



Memorandum

TO: SATPAL SIDHU, COUNTY EXECUTIVE

FROM: Ann Beck, Community Health & Human Services Manager

RE: County Council Approval of Whatcom County 5-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan

DATE: NOVEMBER 4, 2025

Purpose:

Whatcom County Health and Community Services is submitting the 5-Year Homeless Housing Plan to Council for approval. The plan outlines Whatcom County's goals and strategies to reduce homelessness and its related harms over five years (2026–2030). It aligns with Washington State Department of Commerce requirements and includes state required objectives as well as locally developed objectives, strategies, and performance measures.

This plan has been in development for over a year.

- **Timeline:** Began late 2024, led by a subcommittee of the Whatcom County Housing Advisory Committee (WCHAC).
- **Stakeholder Input:** Included interviews with key experts and multiple phases of community engagement.
- **Public Engagement:**
 - **Phase 1 (Objectives):** A ranked-choice activity (748 responses total, both online and in-person) identified seven main objectives.
 - **Phase 2 (Strategies & Metrics):** Community events in Bellingham and Lynden (73 total attendees) and provider meetings gathered input on strategy priorities and performance measures.
- **Governance:** The subcommittee met five times and shared this draft of the plan with the Whatcom County Housing Advisory Committee on **October 9, 2025**. The WCHAC voted to approve the plan with an accompanying letter (attached to this agenda bill) to move forward to the Whatcom County Council for approval.

Plan Highlights:

- **Objectives:** Seven total—five required by the Dept. of Commerce, two developed locally.
- **Strategies:** 50 total, including **22 new strategies** to launch during 2026–2030.



- **Key New Strategies:**

1. Annual funding set-asides for affordable housing (\$1M starting 2027) and emergency shelter expansion (\$800K starting 2026).
2. New shelter projects: 30 tiny home units and a 60-bed low-barrier shelter by 2029.
3. Overhaul of Coordinated Entry policies and assessments.
4. Implementation of Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) recommendations, expanding behavioral health and overdose prevention services.
5. Encouragement of competitive wages for frontline homelessness service workers.

Context & Limitations:

The plan acknowledges it is **not a plan to end homelessness**. Due to the ongoing affordable housing crisis, despite strong local program performance, more people are entering homelessness than exiting it.

Implementation & Reporting:

- **Ongoing and New Efforts:** Most strategies build on existing programs, with new initiatives starting in 2026.
- **Progress Tracking:**
 - o Annual public reports (Q1 each year).
 - o Quarterly performance reports to County Council.
 - o Semiannual presentations and continued WCHAC oversight.

Summary:

The Whatcom County 5-Year Homeless Housing Plan is a community-informed roadmap to reduce homelessness-associated harms through expanded shelter capacity, policy updates, and system improvements, while recognizing systemic challenges that limit the possibility of fully ending homelessness in the near term.

Accompanying the plan, the WCHAC submitted a letter expressing appreciation for the efforts of staff and stakeholders and recommending further discussion on several key policy areas. The committee voiced its support for the plan and requested ongoing collaboration in 2026—during the start of implementation—to address and refine some of the more complex issues identified in the plan.

WCHCS staff are requesting a vote to approve the plan during this meeting. Once approved by County Council, it will be submitted to the Department of Commerce before the end of 2025.