

RESOLUTION NO. _____

SUPPORTING THE EXPANSION OF YEAR-ROUND SHELTER CAPACITY IN WHATCOM COUNTY

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, Whatcom County Health and Community Services (WCHCS) 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 2019 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, in 2017 the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development released new requirements for “a centralized or coordinated assessment system” ([CPD-17-01](#)); and

WHEREAS, according to the 2019 Strategic Plan, Whatcom County has two main entry points where the homeless community can register to receive services: Whatcom Homeless Service Center (WHSC), a department of the Opportunity Council, and Northwest Youth Services; and

WHEREAS, the 2019 Strategic Plan additionally recognizes intakes are also completed by the Homeless Outreach Team specialists at the Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Services (DVSAS) safe shelters with Lydia Place staff, at Opportunity Council’s East Whatcom Regional Resource Center, and at the Lake Whatcom Residential and Treatment Center; and

WHEREAS, coordinated entry processes are intended to help increase the efficiency of local crisis response systems and improve fairness and ease of access to resources; and

WHEREAS, anecdotally, many homeless individuals have had challenges navigating Whatcom County’s current coordinated entry system and receiving housing and services in a comprehensive and timely manner; and

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WHEREAS, an independent evaluation is needed to better understand and improve Whatcom County’s coordinated entry system and explore increasing capacity and collaboration to better meet the needs of the homeless community; 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 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

WHEREAS, on May 4, 2021, the Whatcom County Council approved [Resolution 2021-018](#) concluding the work of the HSW and transferring responsibilities to the Whatcom County Housing Advisory Committee; 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 ultimate goal of moving homeless families and individuals to permanent housing and self-sufficiency; 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 (PIT) survey and public-school students and their families; and

WHEREAS, the PIT count is a voluntary survey of people experiencing homelessness on a single day each year that does not fully represent the true extent of homelessness in Whatcom County; and

WHEREAS, the 2023 PIT survey, conducted January 26, 2023, counted 1,059 individuals from 850 different households experiencing homelessness in Whatcom County; and

WHEREAS, according to the PIT count, between 2022 and 2023, there was a 27% increase in persons experiencing homelessness and a 33% increase in households experiencing homelessness; and

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

WHEREAS, according to the PIT count, of the 1,059 persons counted in the 2023 PIT survey, 711 slept in shelters or transitional housing facilities and 348 were unsheltered; and

103 **WHEREAS**, between the 2022 and 2023 PIT counts, there was a 9% increase in sheltered
104 individuals counted and an 8% increase in the number of sheltered households; and

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106 **WHEREAS**, between the 2022 and 2023 PIT counts, there was a 91% increase in
107 unsheltered individuals counted and a 110% increase of unsheltered households; and

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109 **WHEREAS**, the WCCEH's 2023 Annual Report also states that people sleeping in interim
110 housing facilities (transitional housing or emergency shelters) have better access to opportunities
111 that can lead to long-term health improvement and housing stability when compared to households
112 that are unsheltered; and

113
114 **WHEREAS**, the WCCEH's 2023 Annual Report identifies resources in shelters including
115 hygiene facilities, healthy food and clean drinking water, connections to medical care, and often a
116 place to safely store belongings; and

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118 **WHEREAS**, as noted in WCCEH's 2023 Annual Report, outreach professionals concur that
119 the likely reason for the increase in unsheltered individuals is that homelessness is increasing, and
120 available shelters are near or at capacity, or do not offer the services in a way that will meet the
121 individuals' needs; and

122
123 **WHEREAS**, the WCCEH's 2023 Annual Report suggests that homelessness
124 disproportionately affects Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC); and

125
126 **WHEREAS**, according to the WCCEH's 2023 Annual Report and the 2021 U.S. Census,
127 people identifying as Hispanic or Latino accounted for 10% of Whatcom County's population and
128 14% of respondents in the 2023 PIT count; people identifying as Black, African American, or
129 African accounted for 1% of Whatcom County's population and 4% of respondents in the 2023 PIT
130 count; and people identifying as Native American or Alaska Native accounted for 3% of Whatcom
131 County's population and 10% of respondents in the 2023 PIT count; and

