



## Whatcom County Housing Advisory Committee MEETING AGENDA

Thursday April 11, 2024 8:30-10:00 AM

Hybrid: Civic Building 1<sup>st</sup> Floor Conference Room (322 N Commercial St) & Zoom

Agenda Items		Time
1.	Call to Order, Introductions and Roll Call of Members Present (Dan)	8:30 – 8:35
2.	Agenda Review (Dan)	
3.	Action Item: Approval of March 2024 Minutes (Dan)	
4.	Executive’s Office/Legislative Update (Kayla)	8:35 – 8:45
5.	Follow-up on Comprehensive Plan Recommendations (Dan)	8:45 – 9:00
6.	Point in Time Count Messaging (Teri)	9:00 – 9:20
7.	Health and Community Services Update (HCS Staff)	9:20 – 9:35
8.	City of Bellingham Update (Samya)	9:35 – 9:40
9.	Whatcom Homeless Service Center Update (Teri)	9:40 – 9:45
10.	New Business	9:45 – 9:55
11.	Public Comment (2 Minutes Per Person)	9:55 – 10:00
	Adjourn (Dan)	

Next meeting: Thursday, June 13, 2024, 8:30-10:00 AM

*Community members who require special assistance to participate in a committee meeting are asked to contact the meeting facilitator at least 4 business days in advance.*  
[ageleyns@co.whatcom.wa.us](mailto:ageleyns@co.whatcom.wa.us)



# Whatcom County Housing Advisory Committee

## Meeting Minutes

**Meeting Date/Time/Location:** 3/14/2024 / 8:30-9:30am / Hybrid: Civic 1<sup>st</sup> Floor Conference Room & Zoom

**Committee Members Present:** Ann Beck, Ashley Thomasson, Brien Thane, Bruce Bosch, Dan Dunne, Mary Lou Steward, Paul Schissler, Samya Lutz, Tara Sundin, Von Ochoa

**Committee Members Absent:** Adrienne Renz, Dawna Morse, Diana Phair, Kayla Schott-Bresler, Teri Bryant

**WCHCS Staff/Guest Presenters:** Ashley Geyleynse, Chris D'Onofrio

Agenda Item	Report/Discussion
1. Call to order, introductions, and roll call	Introductions commenced and quorum present.
2. Agenda Review	There were no requested revisions to the agenda.
3. Approval of Minutes	Samya moved that the minutes from the February 2023 meeting be approved, Ann seconded the motion. The committee voted and the motion passed. <b>Yes: 10; No: 0; Abstain: 0</b>
4. Discussion, Review, and Endorsement of 2025 Comp Plan Recommendations to the Executive	<p>Dan reviewed the committee's task to make general recommendations to the County Executive regarding the 2025 Comprehensive Plan. Dan proposed to review the list of Council Priorities, make suggested changes as recommended by members of the committee, and then review collaboratively one by one to either keep, add, change, or remove.</p> <p>Samya shared that she and Tara met with folks internal to the City of Bellingham, and they suggest adding into the mix the Countywide Planning Policies, an existing document that is part of each city's and Whatcom County's comprehensive plans. The amendments were intended to strengthen the language of the policies related to affordable housing. An edited version of Section G of this document was shared with all members. Samya reviewed the City's recommendation to update numbers two, five, six, and seven and remove number nine. Ashley G. screenshared the document and committee members discussed and collaboratively made additional changes to numbers two and six.</p> <p>Ashley G. screenshared the Council Priorities document and committee members collaboratively reviewed and suggested edits.</p> <p>Tara motioned that the Countywide Planning Policies document that was amended by the committee be included in the memo to the Executive. Ann seconded the motion. The committee voted and the motion passed. <b>Yes: 10; No: 0; Abstain: 0</b></p>



	<p>Members continued to review items in the Council Priorities document. Time was running out before the end of the meeting, so a quorum of members agreed to extend the meeting by 10-15 minutes to finish the review.</p> <p>Samya moved that the edited list of priorities be included in the memo from the Committee Chair to the County Executive. Ann seconded the motion. Paul recommended one additional change to the document. The committee voted and the motion passed. Tara and Mary Lou were not present for the final vote. <b>Yes: 8; No: 0; Abstain: 0</b></p>
<p>5. Public Comment</p>	<p>There was no public comment.</p>
<p>Adjourn</p>	<p>The meeting was adjourned.</p>

**Next Meeting:** Thursday, April 11, 2024, 8:30-10:00am

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## Department Report

March, 2024

*Equity – Collaboration – Compassion – Transparency – Innovation - Service*

### **Leadership:**

**Health Director** work has focused on communication/outreach, legislative session, meetings with federal legislators, and key issues including Healthy Children’s Fund and fentanyl/overdose Executive action.

