



Whatcom County

COUNTY COURTHOUSE
311 Grand Avenue, Ste #105
Bellingham, WA 98225-4038
(360) 778-5010

Agenda Bill Master Report

File Number: AB2023-485

File ID:	AB2023-485	Version:	1	Status:	Substitute Amended and Approved
File Created:	07/20/2023	Entered by:	CHalka@co.whatcom.wa.us		
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Assigned to:	Council Public Works & Health Committee			Final Action:	08/08/2023
Agenda Date:	08/08/2023			Enactment #:	RES 2023-020

Primary Contact Email: chalka@co.whatcom.wa.us

TITLE FOR AGENDA ITEM:

Resolution affirming that affordable housing and homelessness are a public health crisis and requesting updates on county actions (Council acting as the Health Board)

SUMMARY STATEMENT OR LEGAL NOTICE LANGUAGE:

Resolution affirming that affordable housing and homelessness are a public health crisis and requesting updates on county actions (Council acting as the Health Board)

HISTORY OF LEGISLATIVE FILE

Date:	Acting Body:	Action:	Sent To:
08/01/2023	Council as the Health Board	REFERRED TO COMMITTEE	Council Public Works & Health Committee
08/08/2023	Council Public Works & Health Committee	SUBSTITUTE RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL WITH PROPOSED AMENDMENT(S) Aye: 3 Frazey, Galloway, and Kershner Nay: 0	
08/08/2023	Council	SUBSTITUTE APPROVED AS AMENDED Aye: 6 Buchanan, Byrd, Donovan, Frazey, Galloway, and Kershner Nay: 1 Elenbaas	

Attachments: Proposed Resolution, Substitute Resolution 8.8.2023, Substitute Resolution 8.8.2023 - tracked, Revised Substitute Resolution Following 8.8.23 PW&H clean, Revised Substitute Resolution Following 8.8.23 PW&H tracked

6 **RESOLUTION NO. 2023 - 020**
7

8
9 **AFFIRMING THAT HOUSING AFFORDABILITY AND HOMELESSNESS ARE**
10 **A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS REQUIRING SYSTEMWIDE ACTIONS AND**
11 **REQUESTING UPDATES ON COUNTY ACTIONS TAKEN**
12

13 **WHEREAS**, there are many factors leading to housing instability and the most
14 frequent hardship is lack of affordable and available housing; and
15

16 **WHEREAS**, on November 19, 2019, the Whatcom County Council approved 'A Home
17 for Everyone: Strategic Plan to End Homelessness in Whatcom County' ([AB2019-576](#)) ; and
18

19 **WHEREAS**, the Strategic Plan's Point-In-Time count identifies the top factors leading
20 to homelessness as housing loss, unemployment, and mental illness; and
21

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

- 23 1. A centralized point of entry
- 24 2. Rapid rehousing
- 25 3. Permanent supportive housing
- 26 4. Increase the supply of affordable housing
- 27 5. Homelessness prevention and diversion
- 28 6. Interim housing, and
- 29 7. Economic security; and
30

31 **WHEREAS**, the Whatcom County Coalition to End Homelessness (WCCEH) is a
32 consortium of public and private agencies and non-profits that collaborate to create a system
33 of housing and services, with the goal of moving homeless families and individuals to
34 permanent housing and self-sufficiency; and
35

36 **WHEREAS**, the WCCEH oversees the implementation of the local Continuum of Care
37 and makes recommendations for filling gaps in services; and
38

39 **WHEREAS**, the WCCEH's [2023 Annual Report](#) provides a deeper understanding of
40 Whatcom County residents experiencing homelessness with information from the annual
41 Point-In-Time survey and public school students and their families; and
42

43 **WHEREAS**, the 2023 annual Point-In-Time survey counted 1,059 individuals from 850
44 different households that were experiencing homelessness in Whatcom County on January
45 26, 2023; and
46

47 **WHEREAS**, between 2022 and 2023, there was a 27% increase in persons
48 experiencing homelessness and a 33% increase in households experiencing homelessness;
49 and
50

51 **WHEREAS**, the numbers of both individuals and households counted in 2023 are the
52 highest reported since counting began in 2008; and
53

54 **WHEREAS**, of the 1,059 persons counted in the 2023 annual Point-In-Time survey,

1 711 slept in shelters or transitional housing facilities and 348 were unsheltered; and

2
3 **WHEREAS**, between 2022 and 2023, unsheltered individuals counted increased by
4 91% and unsheltered households increased by 110%; and