132
133 **WHEREAS**, few surveys were conducted across Lummi Nation, and surveys were not
134 conducted on site with the Nooksack Tribe in 2023, which suggests an undercount of Native
135 Americans experiencing homelessness; and

136
137 **WHEREAS**, previous WCCEH annual reports note that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender,
138 and queer (LGBTQ+) homeless youth make up a disproportionate number of the overall homeless
139 youth population across Whatcom County and the nation; and

140
141 **WHEREAS**, according to the WCCEH's 2023 Annual Report, of the 836 respondents
142 surveyed for disability, 558 or 67% reported having one or more disabilities, including mental
143 illness (49%), chronic substance use (34%), chronic illness (33%), permanent physical (28%), and
144 developmental (13%); and

145
146 **WHEREAS**, according to the WCCEH's 2022 and 2023 annual reports, veteran
147 homelessness increased from 46 homeless veteran households in 2022 to 60 homeless veteran
148 households in 2023; and

149
150 **WHEREAS**, according to the WCCEH's 2023 Annual Report, children under 10 years old
151 accounted for 8% of all identified homeless individuals, and another 7% of individuals were
152 between 10 and 17 years old;

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154 **WHEREAS**, according to the WCCEH’s 2023 Annual Report, 159 homeless children under
155 the age of 18 were counted, making up 15% of the total individuals or around 1 in 7 of the
156 respondents; and

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158 **WHEREAS**, in 2004, the U.S. Department of Education began requiring states to report
159 data on homeless students in local school districts as part of their Consolidated State Performance
160 Report; and

161
162 **WHEREAS**, in contrast to the PIT count, these reports include cumulative data over the
163 course of a school year and count students that are homeless as well as students living with
164 another family to avoid homelessness and households residing in a hotel or motel that is paid with
165 private funding; and

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167 **WHEREAS**, in the 2021-2022 school year, 1,223 students, or 4.3% of the total student
168 population, experienced homelessness in Whatcom County; and

169
170 **WHEREAS**, 56% of students experiencing homelessness in Whatcom County are students
171 of color; and

172
173 **WHEREAS**, 65% of students experiencing homelessness were doubled-up with another
174 family, 11% stayed in hotels or motels, 14% slept in shelters, and 9% were unsheltered; and

175
176 **WHEREAS**, students who are housed in Whatcom County have over double proficiency
177 rates in English Language Arts and Mathematics and a 30% greater graduation rate than students
178 that are unhoused; and

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180 **WHEREAS**, student homelessness exists across Whatcom County school districts, and in the
181 2021-2022 school year:

- 182 • Bellingham School District reported 523 homeless students (4.3% of student population)
- 183 • Lynden School District reported 88 homeless students (2.5% of student population)
- 184 • Mount Baker School District reported 126 homeless students (6.9% of student population)
- 185 • Nooksack Valley School District reported 240 homeless students (12.4% of student
186 population)
- 187 • Blaine School District reported 46 homeless students (2% of student population)
- 188 • Ferndale School District reported 151 homeless students (3.2% of student population)
- 189 • Meridian School District reported 49 homeless students (2.7% of student population); and

190
191 **WHEREAS**, according to the WCCEH’s 2023 Annual Report, 7% of homeless individuals
192 were aged 18-24 (74 young adults) and 15% of homeless individuals were under the age of 18
193 (159 youth) in 2023; and

194
195 **WHEREAS**, Northwest Youth Services served 1,205 youth in Whatcom and Skagit counties
196 in 2023 in an effort to help young people learn and practice the tools that will help them get and
197 stay out of the cycle of homelessness; and

198
199 **WHEREAS**, Point Source Youth (PSY), a national nonprofit organization committed to youth
200 interventions to end the youth homelessness crisis, deploys solutions including rapid re-housing,
201 host homes, direct cast transfers, and family and kinship strengthening programs, all of which are
202 grounded in youth choice, independence, supportive wrap-around services, and the housing-first
203 principle; and

