

Scheduled for Committee of the
Whole discussion on May 21

PROPOSED BY: BUCHANAN, GALLOWAY, SCANLON
INTRODUCTION DATE: MAY 21, 2024

RESOLUTION NO. _____

**REQUESTING THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE PREPARE A PROPOSAL FOR THE EXPANSION OF
YEAR-ROUND SHELTER CAPACITY AND ESTABLISH A HOMELESSNESS AND SHELTER
SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE WHATCOM COUNTY HOUSING ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

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

WHEREAS, Local Plans to End Homelessness are required by Washington State legislation for counties receiving state funding at a minimum of once every five years, with briefer updates annually; and

WHEREAS, the Whatcom County Health Department submitted the 2019 Strategic Plan to End Homelessness in Whatcom County with the input of community stakeholders including those with lived experiences; and

WHEREAS, the Strategic Plan was created in alignment with Federal and Washington State plans to prevent and end homelessness; and

WHEREAS, the Strategic Plan outlined seven key strategies:

1. A Centralized Point of Entry
2. Rapid Re-Housing
3. Permanent Supportive Housing
4. Increase the Supply of Affordable Housing
5. Homelessness Prevention and Diversion
6. Interim Housing
7. Economic Security; and

WHEREAS, the Homeless Strategies Workgroup (HSW) was established by Resolution 2017-055, and re-convened as per [Resolution 2019-034](#) to identify opportunities for shelters to meet the needs of Whatcom County's homeless community; and

WHEREAS, on May 4, 2021, the HSW presented to the Whatcom County Council a completed needs assessment that included a shelter inventory, identified needs and gaps, recommendations, and an accomplishments list (see [AB2021-268](#)); and

WHEREAS, overarching goals from the HSW recommendations are to:

1. clarify the extent of local government support,
2. prioritize most vulnerable populations,
3. consider strategies and actions appropriate for local governments to support,
4. build upon current resources where possible, and
5. invest in long-term permanent solutions over temporary crisis solutions when resources are inadequate to do both; and

1 **WHEREAS**, on May 4, 2021, the Whatcom County Council approved [Resolution 2021-018](#)
2 concluding the work of the HSW and transferring responsibilities to the Whatcom County Housing
3 Advisory Committee; and
4

5 **WHEREAS**, the [Whatcom County Coalition to End Homelessness \(WCCEH\)](#) is a consortium
6 of public and private agencies and non-profits that collaborate to create a system of housing and
7 services, with the ultimate goal of moving homeless families and individuals to permanent housing
8 and self-sufficiency; and
9

10 **WHEREAS**, the WCCEH’s 2023 Annual Report provides a deeper understanding of Whatcom
11 County residents experiencing homelessness with information from the annual Point-in-Time
12 survey and public-school students and their families; and
13

14 **WHEREAS**, the Point-in-Time count surveys people experiencing homelessness on a single
15 day each year, and is a voluntary survey that may not fully represent the true extent of
16 homelessness in Whatcom County ; and
17

18 **WHEREAS**, the 2023 Point-In-Time survey, conducted January 26, 2023, counted 1,059
19 individuals from 850 different households experiencing homelessness in Whatcom County; and
20

21 **WHEREAS**, according to the Point-in-Time count, between 2022 and 2023, there was a
22 27% increase in persons experiencing homelessness and 33% increase in households experiencing
23 homelessness; and
24

25 **WHEREAS**, according to the Point-In-Time count, the numbers of both homeless individuals
26 and households counted in 2023 are the highest reported since counting began in 2008; and
27

28 **WHEREAS**, according to the Point-In-Time count, of the 1,059 persons counted in the 2023
29 Point-In-Time survey, 711 slept in shelters or transitional housing facilities and 348 were
30 unsheltered; and
31

32 **WHEREAS**, between the 2022 and 2023 Point-in-Time counts there was a 9% increase
33 sheltered individuals counted and an 8% increase in the number of sheltered households; and
34

35 **WHEREAS**, between the 2022 and 2023 Point-in-Time counts there was a 91% increase in
36 unsheltered individuals counted and an 110% increase of unsheltered households; and
37

38 **WHEREAS**, as noted in WCCEH’s 2023 Annual Report, outreach professionals concur that
39 the likely reason for the increase in unsheltered individuals is that homelessness is increasing, and
40 available shelters are near or at capacity, or do not offer the services in a way that will meet the
41 individuals’ needs; and
42

43 **WHEREAS**, the WCCEH’s 2023 Annual Report suggests that homelessness
44 disproportionately effects people of color, people with disabilities, and veterans; and
45

