom Unified Command: <https://whatcomcovid.com/>
- Washington State Department of Health, Dashboard
<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/NovelCoronavirusOutbreak2020COVID19/DataDashboard>
- Lighthouse Mission Ministries, Bellingham High School Shelter, FAQs
<https://www.thelighthousemission.org/news/drop-in-center-faqs/>