



WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL

COUNCIL MEETING AS THE HEALTH BOARD JOINT MEETING WITH THE PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY BOARD

10:00 a.m. Tuesday, August 1, 2023

Garden Level Conference Room, Civic Building, 322 N. Commercial Street

(if virtual: www.whatcomcounty.us/joinvirtualcouncil)

A G E N D A

Meeting Topics		Pages	Time
1.	Roll call	No paper	10:00-10:05
2.	Public comment	No paper	10:05-10:15
3.	Public Health Advisory Board (PHAB) update	No paper	10:15-10:20
4.	Health Officer update	No paper	10:20-10:25
5.	Behavioral Health Fund – opportunities and recommendations	No paper	10:25-11:05
6.	Resolution affirming that affordable housing and homelessness are a public health crisis and requesting updates on county actions (AB2023-485)	Pages 2-5	11:05-11:25
7.	Meeting evaluation	No paper	11:25-11:30
Adjourn			

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
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 families with children; and
16

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
21

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
46

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
49
50

1 **WHEREAS**, according to 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. 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
32

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
36

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.
40
41

1 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Whatcom County Council hereby
2 affirms affordable housing 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

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

13
14
15
16 **ATTEST:**

**WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON**

17
18
19 _____
20 Dana Brown-Davis, Clerk of the Council

Barry Buchanan, Health Board Chair

21
22
23 **APPROVED AS TO FORM:**

24
25
26 Karen Frakes (by email 6/7/2023)
27 Civil Deputy Prosecutor