5
6 **WHEREAS**, over the last three years, an average of 88 households annually were
7 families with children experiencing homelessness; and

8
9 **WHEREAS**, homelessness among public school students increased between 2021 and
10 2022 to a total of 372 students, with notable increases in the Lynden (103%) and Nooksack
11 (250%) school Districts, likely flood related, and decreases in Blaine (-24%)and Mt. Baker
12 school districts (-13%); and

13
14 **WHEREAS**, the annual Point-In-Time count is based on a limited federal definition of
15 homelessness and does not include people who have unstable access to housing; and

16
17 **WHEREAS**, Whatcom County Health and Community Services funds affordable
18 housing, interim housing, supportive services, and permanent supportive housing with
19 funding collected from a variety of sources; and

20
21 **WHEREAS**, with federal pandemic relief funding and programs ceasing, Whatcom
22 County is expecting a funding and services cliff that will result in increased housing insecurity
23 and homelessness; and

24
25 **WHEREAS**, there is a continued shortage of workforce able to meet the housing and
26 behavioral health needs that continue to increase in the community; and

27
28 **WHEREAS**, Whatcom County has several local funding sources dedicated to housing
29 and homelessness that can help leverage state and federal funding, but current funding levels
30 are insufficient and cannot keep pace with the increasing community need; and

31
32 **WHEREAS**, the Whatcom County government works with State Legislators, the seven
33 cities within Whatcom County, Port of Bellingham, and many for-profit and non-profit
34 community partners to address housing availability and homelessness issues; and

35
36 **WHEREAS**, according to the US Census, the Whatcom County median household
37 income in 2021 (1-year estimate) was \$72,055 and according to [Northwest Multiple Listing](#)
38 [Service](#) the median sale price of a home in Whatcom County in June 2022 was \$610,000; and

39
40 **WHEREAS**, Washington State acknowledges [the state faces a significant shortage of](#)
41 [available housing](#), needing 1 million additional homes by 2044 and resulting in pressure on
42 median home prices, which increased nearly 14% from 2021-2022; and

43
44 **WHEREAS**, the state of Washington has [allocated more than \\$2.4 billion](#) toward a
45 wide range of efforts to reduce homelessness and address the state's housing shortage; and

46
47 **WHEREAS**, according the Association of Washington Housing Authorities, only 26%
48 of Washington families in need of public housing are served, and families wait on average
49 3.5 years to be accepted into public housing; and

50
51 **WHEREAS**, According to the [American Public Health Association](#), ending homelessness
52 is a public health issue, as those experiencing homelessness have high rates of chronic mental
53 and physical health conditions, co-occurring disorders, and barriers to care; and

54

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

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

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

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

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

29
30 **WHEREAS**, on January 10, 2023, the Whatcom County Business and Commerce
31 Advisory Committee (WCBCC) transmitted their proposal to increase access to housing for all
32 income levels, which included recommendations to:

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

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

43
44 **WHEREAS**, the Whatcom County Council recognizes the challenges for those
45 experiencing the co-occurrence of homelessness, mental health, and substance use disorder,
46 and seeks to support targeted strategies and investments to address these challenges in a
47 human centered way; and

48
49 **WHEREAS**, on July 24, 2023, the Bellingham City Council approved [Resolution](#) #2023-
50 19, (AB# 23783) affirming that affordable housing and homelessness are a public health
51 crisis.

52
53 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Whatcom County Council hereby
54 affirms housing affordability and homelessness as a public health crisis; and

1
2 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, the Whatcom County Council requests that the
3 Executive and county staff from all relevant departments take a more holistic, system-wide
4 approach to addressing homelessness and housing affordability and availability at all income
5 levels, and bring forward ideas for how the County can take more proactive, effective, and
6 decisive action. Examples may include, but are not limited to:

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

24
25 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that Whatcom County increase its coordination,
26 collaboration, and advocacy at the local, state, and federal levels to prioritize addressing the
27 housing affordability and homelessness crisis; and

28
29 **BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED**, the Whatcom County Council requests that the Housing
30 Advisory Committee of Whatcom County and/or county staff provide a progress report to
31 Council before the end of the year on the status of the HSW recommendations.

32
33 **APPROVED this** 8th **day of** August **, 2023.**

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35
36 **ATTEST:**

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40 Dana Brown-Davis, Clerk of the Council

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON

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44
45
46 Barry Buchanan, Health Board Chair

47 **APPROVED AS TO FORM:**

Karen Frakes (by email 8/8/2023)
Civil Deputy Prosecutor