

RESOLUTION NO. _____

**AFFIRMING THAT ~~AFFORDABLE~~ HOUSING AFFORDABILITY AND HOMELESSNESS
ARE
A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS REQUIRING SYSTEMWIDE ACTIONS AND
REQUESTING UPDATES ON COUNTY ACTIONS TAKEN**

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
4

5 **WHEREAS**, the numbers of both individuals and households counted in 2023 are the
6 highest reported since counting began in 2008; and
7

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
10

11 **WHEREAS**, between 2022 and 2023, unsheltered individuals counted increased by
12 91% and unsheltered households increased by 110%; and
13

14 **WHEREAS**, over the last three years, an average of 88 households annually
15 ~~participated in the motel stays program for~~were families with children experiencing
16 homelessness; and
17

18 **WHEREAS**, homelessness among public school students increased between 2021 and
19 2022 to a total of 372 students, with notable increases in the Lynden (103%) and Nooksack
20 (250%) school Districts, likely flood related, and decreases in Blaine (-24%) and Mt. Baker
21 school districts (-13%); and
22

23 **WHEREAS**, the annual Point-In-Time count is based on a limited federal definition of
24 homelessness and does not include people who have unstable access to housing; and
25

26 **WHEREAS**, ~~the~~ Whatcom County Health and Community Services ~~Department~~ funds
27 affordable housing, interim housing, supportive services, and permanent supportive housing
28 with funding collected from a variety of sources; and
29

30 **WHEREAS**, with federal pandemic relief funding and programs ceasing, Whatcom
31 County ~~specific funding sources include document recording fees, Consolidated Homeless~~
32 ~~Grant, Housing and Essential Needs Grant, Veterans Millage, Behavioral Health Sales Tax is~~
33 expecting a funding and Mental Health Millage, totaling 26% (2019) services cliff that will
34 result increased housing insecurity and homelessness; and
35

36 **WHEREAS**, there is a continued shortage of total workforce able to meet the housing
37 and behavioral health needs that continue to increase in the community investments; and
38

39 **WHEREAS**, Whatcom County has several local funding sources dedicated to housing
40 and homelessness that can help leverage state and federal funding, but current funding levels
41 are insufficient and cannot keep pace with the increasing community need; and
42

43 **WHEREAS**, the Whatcom County government works with State Legislators, the seven
44 cities within Whatcom County, Port of Bellingham, and many for-profit and non-profit
45 community partners to address homelessness, and in 2019 the County's share was
46 approximately 26% with additional community investments from the City of Bellingham
47 (26%), Housing Authority and other federal funding (21%), and private contributions (26%);
48 and housing availability and homelessness issues; and
49

50 **WHEREAS**, according to the US Census, the Whatcom County median household
51 income in 2021 (1-year estimate) was \$72,055 and according to Redfin.com Northwest
52 Multiple Listing Service the median sale price of a home in Whatcom County in June 2023 was
53 \$605610,000; and
54

1 **WHEREAS**, Washington State acknowledges [the state faces a significant shortage of](#)
2 [available housing](#), needing 1 million additional homes by 2044 and resulting in pressure on
3 median home prices, which increased nearly 14% from 2021-2022; and

4
5 **WHEREAS**, the state of Washington has [allocated more than \\$2.4 billion](#) toward a
6 wide range of efforts to reduce homelessness and address the state’s housing shortage; and

7
8

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
8

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.~~ ~~1-~~ Additional temporary winter shelters,
- 12 ~~2.~~ ~~2-~~ Added capacity for year-round shelters,
- 13 ~~3.~~ Additional opportunities to address the needs of the county' s homeless population,
- 14 ~~3.~~ and
- 15 ~~4.~~ ~~4-~~ Strategies to prevent people from having no other option than to sleep outside;
- 16 and
- 17

18 **WHEREAS**, On May 4, 2021, the Whatcom County Council approved [Resolution 2021-](#)
19 [018](#), receiving the HSW's [recommendations](#), which included:

- 20 • Provide motel stays for families with children
- 21 • Establish overflow winter shelter to offer individuals when basecamp is full
- 22 • Establish severe weather shelters to offer individuals who typically don't use
- 23 shelters when basecamp and overflow winter shelter capacity has been reached
- 24 • Establish a data collection process to assist in ongoing analysis and planning
- 25 • Support continuation of current specialty shelters
- 26 • Support continuation of current tiny home villages as well as the pending village
- 27 contracted by City of Bellingham
- 28 • Encourage local elected officials to work with Skagit and Island counties to increase
- 29 shelter capacity for their residents
- 30 • Interim housing unites for families with children as an alternative to motel stays
- 31 • Establish shelter and services for people who are medically fragile
- 32 • Relocation of basecamp to permanent home; and
- 33

34 **WHEREAS**, [Resolution 2021-018](#) asked the [Housing Advisory Committee of Whatcom](#)
35 [County](#) to take responsibility for moving forward the recommendations of the Homeless
36 Strategies Workgroup; and
37

38 **WHEREAS**, on January 10, 2023, the Whatcom County Business and Commerce
39 Advisory Committee (WCBCC) transmitted their proposal to increase access to housing for all
40 income levels, which included recommendations to:

- 41 • Reduce the complexity and the cost of compliance of code.
- 42 • Prioritize density in existing city boundaries and urban growth areas while
43 supporting limited annexations.
- 44 • Provide incentives for permanently affordable home ownership and rentals for
45 occupants whose incomes range from 50% to 150% of area median income
- 46

47 **WHEREAS**, the WCBCC recommendations included specific budget requests, changes
48 to land use code, improvements to building permit processes, increased coordination with
49 Planning & Development Services staff, suggestions for the housing element in the upcoming
50 2025 Comprehensive Plan, and advocacy for state legislation; and
51

52 **WHEREAS**, on July 24, 2023, the Bellingham City Council _____
53 Resolution _____, approved Resolution _____, (AB# 23783) affirming that
54 affordable housing and homelessness are a public health crisis.

1 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Whatcom County Council hereby
2 affirms ~~affordable~~-housing affordability and homelessness as a public health crisis; and
3

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 county staff from all relevant~~
7 ~~departments take a more holistic, system-wide approach to addressing homelessness and~~
8 ~~housing affordability and availability at all income levels, and bring forward ideas for how the~~
9 ~~County can take more proactive, effective, and decisive action. Examples may include, but~~
10 ~~are not limited to:~~

- 11 • exploring additional local, state, and federal funding sources dedicated to housing
12 and homelessness,
- 13 • developing a gap analysis,
- 14 • addressing regulatory barriers,
- 15 • considering the feasibility of a county land bank and/or land trust,
- 16 • pursuing housing and shelter projects on county owned lands,
- 17 • developing an emergency plan for climate change related response impacting those
18 who are unhoused,
- 19 • providing technical assistance and training to those working on housing and
20 homelessness issues in the community to support planning, housing, and
21 emergency response related needs,
- 22 • working with legal and finance departments to build capacity of partner agencies
23 to help meet the increased demand for services,
- 24 • exploring increased rental safety standards that includes expanding inspections
25 and testing for materials harmful to human health, and
- 26 • working with the City of Bellingham on providing safe parking and adequate
27 sheltering in compliance with Martin v. Boise; and

28
29 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that Whatcom County increase its coordination,
30 collaboration, and advocacy at the local, state, and federal levels to prioritize addressing the
31 housing affordability and homelessness crisis; and
32

33 **BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED**, the Whatcom County Council requests that the Housing
34 Advisory Committee of Whatcom County and/or county staff provide a progress report to
35 Council before the end of the year on the status of the HSW recommendations.
36

37 **APPROVED this _____ day of _____, 2023.**

38
39
40 **WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL**
41 **WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON**

42 **ATTEST:**

43
44 _____
45 Dana Brown-Davis, Clerk of the Council

46 _____
47 Barry Buchanan, Health Board Chair

48 **APPROVED AS TO FORM:**

49
50
51 Karen Frakes (by email [6/78/4/2023](#))
52 Civil Deputy Prosecutor