46 **WHEREAS**, the WCCEH’s 2023 Annual Report also states that people sleeping in interim
47 housing facilities (transitional housing or emergency shelters) have better access to opportunities
48 that can lead to long-term health improvement and housing stability when compared to households
49 that are unsheltered; and
50
51

1 **WHEREAS**, the WCCEH’s 2023 Annual Report identifies resources in shelters include
2 hygiene facilities, healthy food and clean drinking water, connections to medical care, and often a
3 place to safely store their belongings; and
4

5 **WHEREAS**, the 2024 Point-in-Time count was completed on January 26, 2024, and results
6 are expected to be released in June 2024 in the 2024 Whatcom County Annual Report on
7 Homelessness; and
8

9 **WHEREAS**, in 2023 the Big Lift was drafted by a coalition of concerned community leaders
10 advocating for cooperation between the community and local governments to address the
11 homelessness crisis and recognizing the value of tiny home villages as an effective shelter model;
12 and
13

14 **WHEREAS**, on August 8, 2023, the Whatcom County Council approved [Resolution 2023-](#)
15 [020](#) declaring affordable housing and homelessness a public health crisis; and
16

17 **WHEREAS**, Resolution 2023-020 also requests that the Executive and county staff from all
18 relevant departments take a more holistic, system-wide approach to addressing homelessness and
19 housing affordability and availability at all income levels, and bring forward ideas for how the
20 County can take more proactive, effective, and decisive action; and
21

22 **WHEREAS**, Resolution 2023-020 also requests that Whatcom County increase its
23 coordination, collaboration, and advocacy at the local, state, and federal levels to prioritize
24 addressing the housing affordability and homelessness crisis; and
25

26 **WHEREAS**, Resolution 2023-020 also requests that the Housing Advisory Committee of
27 Whatcom County and/or county staff provide a progress report to Council before the end of 2023
28 on the status of the HSW recommendations; and
29

30 **WHEREAS**, on October 24, 2023, the Whatcom County Council approved [Resolution 2023-](#)
31 [043](#) supporting the use of Economic Development Investment (EDI) funds for affordable housing;
32 and
33

34 **WHEREAS**, Whatcom County often partners with the City of Bellingham and other local
35 jurisdictions and agencies to fund and support homeless shelters; and
36

37 **WHEREAS**, on October 24, 2023, Whatcom County and the City of Bellingham entered into
38 an interlocal agreement to jointly fund Road2Home, a nonprofit serving community members
39 experiencing homelessness, to operate a winter shelter located at 1355 Civic Field Way in
40 Bellingham, from December 1, 2023 through February 29, 2024; and
41

42 **WHEREAS**, Whatcom County agreed to pay half of the costs of the Road2Home shelter, not
43 to exceed \$250,000, with funds provided by the American Rescue Plan Act; and
44

45 **WHEREAS**, the City of Bellingham entered into a financial assistant agreement with
46 Road2Home for \$500,000 (of which \$306,000 are federal funds) to operate the winter shelter at
47 Civic Field Way (see [Contract C2301393](#)); and
48
49
50
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52

1 **WHEREAS**, the winter shelter operated every day from 7:00 pm to 8:00 am and provided
2 space for up to 45 guests, with the possibility for additional capacity during severe weather; and
3

4 **WHEREAS**, in summer 2023 Whatcom County staff published a request for proposals
5 seeking a qualified provider to run a severe weather shelter for the 2023-24 winter season; and
6

7 **WHEREAS**, Ferndale Community Services was the only respondent and entered into a
8 contract with Whatcom County to operate a severe weather shelter for the 2023-24 winter season
9 with funding from the American Rescue Plan Act; and
10

11 **WHEREAS**, no other applications were received and Whatcom County was unable to
12 identify a willing and available partner to provide a severe weather shelter service within
13 Bellingham city limits; and
14

15 **WHEREAS**, Whatcom County Health and Community Services staff were tasked to plan and
16 operate a severe weather shelter over the 2023-2024 winter season funded by Whatcom County;
17 and
18

19 **WHEREAS**, Whatcom County Health and Community Services staff:

- 20 • Located, acquired, and equipped a location to operate a shelter from November 1, 2023
- 21 through February 29, 2024,
- 22 • Recruited and trained on-call volunteers and temporary paid staff to support operations,
- 23 and
- 24 • Operated overnight (5pm to 8am) when forecasted conditions met previously
- 25 established Severe Weather Shelters Guiding Assumptions and sufficient staffing was
- 26 available; and
27

28 **WHEREAS**, as of February 20, 2024, the county-run severe weather shelter, located at 810
29 N. State Street in Bellingham, was open for a total of 17 nights and provided shelter for 765
30 guests, averaging 45 people per night; and
31

