

RESOLUTION NO. _____

**AFFIRMING THAT 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

WHEREAS, between 2022 and 2023, there was a 27% increase in persons experiencing homelessness and a 33% increase in households experiencing homelessness; and

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

1 **WHEREAS**, of the 1,059 persons counted in the 2023 annual Point-In-Time survey,
2 711 slept in shelters or transitional housing facilities and 348 were unsheltered; and

3
4 **WHEREAS**, between 2022 and 2023, unsheltered individuals counted increased by
5 91% and unsheltered households increased by 110%; and

6
7 **WHEREAS**, over the last three years, an average of 88 households annually were
8 families with children experiencing homelessness; and

9
10 **WHEREAS**, homelessness among public school students increased between 2021 and
11 2022 to a total of 372 students, with notable increases in the Lynden (103%) and Nooksack
12 (250%) school Districts, likely flood related, and decreases in Blaine (-24%)and Mt. Baker
13 school districts (-13%); and

14
15 **WHEREAS**, the annual Point-In-Time count is based on a limited federal definition of
16 homelessness and does not include people who have unstable access to housing; and

17
18 **WHEREAS**, Whatcom County Health and Community Services funds affordable
19 housing, interim housing, supportive services, and permanent supportive housing with
20 funding collected from a variety of sources; and

21
22 **WHEREAS**, with federal pandemic relief funding and programs ceasing, Whatcom
23 County is expecting a funding and services cliff that will result increased housing insecurity
24 and homelessness; and

25
26 **WHEREAS**, there is a continued shortage of workforce able to meet the housing and
27 behavioral health needs that continue to increase in the community; and

28
29 **WHEREAS**, Whatcom County has several local funding sources dedicated to housing
30 and homelessness that can help leverage state and federal funding, but current funding levels
31 are insufficient and cannot keep pace with the increasing community need; and

32
33 **WHEREAS**, the Whatcom County government works with State Legislators, the seven
34 cities within Whatcom County, Port of Bellingham, and many for-profit and non-profit
35 community partners to address housing availability and homelessness issues; and

36
37 **WHEREAS**, according to the US Census, the Whatcom County median household
38 income in 2021 (1-year estimate) was \$72,055 and according to [Northwest Multiple Listing](#)
39 [Service](#) the median sale price of a home in Whatcom County in June 2023 was \$610,000; and

40
41 **WHEREAS**, Washington State acknowledges [the state faces a significant shortage of](#)
42 [available housing](#), needing 1 million additional homes by 2044 and resulting in pressure on
43 median home prices, which increased nearly 14% from 2021-2022; and

44
45 **WHEREAS**, the state of Washington has [allocated more than \\$2.4 billion](#) toward a
46 wide range of efforts to reduce homelessness and address the state's housing shortage; and

47
48 **WHEREAS**, according the Association of Washington Housing Authorities, only 26%
49 of Washington families in need of public housing are served, and families wait on average
50 3.5 years to be accepted into public housing; and

51
52 **WHEREAS**, According to the [American Public Health Association](#), ending homelessness
53 is a public health issue, as those experiencing homelessness have high rates of chronic mental
54 and physical health conditions, co-occurring disorders, and barriers to care; and

1
2 **WHEREAS**, the Homeless Strategies Workgroup (HSW) was created by Council
3 [Resolution 2017-055](#) and reconvened in 2019 ([Resolution 2019-034](#)) to identify:

- 4 1. Additional temporary winter shelters,
- 5 2. Added capacity for year-round shelters,
- 6 3. Additional opportunities to address the needs of the county's homeless population,
7 and
- 8 4. Strategies to prevent people from having no other option than to sleep outside;
9 and

10
11 **WHEREAS**, On May 4, 2021, the Whatcom County Council approved [Resolution 2021-](#)
12 [018](#), receiving the HSW's [recommendations](#), which included:

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

26
27 **WHEREAS**, [Resolution 2021-018](#) asked the [Housing Advisory Committee of Whatcom](#)
28 [County](#) to take responsibility for moving forward the recommendations of the Homeless
29 Strategies Workgroup; and

30
31 **WHEREAS**, on January 10, 2023, the Whatcom County Business and Commerce
32 Advisory Committee (WCBC) transmitted their proposal to increase access to housing for all
33 income levels, which included recommendations to:

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

39
40 **WHEREAS**, the WCBC recommendations included specific budget requests, changes
41 to land use code, improvements to building permit processes, increased coordination with
42 Planning & Development Services staff, suggestions for the housing element in the upcoming
43 2025 Comprehensive Plan, and advocacy for state legislation; and

44
45 **WHEREAS**, on July 24, 2023, the Bellingham City Council approved [Resolution](#)
46 _____, (AB# 23783) affirming that affordable housing and homelessness are a
47 public health crisis.

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49 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Whatcom County Council hereby
50 affirms housing affordability and homelessness as a public health crisis; and

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52 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, the Whatcom County Council requests that the
53 Executive and county staff from all relevant departments take a more holistic, system-wide
54 approach to addressing homelessness and housing affordability and availability at all income

1 levels, and bring forward ideas for how the County can take more proactive, effective, and
2 decisive action. Examples may include, but are not limited to:

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

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21 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that Whatcom County increase its coordination,
22 collaboration, and advocacy at the local, state, and federal levels to prioritize addressing the
23 housing affordability and homelessness crisis; and

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

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

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33 **ATTEST:**

**WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON**

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36 _____
37 Dana Brown-Davis, Clerk of the Council

Barry Buchanan, Health Board Chair

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40 **APPROVED AS TO FORM:**

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42
43 Karen Frakes (by email 8/4/2023)
44 Civil Deputy Prosecutor