**Annual Report and City Council Briefings:** Whatcom County Health and Community Services published our first Annual Report in March. In conjunction with the release and to re-open communication with local elected officials, I provided presentations to every city council in March. Topics included department/division overview, budget, strategic plan, 2023 accomplishments and 2024 projects/initiatives.

**Legislative Advocacy:** Through Washington State Association of Local Public Health Officials (WSALPHO) and National Association of City and County Health Officials (NACCHO), I met with state and federal legislators, respectively, to share local priorities, challenges, and requests for support. Two of the three WSALPHO legislative priorities passed and were signed into law by the Governor.

**Priority Topics:** I’ve worked with our staff team to move our proposed RFPs for the Healthy Children’s Fund through the county process, and partnered with Executive Staff and stakeholders to develop a budget and recommendations for immediate action re: fentanyl. I look forward to the Council and Executive actions and the opportunity to move forward with a variety of new activities and initiatives.

**Health Officer** work has focused on the opioid crisis, communicable diseases, behavioral health, and collaboration with community healthcare providers.

**Opioids:** We have continued engaging with elected officials and community partners in addressing the opioid crisis. Within the department the Health Officers are working inter-divisionally, particularly with RSD and CDE, around improving capacity, treatment options, and interfaces between people who use drugs and the jail, hospital, outpatient medical providers, Lummi Nation, and Opioid Use Disorder treatment providers. Dr. Thompson recently attended a 2-day addiction medicine conference and is working to

connect the Swedish Hospital addiction medicine fellowship program and Whatcom County healthcare institutions. Dr. Harley is working to improve support for pregnant people, young families, and youth with mental health concerns. The Health Officers are also convening meetings of medical leadership to increase collaboration and communication between healthcare institutions in our county.

**Communicable Disease:** Respiratory virus guidance is evolving to better respond to the current situation of less severe outcomes from COVID-19, and harmonize COVID guidance with that around other respiratory infections. These efforts are balanced with caution around the ongoing deaths and severe disease from COVID-19 illness, particularly in those over 65 years of age. Still at the forefront is the prevention message that vaccination continues to significantly reduce health risks from COVID-19. We are alert to up-trending measles cases nationally this year, with a number of cases within Washington state among unimmunized adults. We appreciate efforts by healthcare, schools, childcare and our immunizations nurses to improve measles immunity in our county through MMR vaccination.

**Other work:** We continue to engage regularly around communication and media requests, data presentation and interpretation, collaboration with the Medical Examiner's office, and the Whatcom Community Health Insights project.

### **Communicable Disease and Epidemiology (CD&E):**

Public health nurses and staff within the CD&E division continue clinical service outreach and educational events in the community.

**Refugee Health:** With the assistance of Dr. Amy Harley, we are working with the state Department of Health and the federal Department of Health and Human Services to contract with a local community health center in Whatcom County to start offering Refugee Health Screenings. Refugees who resettle in Whatcom County must travel to Snohomish County for Refugee Health Screenings. Offering this service locally can reduce barriers for refugees seeking health services. Reducing barriers to healthcare access for this population is vital for infectious disease surveillance in the community.

**Vaccine Clinics:** The immunization team continues to offer monthly vaccine clinics and clinic appointments to increase access for residents with barriers. The team recently received an expression of gratitude for their partnership with Hoagland's Pharmacy to ensure the administration of COVID-19 and influenza vaccines for residents who are insured but homebound due to disability or illness. This vulnerable population often has high barriers to accessing care due to physical disability and high medical risk, which

prevents them from accessing healthcare through traditional methods. From January to February 2024, we served 54 clients and administered 134 vaccines.

