

From: dbobena@yahoo.com
To: [Cathy Halka](#); [Carol Frazey](#); [Barry Buchanan](#); [Michael W. Lilliquist](#); mayorsoffice@cob.org; [Ann Beck](#); [Daniel C. Hammill](#); michael_parker@whatcomhsc.org; michaels@portofbellingham.com; [Mike Hilley](#); [Tyler Schroeder](#); rileysweeney@cityofferndale.org; [Health](#); hanse@thelighthousemission.org
Cc: [Satpal Sidhu](mailto:Satpal.Sidhu); [Council](#); cmail@cob.org; [David G. Doll](#)
Subject: Regarding topics from today's 8/21/20 Homeless Strategies Workgroup meeting
Date: Friday, August 21, 2020 6:22:50 PM

Dear Homeless Strategies Workgroup:

Thank you for working hard to try to accommodate my public comment at today's, August 21, 2020 Homeless Strategies Workgroup meeting. Each time I selected to unmute myself, somehow you all couldn't hear me. (One of the times it asked me for a password, which I didn't have available - yikes!) I could hear you all, though.

In light of the discussion about long-term and short-term goals for solutions in providing shelter for people who do not have it, I was thinking it could be good for some sort of survey to be shared with HSW members in order to identify something like top 3 or top 5 long-term advisory goals and the same for short-term advisory goals. You could also decide if you want community members to weigh in on the survey, as well. A consolidated list could be made and refined to a list of, for example, 5 long-term goals which get the most "top 5 goal" votes and the same for the top 5 short-term goals that the HSW would be working to address for a designated period of time. Then you all could take a second look at that list every 6 months or so, to see if priorities have changed and goals need to be adjusted.

I think that right now you definitely can't shy away from working on the short-term list concurrently with working on the long-term list, until, as Emily O'Connor noted, short-term needs begin to drop off as a result of long-term needs being supplied.

I also recommend that all HSW members and City and County officials and staff start working with all those who are providing and proposing solutions in the same way they often emphasize working with businesses, which is finding ways to get to yes regarding their proposals and solutions. Everyone should be trying to facilitate everyone providing homeless solutions, not just some. We need all the effective solutions - all the gaps filled. Service providers should not have to be placed in positions where they are in fear or mistrust of officials or agencies, or where they are being parented by officials or agencies. They need to be partnered with and empowered by them. We cannot let unsheltered people go unserved because of an outlook that volunteer efforts are not sustainable, when we have volunteers who have been faithfully serving for years and who continue to be ready to try to expand efforts of homeless outreach and the services they provide people who are unsheltered. Instead, we should foster the dedication of those volunteers and get them the help they need,

so their efforts are guaranteed to be sustainable.

I agree with Markis Stidham, that we all need to take actions to ensure that Bellingham Police Department and the City of Bellingham are on the same page with the Whatcom County Health Department and Center for Disease Control guidelines regarding keeping unsheltered people safe in camps during COVID-19. I call on those with the influence and authority to take actions to ensure that clean-ups that evict campers from camps that do not pose a public health risk, are not performed, and to ensure there is someone with health expertise making the determination regarding the public health condition of the camps. For those camps that do pose a health risk, hopefully Council Members Lilliquist and Hammill will promptly verify there is a published BPD policy supporting Health Department and CDC recommendations for homeless camps during COVID-19 and that follow-up is done to make sure policy is making it to officers in the field and is being followed. I have copied this email to Chief Doll to support the call for that published policy.

I am still very discouraged hearing about where the County is at in regard to severe weather sheltering. I agree that there is some value to having created guidelines last year, but those guidelines need revising because there are elements in those guidelines that allowed efforts to provide severe weather relief to people without shelter, to fail many of them. I feel that communication, alone, is going to do very little to fill available severe weather shelters if those shelters continue to just suddenly pop-up, primarily based on whether the Lighthouse Mission says they anticipate being at capacity on a given set of nights.

Early this year there was a February 14, 2020 HSW meeting where Bridget Reeves acknowledged that people had had to be turned away from the Drop-In Center during a time of cold nights leading up to that meeting (night time National Weather Service Bellingham temperatures, Sunday through the date of the meeting were, 28, 31, 41, 36, and 40) when severe weather shelters were not open. She had explained that Lighthouse Mission was doing everything they could to expand their own capacity, and still people were being turned away.

The week after that meeting, there were numerous nights when temperatures were at or below the 28 degree threshold, when severe weather shelters were not made available.

I am attaching calendars with nightly Bellingham temperatures from the National Weather Service from partway through December 2019, on through March of this year, with the 6 nights noted during all those months when severe weather shelters were opened. There were 10 days in those 4 months for which I have recorded temperatures, when nighttime temperatures were 28 or below, and no access to severe weather shelters was offered. There were 26 days within that period when nighttime temperatures were 32 degrees and below when severe weather shelters

were not offered. When I made the calendars in March, temperature data was not available for early December and November. I know there were a few nights in November when severe weather shelters were opened.

This year, even though Base Camp will likely have greater and higher-quality capacity than the Drop-In Center had last year, it sounded like perhaps it is being considered by HSW to not offer the Civic Field location. This leads me to believe that sheltering capacity may not be noticeably increasing during winter months. Just as it really didn't really increase last year either, due to Fountain Community Church not being able to offer a woman's shelter. Civic Field took that role and replaced that missing availability of beds.

So, there is the issue of Lighthouse Mission being granted (and burdened) with being a determiner for if severe weather shelters are to be suddenly opened and being offered on a two-or-three-days-at-a-time basis which, I believe, is reducing access to severe weather shelter access. And then there is the 28 degree temperature trigger, limiting that access as well.

These determiners are hindering any sense of predictability for people to know that if it's freezing out at night - and 32 degrees is a freezing temperature - there are shelters that will be available, no matter what. People out in freezing conditions should get to know and count on, at least that much. Additionally, it may be more predictable for providers to know that when it is forecast to be freezing at night that they will be open for a one week minimum, with potential to extend as severe weather persists, and this could be something that could be beneficial and aid predictability for potential nightly residents of severe weather shelters, as well. If the goal is to fill beds when they are offered, then these seem likely ways to accomplish that.

We didn't do any better during the 2019-2020 winter season than we did the year before (and that winter of 2018-2019, there had been no advance preparation for sheltering people.) We may have done worse this time. We can't let that happen again. This time needs to be better, and we can do it. We all need to support and move each other forward.

Sincerely,
Dena Jensen
Birch Bay, WA

dbobena@yahoo.com

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