32 **WHEREAS**, the final after-action report for Whatcom County Health and Community
33 Services' severe weather shelter will be published later this year; and
34

35 **WHEREAS**, Whatcom County now has experience operating a shelter; and
36

37 **WHEREAS**, on April 8, 2024, Bellingham City Council approved the purchase of a property
38 at 3300 Northwest Avenue to be used as the new location for a tiny home village to replace two
39 existing villages; and
40

41 **WHEREAS**, The North Haven tiny home village will be operated by HomesNOW! and could
42 be ready for guests by late 2024 pending Temporary Shelter Permit approval; and
43

44 **WHEREAS**, Lighthouse Mission Ministries operates Base Camp, a low barrier 24-hour
45 emergency shelter that provides a safe place for up to 200 adults to stay; and
46
47

1 **WHEREAS**, Base Camp has observed higher demand resulting in the shelter hitting
2 maximum capacity more frequently; and
3

4 **WHEREAS**, Lighthouse Mission Ministries will open a new 300-bed shelter later this year at
5 910 W. Holly Street with the potential for an additional 100 beds during extreme weather; and
6

7 **WHEREAS**, Whatcom County also provides funding to support shelters with Domestic
8 Violence and Sexual Assault Services of Whatcom County, Northwest Youth Services PAD Program,
9 Motel Program for families with children, YWCA, and Sun House; and
10

11 **WHEREAS**, the hard work of dedicated staff from these shelters and others have prevented
12 hundreds of people from having no other option than to sleep outside; and
13

14 **WHEREAS**, the County and community partners have increased shelter beds over the last
15 few years, but still the demand continues to outpace the supply and the need to expand year-
16 round shelter capacity continues to exist; and
17

18 **WHEREAS**, the Whatcom County Council acts as the Whatcom County Health Board to
19 enact local rules and regulations as are necessary to preserve, promote, and improve public health
20 and make recommendations to the Whatcom County Executive on matters affecting public health in
21 our community.
22

23 **THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the Whatcom County Council supports the expansion
24 of year-round shelter capacity in our community, including through operating a county-managed
25 year-round shelter; and
26

27 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Whatcom County Council requests the County
28 Executive prepare a proposal to expand capacity for year-round shelters through a variety of
29 methods, including but not limited to, county-managed shelter options, with budget impact
30 analysis that includes costs, staff time, funding sources, and other necessary considerations; and
31

32 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Whatcom County Council requests the Executive
33 explore options to coordinate, collaborate, and cost share increasing shelter capacity with the City
34 of Bellingham, other local, state, federal, and tribal jurisdictions, and community partners; and
35

36 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the shelter options and budget impacts be provided to
37 the Whatcom County Council for review and consideration by September 10, 2024, as to ensure
38 adequate time to include funding in the 2025-26 biennial budget; and
39

40 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Whatcom County Council declares a goal to achieve
41 and maintain functional zero homelessness within ten years; and
42
43

1 **BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED** that the Whatcom County Council respectfully requests that
2 the County Executive create a "Homelessness and Shelter Subcommittee" of the Whatcom County
3 Housing Advisory Committee with the following specifications:

- 4 • the subcommittee shall include Housing Advisory Committee member and nonmember
5 participation including those with lived experiences
- 6 • the scope of the subcommittee shall include the following tasks:
 - 7 1. Review and evaluate the implementation of the Homeless Strategies Workgroup
8 recommendations and action steps.
 - 9 2. Review and provide feedback on the after-action report for Whatcom County's severe
10 weather shelter.
 - 11 3. Evaluate the temperature threshold required for opening the severe weather shelter.
 - 12 4. Review and provide feedback on proposals to expand capacity for year-round shelters
13 including:
 - 14 o different types of shelters including congregate, tiny homes, urban camping zones,
15 and safe parking
 - 16 o strategies to support building nonprofit provider capacity
 - 17 o proposal for a county operated year-round shelter, identifying federal, state, and
18 local funding sources and outlining staffing needs and possible locations (lands
19 currently owned by county or those available for purchase)
 - 20 5. Provide recommendations to the Comprehensive Plan specifically addressing homelessness
21 and shelter capacity.
 - 22 6. Review and provide input and direction on updates to the county's Plan to End
23 Homelessness.

24
25
26 **APPROVED** this _____ day of _____, 2024.

27
28 WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
29 WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON

30 ATTEST:

31
32 _____
33 Dana Brown-Davis, Clerk of the Council

34 _____
35 Barry Buchanan, Council Chair

36 APPROVED AS TO FORM:
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38
39 _____
40 Civil Deputy Prosecutor
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42
43