204

205 **WHEREAS**, in February 2022, A Way Home Washington and Washington State Department
206 of Commerce, with the help of many contributors that included young people with lived
207 experiences, released [“Yes to Yes” Washington State: Unaccompanied Youth and Young Adult](#)
208 [Homelessness Landscape Scan](#); and
209

210 **WHEREAS**, the “Yes to Yes” report found that there has been increased action on
211 preventing youth and young adult (YYA) homelessness including flexible fund diversion programs in
212 ten counties, a statewide prevention strategy created by young people with lived experience, the
213 Office of Homeless Youth, and partners, and investments in preventing exits from public systems of
214 care into homelessness; and
215

216 **WHEREAS**, the “Yes to Yes” report also identified gaps that still exist including
217 disproportionality of homeless youth that are BIPOC, LGBTQ+, or disabled, lack of resources for
218 pregnant/parenting individuals and individuals struggling with mental health and substance use,
219 lack of access to basic needs including transportation, food, and YYA-specific shelter and housing,
220 and insufficient government funding, equity strategies, and real-time data; and
221

222 **WHEREAS**, based on the WCCEH’s 2023 Annual Report, of the 850 households experiencing
223 homelessness counted, 752 (88%) were unaccompanied (single) persons, 87 (10%) were families
224 with children, and 11 (1%) were family households without children; and
225

226 **WHEREAS**, the WCCEH’s 2023 Annual Report states it is probable that the 87 households
227 with children represents a significant undercount because Housing Pool data indicates many eligible
228 families were waiting for services in January, though they were unreachable when surveys were
229 conducted; and
230

231 **WHEREAS**, according to the WCCEH’s 2023 Annual Report, 6% of single parent households,
232 13% of two parent households, 36% of adult-only households, and 42% of unaccompanied persons
233 remain unsheltered; and
234

235 **WHEREAS**, according to the WCCEH’s 2023 Annual Report, 164 seniors over the age of 60
236 were surveyed in the 2023 PIT, representing 15% of total respondents; and
237

238 **WHEREAS**, according to the WCCEH’s 2023 Annual Report, since 2019 senior homelessness
239 measured in the PIT counts has increased by 141% and the percentage of seniors among those
240 surveyed increased by 50%; and
241

242 **WHEREAS**, as noted in the WCCEH’s 2023 Annual Report, individuals experiencing
243 homelessness over the age of 50 are more frequently experiencing health complications normally
244 found in populations over the age of 70 due to the difficult conditions they endure while unhoused;
245 and
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247 **WHEREAS**, the 2024 PIT count was completed on January 26, 2024, and results are
248 expected to be released in summer 2024 in WCCEH’s 2024 Annual Report; and
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250 **WHEREAS**, in 2023, the Big Lift was drafted by a coalition of concerned community
251 leaders advocating for cooperation between the community and local governments to assess and
252 address the homelessness crisis through a holistic sheltering, services, and transitional housing
253 program leveraged heavily on the value of tiny home villages and promotion of supportive
254 legislation; and
255

256 **WHEREAS**, over the last few years, the Whatcom County Council has passed multiple
257 ordinances and resolutions supporting policies that aim to improve housing availability and
258 affordability, reduce risk of homelessness, and provide services to those most in need; and
259

260 **WHEREAS**, on May 22, 2018, The Whatcom County Council adopted [Ordinance 2018-030](#)
261 establishing the Whatcom County Business and Commerce Advisory Committee to advise the
262 County Council and Executive on critical issues impacting the business community; and
263

264 **WHEREAS**, studies show that in order to end homelessness, individuals need to be
265 connected to services such as employment and trade skills; and
266