**Candida Auris:** The Infection Prevention team, in concert with the state Department of Health, is collaborating with the local hospital and long-term care facilities on surveillance and infection prevention protocols for Candida Auris. Cases were recently identified in Washington State. Candida Auris is a multi-drug-resistant fungus that can cause severe illness and spread within healthcare facilities.

**School/Childcare Support:** Our Public Health Nurse and Liaison for School and Childcare Health is collaborating with the state Department of Health on creating a tool to help schools and childcare facilities standardize reporting of absenteeism for certain notifiable conditions and facilitate prompt notification of clusters/outbreaks to local health jurisdictions. The tool will help streamline data collection and reduce the reporting burden on the public school system.

**Syphilis:** Syphilis cases continue to trend upward on the local and national levels. The Sexual Health Provider Education virtual presentation series, which was organized by CD&E, begins in March. Syphilis is the first of three presentations by expert faculty from the University of Washington. This virtual education series will help with healthcare providers' knowledge deficits regarding managing STDs/STIs.

**Tuberculosis:** The Tuberculosis Team is currently managing five active TB cases. TB nurses often provide clinical care and case management to medically complex individuals. The public health nurse went above and beyond duty to contact a patient's specialty providers to prevent an adverse outcome from the client's reaction to their cardiac medication. The same client was admitted to the hospital recently. This nurse collaborated with the hospital case management team to advocate for this client to receive a home health nurse at discharge.

**Drug Testing:** The public health nurses in the SSP/Harm Reduction Program have started rounding with the street medicine outreach team to increase participant engagement. Collaborating with the University of Washington and the Addiction, Drug, & Alcohol Institute (ADAI), they have started offering a new service, which is drug testing to help participants identify potentially harmful substances circulating in the community. In addition, both public health nurses are participating in the Community-Law Enforcement Aligning in Response to Substance Use (CLEARS) Project, a one-year project to develop regional solutions to improve interactions between law enforcement and people who use drugs.

**Community and Organizational Development (COD):**

The Community and Organizational Development division facilitates collaboration across the divisions and provides accurate, meaningful, and timely information, data, and training. Specialty areas include data, assessment, epidemiology, informatics, performance management, evaluation, communications, media relations, emergency preparedness, equity and belonging work, and workforce development. A few key areas of focus at this time are:

**Equity:** The newly formed HEAL (Healing-centered, Equity and Leadership) Team launched on February 29<sup>th</sup>! This team will receive professional development in trauma-informed care, healing-centered practices, antiracism and health equity to create foundational learning in preparation for actionizing health equity. In late Spring, an organizational climate and care survey will be launched to assess the strengths and needs of WCHCS.

**Performance Management:** Quality Improvement (QI) Council launched March 7<sup>th</sup>. This is a cross-divisional collaborative team that will execute the Quality Improvement strategic priority to improve the use of data to drive decision-making, inform improvements, and foster a culture of transparency and accountability. The council will focus on alignment and standardization of our department's quality improvement efforts, bring new innovations to the departments' programs, and increase accountability to leadership and our stakeholders.

**Data:** A new Child Wellness Survey focused on infants and children ages 6 months to 11 years is being conducted by WA DOH. Typically, the results would be available at a state-level however, through Healthy Children's Fund, Whatcom County will survey our county and get data specific to our community. This will allow more meaningful results that reflect children and their families who live in the county. The survey will ask parents of children in this age group about the health and development of their child, access to childcare, and other topics including mental health. Whatcom County will be a model for other smaller counties in Washington State that would like to have their own county-specific sample.

### **Community Health and Human Services (CH&HS):**

**Retreat:** CH&HS held a retreat on January 25<sup>th</sup> and nearly every staff member of the now 30+ people in the division were able to attend and share their programs, commitments and priorities for 2024. This year the focus is on intentional programming and commitments in our work, to make sustainable long-term impacts. The retreat also created space for several of our program teams to connect and find ways to collaborate.

The Veterans Program and the Child and Family team met shortly after the retreat and are now working on ways to support childcare needs for veteran households.

**Severe Weather Shelter:** The Severe Weather Shelter has officially closed for the season, as of March 15<sup>th</sup>. Over the 20 nights that it was open, over 197 unique guests were served. The shelter was staffed using a pool of 11 temporary staff and 22 permanent Health & Community Services employees. In partnership with the Response Systems Division, over 730 hours of training were completed for the individuals who worked or volunteered for the operation. It was a very large lift, and involved staff across the department, but with 947 utilizations by guests over those 20 nights and 5 days, many of our vulnerable neighbors kept warm during some life-threatening temperatures.

