

RESOLUTION NO. \_\_\_\_\_

**AFFIRMING THAT AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS ARE A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS AND REQUESTING UPDATES ON COUNTY ACTIONS**

**WHEREAS**, there are many factors leading to housing instability and the most frequent hardship is lack of affordable and available housing; and

**WHEREAS**, on November 19, 2019, the Whatcom County Council approved 'A Home for Everyone: Strategic Plan to End Homelessness in Whatcom County' ([AB2019-576](#)) ; and

**WHEREAS**, the Strategic Plan's Point-In-Time count identifies the top factors leading to homelessness as housing loss, unemployment, and mental illness; and

**WHEREAS**, the Strategic Plan identifies seven strategies to address homelessness:

1. A centralized point of entry
2. Rapid rehousing
3. Permanent supportive housing
4. Increase the supply of affordable housing
5. Homelessness prevention and diversion
6. Interim housing, and
7. Economic security; and

**WHEREAS**, the Whatcom County Coalition to End Homelessness (WCCEH) is a consortium of public and private agencies and non-profits that collaborate to create a system of housing and services, with the goal of moving homeless families and individuals to permanent housing and self-sufficiency; and

**WHEREAS**, the WCCEH oversees the implementation of the local Continuum of Care and makes recommendations for filling gaps in services; and

**WHEREAS**, the WCCEH's [2023 Annual Report](#) provides a deeper understanding of Whatcom County residents experiencing homelessness with information from the annual Point-In-Time survey and public school students and their families; and

**WHEREAS**, the 2023 annual Point-In-Time survey counted 1,059 individuals from 850 different households that were experiencing homelessness in Whatcom County on January 26, 2023 ; and

1           **WHEREAS**, between 2022 and 2023, there was a 27% increase in persons  
2 experiencing homelessness and a 33% increase in households experiencing homelessness;  
3 and  
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5           **WHEREAS**, the numbers of both individuals and households counted in 2023 are the  
6 highest reported since counting began in 2008; and  
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8           **WHEREAS**, of the 1,059 persons counted in the 2023 annual Point-In-Time survey,  
9 711 slept in shelters or transitional housing facilities and 348 were unsheltered; and  
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11           **WHEREAS**, between 2022 and 2023, unsheltered individuals counted increased by  
12 91% and unsheltered households increased by 110%; and  
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14           **WHEREAS**, over the last three years, an average of 88 households annually  
15 participated in the motel stays program for families with children; and  
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17           **WHEREAS**, homelessness among public school students increased between 2021 and  
18 2022 to a total of 372 students, with notable increases in the Lynden (103%) and Nooksack  
19 (250%) school Districts, likely flood related, and decreases in Blaine (-24%) and Mt. Baker  
20 school districts (-13%); and  
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22           **WHEREAS**, the annual Point-In-Time count is based on a limited federal definition of  
23 homelessness and does not include people who have unstable access to housing; and  
24

25           **WHEREAS**, the Whatcom County Health and Community Services Department funds  
26 affordable housing, interim housing, supportive services, and permanent supportive housing  
27 with funding collected from a variety of sources ; and  
28

29           **WHEREAS**, Whatcom County specific funding sources include document recording  
30 fees, Consolidated Homeless Grant, Housing and Essential Needs Grant, Veterans Millage,  
31 Behavioral Health Sales Tax and Mental Health Millage, totaling 26% (2019) of total  
32 community investments; and  
33

34           **WHEREAS**, Whatcom County works with community partners to address  
35 homelessness, and in 2019 the County's share was approximately 26% with additional  
36 community investments from the City of Bellingham (26%), Housing Authority and other  
37 federal funding (21%), and private contributions (26%); and  
38

39           **WHEREAS**, according to the US Census, the Whatcom County median household  
40 income in 2021 (1-year estimate) was \$72,055 and according to Redfin.com the median sale  
41 price of a home in Whatcom County in June 2023 was \$605,000; and  
42

43           **WHEREAS**, Washington State acknowledges [the state faces a significant shortage of](#)  
44 [housing](#), needing 1 million additional homes by 2044 and resulting in pressure on median  
45 home prices, which increased nearly 14% from 2021-2022; and  
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47           **WHEREAS**, the state of Washington has [allocated more than \\$2.4 billion](#) toward a  
48 wide range of efforts to reduce homelessness and address the state's housing shortage; and  
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50

1           **WHEREAS**, according the Association of Washington Housing Authorities, only 26%  
2 of Washington families in need of public housing are served, and families wait on average  
3 3.5 years to be accepted into public housing; and  
4

5           **WHEREAS**, According to the [American Public Health Association](#), ending homelessness  
6 is a public health issue, as those experiencing homelessness have high rates of chronic mental  
7 and physical health conditions, co-occurring disorders, and barriers to care; and  
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9           **WHEREAS**, the Homeless Strategies Workgroup (HSW) was created by Council  
10 [Resolution 2017-055](#) and reconvened in 2019 ([Resolution 2019-034](#)) to identify:

- 11           1. Additional temporary winter shelters,
- 12           2. Added capacity for year-round shelters,
- 13           3. Additional opportunities to address the needs of the county' s homeless population,
- 14           and
- 15           4. Strategies to prevent people from having no other option than to sleep outside; and  
16

17           **WHEREAS**, On May 4, 2021, the Whatcom County Council approved [Resolution 2021-](#)  
18 [018](#), receiving the HSW's [recommendations](#), which included:

- 19           • Provide motel stays for families with children
- 20           • Establish overflow winter shelter to offer individuals when basecamp is full
- 21           • Establish severe weather shelters to offer individuals who typically don't use  
22 shelters when basecamp and overflow winter shelter capacity has been reached
- 23           • Establish a data collection process to assist in ongoing analysis and planning
- 24           • Support continuation of current specialty shelters
- 25           • Support continuation of current tiny home villages as well as the pending village  
26 contracted by City of Bellingham
- 27           • Encourage local elected officials to work with Skagit and Island counties to  
28 increase shelter capacity for their residents
- 29           • Interim housing unites for families with children as an alternative to motel stays
- 30           • Establish shelter and services for people who are medically fragile
- 31           • Relocation of basecamp to permanent home; and  
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33           **WHEREAS**, [Resolution 2021-018](#) asked the [Housing Advisory Committee of Whatcom](#)  
34 [County](#) to take responsibility for moving forward the recommendations of the Homeless  
35 Strategies Workgroup; and  
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37           **WHEREAS**, on July 24, 2023, the Bellingham City Council \_\_\_\_\_  
38 Resolution \_\_\_\_\_, (AB# 23783) affirming that affordable housing and homelessness are  
39 a public health crisis.  
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1           **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Whatcom County Council hereby  
2 affirms affordable housing and homelessness as a public health crisis; and

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4           **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, the Whatcom County Council requests that the  
5 Executive and/or county staff bring forward ideas for how efforts to address affordable  
6 housing and homelessness can be enhanced now; and

7  
8           **BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED**, the Whatcom County Council requests that the Housing  
9 Advisory Committee of Whatcom County and/or county staff provide a progress report to  
10 Council before the end of the year on the status of the HSW recommendations.

11           **APPROVED this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2023.**

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16 **ATTEST:**

**WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL  
WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON**

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19 \_\_\_\_\_  
20 Dana Brown-Davis, Clerk of the Council

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Barry Buchanan, Health Board Chair

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23 **APPROVED AS TO FORM:**

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25  
26   Karen Frakes (by email 6/7/2023)    
27 Civil Deputy Prosecutor