267 **WHEREAS**, the business and labor community can play a pivotal role in assisting
268 unhoused individuals by offering employment, training, and apprenticeships; and
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270 **WHEREAS**, in November 2022, Proposition 5, the Healthy Children's Fund, was approved
271 by voters in Whatcom County and established a dedicated property tax for 10 years as outlined in
272 [Ordinance 2022-045](#); and
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274 **WHEREAS**, on March 21, 2023, the Whatcom County Council passed [Resolution 2023-007](#)
275 approving the Healthy Children's Fund Implementation Plan, which outlines goals and strategies
276 to increase early childhood well-being with one focus area being preventing and reducing the
277 trauma of homelessness; and
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279 **WHEREAS**, the Healthy Children's Fund is a critical local funding source for supporting
280 children and families at risk of or experiencing homelessness and providing more safe housing
281 options; and
282

283 **WHEREAS**, investing in shelter and housing for families with children can help prevent
284 adverse childhood experiences and end generational homelessness; and
285

286 **WHEREAS**, on July 11, 2023, the Whatcom County Council approved [Ordinance 2023-039](#)
287 providing for submission of a proposition to the qualified electors of Whatcom County pursuant to
288 RCW 82.14.450 authorizing the collection of a local sales and use tax of two-tenths of one percent
289 for the purpose of providing funds for costs associated with public health, safety and justice
290 facilities and services, including behavioral health, supportive housing, public safety, and criminal
291 justice facilities and programs; and
292

293 **WHEREAS**, Ordinance 2023-039 adopted the Justice Project Needs Assessment
294 Implementation Plan, which identifies five strategies and 15 projects for transforming the criminal
295 legal and behavioral health systems in Whatcom County and ensuring the provision of adequate
296 facilities, staffing, resources, and services at all points of contact between the community and
297 these systems; and
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299 **WHEREAS**, the Justice Project Needs Assessment Implementation Plan acknowledged a
300 lack of adequate housing for people with behavioral health issues as a problem in Whatcom
301 County; and
302

303 **WHEREAS**, Project 12 in the Justice Project Needs Assessment Implementation Plan is to
304 maintain and expand supportive housing programs for people with behavioral health issues and a
305 history of incarceration, as clinical support and intensive case management services have been
306 shown to increase housing stability, reduce involvement with the criminal legal system, and
307 decrease use of emergency medical services; and
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309 **WHEREAS**, among the identified key next steps is to provide capital and operating funding
310 for small recovery/supportive housing and shelters; and

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312 **WHEREAS**, on August 8, 2023, the Whatcom County Council approved [Resolution 2023-](#)
313 [020](#) declaring affordable housing and homelessness a public health crisis; and

314
315 **WHEREAS**, Resolution 2023-020 also requests that the Executive and county staff from all
316 relevant departments take a more holistic, system-wide approach to addressing homelessness and
317 housing affordability and availability at all income levels, and bring forward ideas for how the
318 County can take more proactive, effective, and decisive action; and

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

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

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328 **WHEREAS**, Whatcom County is currently undergoing an update to its Comprehensive Plan
329 due by December 2025; and

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331 **WHEREAS**, on August 9, 2022, the Whatcom County Council approved [Resolution 2022-036](#)
332 establishing priorities for Whatcom County's 2025 Comprehensive Plan update; and

333
334 **WHEREAS**, one of the priorities outlined in the Resolution is to collaboratively work toward
335 economic security and affordable housing without sacrificing environmental health and public
336 safety; and

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338 **WHEREAS**, in alignment with changes to the Growth Management Act (GMA) instituted by
339 House Bill 1220, Resolution 2022-036 requests that the 2025 Comprehensive Plan update include a
340 goal that everyone, at every income level, has access to affordable housing, as defined by a
341 household spending 30% of less of its income on housing costs; and

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343 **WHEREAS**, possible implementation strategies and actions that could help accomplish the
344 housing priorities listed in this resolution include, but are not limited to:

- 345 • Specific goals and policies to ensure housing development meets current and future
346 housing, equity, climate, and economic needs;
- 347 • Ensure adequate housing and services for seniors and people with disabilities - services to
348 include housing support, assistance with daily living, transportation, recreation, accessing
349 healthcare, and assistance at a person-centered level;
- 350 • Provide a full range of affordable housing types ranging from multifamily apartments,
351 condos, and duplexes to detached single family homes, ADU's, and tiny homes; and

