



City of Bellingham
City Council & Whatcom County Council Special Meeting Minutes
January 11, 2021, 3:00 PM

Mayor Seth Fleetwood
Council Members Hannah Stone, Gene Knutson, Daniel Hammill,
Pinky Vargas, Lisa Anderson, Michael Lilliquist and
Hollie Huthman

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www.cob.org/council
All meetings are held in the City Hall Council Chambers at
210 Lottie Street, Bellingham, WA, unless otherwise noted.

Call to Order

Roll Call

Present:

Council President Hannah Stone, First Ward
Council Member Gene Knutson, Second Ward
Council Member Daniel Hammill, Third Ward
Council Member Pinky Vargas, Fourth Ward
Council Member Lisa Anderson, Fifth Ward
Council Member Michael Lilliquist, Sixth Ward
Council Member Hollie Huthman, At-Large

Present:

Council Chair Barry Buchanan, At-Large
Council Member Todd Donovan, Council District 2
Council Member Ben Elenbaas, Council District 5
Council Member Carol Frazey, At-Large
Council Member Rud Browne, Council District 1
Council Member Tyler Byrd, Council District 3
Council Member Kathy Kershner, Council District 4

Joint Council Meeting

22881 1. Discussion and Possible Action on Shelter and Other Issues Related to Homelessness in Whatcom County

Council President Stone, gave some background and history of the encampments at City Hall. She stated the value of a joint meeting and conversation between County Council and City Council on the issue of encampments. A joint meeting helps to provide transparency and a voice from both councils.

She introduced Mayor Seth Fleetwood.

The Mayor listed efforts being made to shelter unhoused individuals and is working toward a humane process to ending the occupancy of the City Hall camp. He explained that Swift Haven, a tiny home encampment, is currently operational at Frank Geri field. A joint effort between the City and the County, has 50 tiny homes that will be available soon. Currently there are 25 built and ready for occupancy. The Port of Bellingham made available a site on Cornwall Avenue for pallet shelters.

County Executive Sidhu, indicated that 24 of the tiny homes have been delivered and he expects that 25 will be delivered within the next ten days. COVID-19 has limited the County's partnership with usual partners for homeless service providers. There could be more coordination between service providers. There has been misinformation among Camp 210. Residents have incorrectly heard that if they go to Base Camp, they will miss out on a tiny home opportunity. And there have been a couple days when Base Camp was full. The Walk-In Center on Holly Street has had vacancy, but people have not taken advantage of it. The Walk-In Center has 39 available spaces. The County contacted Base Camp and found that there was misinformation that others were not let back in, and some tested positive for COVID-19. A quarantine facility is available and when individuals have quarantined, they are welcome back at Base Camp.

County employees have expressed they do not feel safe with the presense of Camp 210. Some have encountered an increase in violence since the camp went up. The County asked that Grand Avenue parking spaces open so that County employees can park close to the County Courthouse or use the shuttle service that shuttles them to a parking lot at the Senior Center.

Council Member Hammill asked when the total number of available units will be available.

Mayor Fleetwood, answered that there are 25 at Swifhaven, (operator is HomesNOW!). The Cornwall site will likely hold 20 -25 homes, but we still need an operator.

Council Member Frazey asked how many tents are on the library lawn.

Mayor Fleetwood reported that a few weeks ago, a representative from the Health Department counted 141 tents. Currently, there may be 120 persons camping.

Council Member Donovan asked about the availability of a third site for tiny homes or pallet shelters. Mayor Fleetwood answered another site and operator is needed.

Council Member Vargas, asked if 25 people have moved into Swift Haven, and has a discussion commenced with people at Camp 210 to ask for their willingness to move if they get a tiny house.

Mayor Fleetwood answered that they have not asked residents of the camp about their willingness to move. He reported that 13 units at Swift Haven are occupied and HomesNOW! are working to fill up the additional 12 homes.

Council Member Byrd, asked how many people we are trying to assist and what their situation is. He suggested that we look into a table or kiosk where people can be triaged. That may help us to know what services are needed. Mayor Fleetwood said that could be considered. He is inclined to bring in case workers for a chance to engage occupants of the camp.

Satpal Sidhu affirmed Council Member Byrd's point. Separating and identifying levels of service is a good place to start. He also feels the immediate need can be met between the Drop-in Center and Base Camp. If both are combined, there are more than 100 spots available immediately.

Ann Beck, of the Whatcom County Health Department noted that this is a regional problem not only a Bellingham problem.

Council Member Knutson, feels the camp must end. There are many options and services available to those experiencing homelessness.

Council Member Huthman, agreed with the points of Tyler Byrd and asked if there are ways to identify the needs of those on the lawn.

Council Member Browne likes the idea of inventory on a regular basis to assess the needs of people. He asked if we understand what the barriers are to those not utilizing the existing service providers.

Council Member Kershner, is a proponent of pallet shelters for temporary housing and changing code so not to harm future home affordability.

Council President Stone asked if we have capacity and resources for those individuals who have extenuating circumstances that prevent them from utilizing the Base Camp or Drop-in Center. She asked, if, as a Council, there is anything legislatively that can be done or have existing ordinances that enable us to help these individuals.

Council Member Frazey inquired if persons at Camp 210 had contact with a case manager.

Council Member Byrd, suggested a warming house at the Farmers Market location.

Council Member Browne added that we must prioritize help to individuals and not fund a nation problem with local tax dollars.

Council Member Elenbaas commented that low expectations from those who need help will only lead to low outcomes. We must require something from those seeking assistance.

Council President Stone announced that compared to January 2020 where there were 280 emergency beds available, we now have 400 emergency beds available.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 5:13 PM.