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353 **WHEREAS**, 2025 Comprehensive Plan should include more specific consideration of
354 recommendations addressing homelessness and shelter capacity and related zoning and land use
355 policies and regulations; and

356
357 **WHEREAS**, the City of Bellingham estimates that less than 30% of Whatcom County
358 housing is affordable to a household earning the median family income; and

359

360 **WHEREAS**, in 2023 [Washington State Department of Commerce projected](#) Whatcom County
361 will need to build 34,377 new homes by the year 2044, 18,053 of which need to be affordable to
362 households earning less than 50% of Area Median Income; and

363
364 **WHEREAS**, on October 24, 2023, the Whatcom County Council approved [Resolution 2023-](#)
365 [043](#) supporting the use of Economic Development Investment (EDI) funds for affordable housing;
366 and

367 **WHEREAS**, on April 9, 2024, the Whatcom County Council approved [Resolution 2024-017](#)
368 recognizing the fentanyl crisis as an emergency in Whatcom County and identifying approaches to
369 the emergency; and

370
371 **WHEREAS**, Resolution 2024-017 recognizes that involuntary displacement of people
372 experiencing homelessness is estimated to worsen overdose and hospitalizations, decrease
373 initiations of medications for opioid use disorder, and contribute to deaths among people
374 experiencing homelessness; and

375
376 **WHEREAS**, on April 10, 2024, the Whatcom County Executive issued [Executive Order](#)
377 [2024-02](#) addressing fentanyl in Whatcom County; and

378
379 **WHEREAS**, Executive Order 2024-02 requests WCHCS prepare and submit to the
380 Executive, in coordination with the Department of Emergency Management, a 24-month
381 emergency response plan, staffing requests, and budget proposal to operationalize the order's
382 actions to address the Prevention, Intervention, Treatment, and Aftercare/Recovery (PITA) needs
383 of the Whatcom County community; and

384
385 **WHEREAS**, on May 30, 2024, WCHCS completed the [Operations Plan for Fentanyl Executive](#)
386 [Order](#); and

387
388 **WHEREAS**, strategy 1e of this Operations Plan is to implement strategies to reduce the
389 number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness and mitigate the individual and public
390 health impacts of encampments; and

391
392 **WHEREAS**, shelter is often an initial entry point for the homeless community to gain access
393 to services including treatment for chronic substance use, mental illness, and other health issues;
394 and

395 **WHEREAS**, in discussion of the Operations Plan and councilmember priorities during a
396 Council Committee of the Whole meeting on June 18, 2024, multiple councilmembers expressed
397 interest in supporting recovery shelter and housing; and

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399 **WHEREAS**, Whatcom County often partners with the City of Bellingham, City of Ferndale,
400 and other local jurisdictions and agencies to fund and support homeless shelters; and

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402 **WHEREAS**, on October 24, 2023, Whatcom County and the City of Bellingham entered into
403 an interlocal agreement to jointly fund a winter shelter located at 1355 Civic Field Way in
404 Bellingham from December 1, 2023 through February 29, 2024 operated by Road2Home, a
405 nonprofit serving community members experiencing homelessness; and

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407 **WHEREAS**, Whatcom County agreed to pay half of the costs of the Road2Home winter
408 shelter, not to exceed \$250,000, with funds provided by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA); and
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410 **WHEREAS**, the City of Bellingham agreed to pay Road2Home \$500,000 (of which \$306,000
411 are federal funds) to operate the Road2Home winter shelter (see [Contract C2301393](#)); and
412

413 **WHEREAS**, the Road2Home winter shelter at Civic Field Way operated every day from 7:00
414 p.m. to 8:00 a.m. and provided space for up to 45 guests, with the possibility for additional
415 capacity during severe weather; and
416

417 **WHEREAS**, in summer 2023, Whatcom County staff published a request for proposals
418 seeking a qualified provider to run a temperature dependent severe weather shelter for the 2023-
419 24 winter season; and
420

421 **WHEREAS**, Ferndale Community Services was the only respondent interested in operating a
422 temperature dependent shelter and entered into a contract with Whatcom County to operate a
423 severe weather shelter for the 2023-24 winter season with funding from ARPA; and
424

425 **WHEREAS**, Road2Home and YWCA responded to provide nightly winter shelter and entered
426 into a contract with Whatcom County to operate nightly with funding from ARPA; and
427

428 **WHEREAS**, no other applications were received and Whatcom County was unable to identify
429 a willing and available partner to provide a severe weather shelter service within Bellingham city
430 limits; and
431

432 **WHEREAS**, WCHCS staff recognized the need for additional capacity for shelter over the
433 2023-24 winter season, so they took on the responsibility of planning and operating a severe
434 weather shelter funded by Whatcom County; and
435

436 **WHEREAS**, WCHCS staff:

- 437 • Located, acquired, and equipped a location to operate a shelter from November 1, 2023
438 through March 14, 2024,
- 439 • Recruited and trained on-call volunteers and temporary paid staff to support operations, and
- 440 • Operated overnight (5pm to 8am) when forecasted conditions met previously established
441 Severe Weather Shelters Guiding Assumptions ($\leq 28^{\circ}\text{F}$) and sufficient staffing was available;
442 and
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444 **WHEREAS**, the WCHCS' [Winter 2023-24 Severe Weather Shelter After Action Report](#) was
445 published on May 23, 2024 and presented to Council on June 4, 2024; and
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447 **WHEREAS**, the county-run severe weather shelter, located at 810 N. State Street in
448 Bellingham, was open for a total of 20 nights and served 197 clients for a total of 947 bed nights,
449 averaging 47 people per night; and
450

451 **WHEREAS**, the planned capacity of the county-run severe weather shelter was 45, but
452 during particularly cold nights, the shelter exceeded that capacity, with the highest number of
453 clients served in one night totaling 69; and
454

455 **WHEREAS**, the nightly winter low barrier shelter operated by Road2Home reached or
456 exceeded capacity (45 people) 87% of the nights they operated this winter, and reported guests
457 would begin lining up outside in hopes of acquiring a space for the night as many as 3-4 hours prior
458 to opening; and
459

460 **WHEREAS**, Road2Home counted an average of 25 to 30 guests who were turned away on
461 nights when Whatcom County’s severe weather shelter was closed compared with an average of 8
462 guests on nights when the severe weather shelter was open; and

463
464 **WHEREAS**, these numbers likely represent an undercounting of individuals seeking
465 overnight sheltering, as severe weather shelter guests shared anecdotally that word spread quickly
466 among the unsheltered population as to when the line queuing at Road2Home’s nightly shelter had
467 reached capacity; and

468
469 **WHEREAS**, the After Action Report identified strengths and areas for improvement for five
470 main objectives:

- 471 • Operationalize a facility to serve as a Severe Weather Shelter (SWS)
- 472 • Recruit, train, and schedule staff to safely operate the SWS
- 473 • Activate the SWS based on established temperature and weather-based criteria
- 474 • Communicate SWS operational status to partner agencies and public at least 48
- 475 hours before activation
- 476 • Ensure safety and wellbeing of staff, volunteers, and guests; and
- 477

478 **WHEREAS**, among the identified strengths were that the Response System Division staff
479 (including Ground Response and Coordinated Entry, Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion, and
480 Alternative Response Team) were able to make prolonged connections with regular clientele during
481 severe weather shelter operations; and

482
483 **WHEREAS**, the After Action Report included four main recommendations moving forward:

- 484 1. Prioritize additional nightly sheltering capacity during the coldest months instead of
- 485 sporadic, criteria-based severe weather sheltering
- 486 2. Expand both length of winter sheltering “season” and hours of operation
- 487 3. Utilize a dedicated, single purpose location with sufficient capacity, necessary
- 488 amenities, and within proximity to other community services
- 489 4. Identify a contracted provider OR establish dedicated WCHCS positions to operate
- 490 and manage a nightly winter shelter as described above in the above
- 491 recommendations; and
- 492

493 **WHEREAS**, the total cost for this severe weather shelter was \$403,598, for an average of
494 \$426 per guest served per night; and

495
496 **WHEREAS**, WCHCS’ After Action Report [presentation](#) provides the following cost
497 comparison of various interventions:

- 498 • The average cost of an uninsured overnight hospital stay is \$9,300, while an
- 499 uninsured daytime visit is \$2,607
- 500 • The median annual cost of a motel/hotel room in Whatcom County is \$48,000
- 501 • The average annual cost of a single bed in the Whatcom County jail is \$45,000
- 502 • The average cost of a bed per year in 2022 at 22 North is \$25,000
- 503 • The average estimated annual cost of one Tiny Home at Gardenview is \$15,000
- 504 • The average annual cost for a bed in federal prison is \$35,347
- 505 • The median annual PSH unit cost is \$13,349.31, fluctuating depending on population
- 506 level and program size
- 507 • The median annual cost of a single night by night shelter bed in Washington State is
- 508 \$13,421.05
- 509 • The estimated annual cost of a single bed in a county-run low barrier shelter is
- 510 \$24,000; and
- 511

512 **WHEREAS**, shelter is a more cost-effective form of intervention compared to a night in a
513 hospital, motel, Whatcom County jail, and federal prison; and

514
515 **WHEREAS**, Whatcom County now has experience operating a shelter; and

516
517 **WHEREAS**, on April 8, 2024, Bellingham City Council approved the purchase of a property
518 at 3300 Northwest Avenue to be used as the new location for a tiny home village to replace two
519 existing villages, Swift Haven (25 beds) and Unity Village (23 beds) operated by HomesNOW!; and

520
521 **WHEREAS**, the new North Haven tiny home village will be operated by HomesNOW! and
522 could be ready for 48 guests by late 2024 pending Temporary Shelter Permit approval; and

523
524 **WHEREAS**, HomesNOW! has expressed interest and ability to expand tiny home shelter
525 capacity; and

526
527 **WHEREAS**, Lighthouse Mission Ministries operates Base Camp, a low barrier 24-hour
528 reservation-based shelter that provides a safe place for up to 200 adults to stay; and

529
530 **WHEREAS**, Lighthouse Mission Ministries reported that in a matter of a few weeks they had
531 to turn away 20+ families due to lack of capacity; and

532
533 **WHEREAS**, Lighthouse Mission Ministries will replace the current 200-bed Base Camp
534 shelter with a new 300-bed shelter later this year at 910 W. Holly Street with the potential for an
535 additional 100 beds during extreme weather; and

536
537 **WHEREAS**, Whatcom County also provides funding to support shelters with Domestic
538 Violence and Sexual Assault Services of Whatcom County, Northwest Youth Services PAD Program,
539 Opportunity Council, Lydia Place Motel Program for families with children, YWCA, and Sun House;
540 and

541
542 **WHEREAS**, the hard work of dedicated staff from these shelters and others have prevented
543 hundreds of people from having no other option than to sleep outside; and

544
545 **WHEREAS**, the County and community partners have increased shelter beds over the last
546 few years, but demand continues to outpace the supply, and the need to expand year-round
547 shelter capacity continues to exist; and

548
549 **WHEREAS**, the Whatcom County Council acts as the Whatcom County Health Board to
550 enact local rules and regulations as are necessary to preserve, promote, and improve public health
551 and make recommendations to the Whatcom County Executive on matters affecting public health in
552 our community; and

553
554 **WHEREAS**, [functional zero homelessness](#) is a milestone that indicates a community has
555 measurably solved homelessness, meaning that when homelessness occurs it is rare and brief; and

556
557 **WHEREAS**, to achieve functional zero, the Whatcom County community must increase
558 whole system capacity and availability of shelter, transitional housing, permanent supportive
559 housing, affordable housing, attainable market rate housing, behavioral health and substance use
560 treatment, and social services.

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562 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the Whatcom County Council declares a goal to
563 achieve and maintain functional zero homelessness within ten years; and

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BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Whatcom County Council supports the expansion of year-round shelter capacity in our community, including but not limited to operating a county-managed year-round shelter and supporting tiny home villages, especially for vulnerable and overburdened communities at risk of housing insecurity and homelessness; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Whatcom County Council recognizes the opportunity to end youth and young adult homelessness in Whatcom County and supports the establishment of shelter for families with children, unaccompanied minors, and young adults (18-25); and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Whatcom County Council requests the County Executive to:

1. Prepare a proposal in consultation with the Whatcom County Housing Advisory Committee to expand capacity for year-round shelters through a variety of methods and other preferred approaches as recommended by the County Executive.
 - a. Consider different types of shelters including county-managed, congregate, tiny homes, pallet shelters, urban camping zones, safe parking, and low barrier.
 - b. Consider population specific shelter including for families with children, unaccompanied minors, and young adults (18-25).
 - c. Determine if a temperature dependent shelter or a nightly winter shelter is operationally preferable. If recommendation is continuing to contract/operate a temperature dependent severe weather shelter, evaluate the temperature threshold required for opening the severe weather shelter.
 - d. Use the Homeless Strategies Workgroup recommendations and action steps to inform proposal for expanding shelter capacity.
 - e. Include budget impact analysis that outlines costs, staff time, funding sources, and other necessary considerations.
2. Explore options to coordinate, collaborate, and cost share increasing shelter capacity with all seven cities in Whatcom County, other local, state, federal, and tribal jurisdictions, and community partners.
3. Identify strategies to support building nonprofit provider capacity.
4. Explore Whatcom County owned properties and future land acquisitions for expanded shelter and housing capacity.
5. Identify a provider who will ensure adequate winter sheltering for the 2024-25 winter season. If no provider is available, then establish a plan for Whatcom County to operate.
6. Contract with an independent entity to conduct an evaluation of Whatcom County's coordinated entry system in coordination with the WCHCS, other organizational homeless and housing service providers, and community members with lived experience.
7. Provide a road map for how to achieve functional zero in ten years with annual progress reports.
8. Create a plan to do community outreach to locations where unsheltered community members reside;
9. Create a training and employment program supporting unhoused community members, in partnership with the business and labor community; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the shelter options and budget impacts be provided to the Whatcom County Council for review and consideration by September 30, 2024 to ensure adequate time to include funding in the 2025-26 biennial budget; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Whatcom County Council respectfully requests that the Whatcom County Housing Advisory Committee (WCHAC):

- 615 1. Create a short-term subcommittee that sunsets December 31, 2025 to issue shelter
616 recommendations with the following specifications:
- 617 • The subcommittee, led by the WCHAC Chair, shall include Housing Advisory
618 Committee member and nonmember participation including those with lived
619 experiences.
 - 620 • Review and provide feedback on the County Executive's proposal for expanding
621 year-round shelter capacity, funding sources, staff needs, and possible locations
622 (including lands currently owned by county or those available for purchase).
 - 623 • The subcommittee should recruit additional expertise, as needed, to meet the
624 deliverables and scope.
- 625 2. Provide recommendations to the Comprehensive Plan specifically addressing
626 homelessness and shelter capacity and related zoning and land use policies and
627 regulations.
- 628 3. Review and provide input and direction on the county's upcoming 2024 Plan to End
629 Homelessness.
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631 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Whatcom County Council request council staff support
632 in exploring options for establishing an independent, quasi-governmental entity dedicated to
633 housing and homeless issues; and
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635 **BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED** that the Whatcom County Council supports any efforts by the
636 cities of Whatcom County to increase shelter capacity, including but not limited to the
637 implementation of safe parking sites, relocation and expansion of tiny home villages, the extension
638 of the lease and permit for the current Basecamp location to expand capacity for the 2024-25
639 winter season, and the operation of daytime severe weather drop-in locations.
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641 **APPROVED** this ____ day of _____, 2024.
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645 WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
646 ATTEST: WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON
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649 _____
650 Cathy Halka, Clerk of the Council
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649 _____
650 Barry Buchanan, Council Chair
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653 APPROVED AS TO FORM:
654

655 George Roche via email 7/16/2024
656 Civil Deputy Prosecutor