**Youth RFPs:** Supporting youth is very much a focus across several of our programs right now. It is really exciting to have three different Requests for Proposals (RFP) open to the community with a youth focus. We are seeking proposals ranging from homeless prevention strategies for families with children 0-5 (closes 3/12), Outreach work focused on preventing youth from using opioids (closes 4/2) and an opportunity to support families seeking services and referrals for their children with healthcare needs (closes 4/2). Each of these is an opportunity to prevent further harm or trauma for many of the youth in the community, and it is exciting to be one step closer to getting programs to the people and places they are needed most.

**Healthy Children's Fund:** Over the last month, the Children and Family Programs have released a Housing Stability RFP, solicited proposals from Douglas to serve Medicaid eligible pregnant parents and finalized a Basic Needs RFP that will be released in early April for families with Children 0-5. All funded through the Healthy Children's Fund. The Child and Family Well Being Task Force will be hosting its first annual retreat on March 29<sup>th</sup>, with focus on building a work plan and connection amongst the group moving into the new year.

**Opioids/Behavioral Health:** Our Prevention staff continue to support the work of the All Hands team, and so far in 2024, there have been four successful events. The staff are also excited as they are just beginning the scoring of the proposals from a recently closed RFP seeking providers able to offer school based teletherapy in Whatcom County. This will mean added capacity for youth mental health services in our schools.

### **Environmental Health (EH):**

EH programs focus on protecting groups of people from threats to their health and safety posed by their environments. EH programs include various sanitation areas such as food safety, drinking water, on-site sewage and solid waste.

**New Leadership:** With the recent promotion of an environmental health specialist into a supervisor position within the division, there has been a shift and reorganization of programmatic responsibilities. This expansion in leadership will allow for more support in programs including food safety, living environment, school safety and solid waste.

**Smoke and Heat Response:** Using Foundational Public Health Services funding, EH is building a program to support frontline communities during wildfire smoke and extreme heat events. Several public education events, including at senior centers around the county, and focused conversations are scheduled in April 2024. This qualitative assessment will inform the recommendations of the Climate Vulnerability Assessment, which will be completed June 30, 2024.

**Coordinated Water System Plan:** The division is leading the Coordinated Water System Plan update to dovetail with the County's larger Comprehensive Plan update. Changes and updates to the plan intend to address complex issues such as the impact of climate change on water systems.

### Financial Services:

The Financial & Administrative Services division supports the department by coordinating financial services such as contract processing, payment processing, grant billing, payroll processing and other various audit functions.

**New Manager:** The new Financial Services Manager started February 26<sup>th</sup> and this position will coordinate and oversee the daily departmental financial and accounting activities.

**Year End:** The Business Office has wrapped up the 2023 financial year end process. This process included creating grant accountability worksheets for the 33 Federal Grants (\$2.8M) and 51 State Grants (\$15.7M) that were reviewed and reconciled.

**Contracts:** Our Contracts Coordinator is successfully managing 129 active contracts and 15 Letter of Agreements (LOA's) to help support the \$34.2M the department has budgeted to contractual services in 2024.

### Response Systems:

The Response Systems Division (RSD) programs aim to address the needs of individuals lacking adequate care for behavioral health challenges and basic needs within our community. These programs seek to alleviate the reliance on emergency services such

as 911, crisis interventions, and the legal system. By implementing innovative approaches like the Alternative Response Team (ART), Ground-Level Response and Coordinated Engagement (GRACE) program, Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion/Let Everyone Advance with Dignity (LEAD) program, Co-Responder program, Mental Health Court and Street Medicine Team, we strive to provide comprehensive support to individuals in need while also enhancing the efficiency of our emergency response and care coordination systems.

A few program highlights include:

**ART:** The Alternative Response Team (ART) is fully staffed as of March 4th. ART continues to respond to 911 calls in lieu of law enforcement when appropriate. In addition to the ART response team, RSD was able to hire a Behavioral Health Aide who support ART and community providers with transportation needs. In March, RSD will report back to County and City of Bellingham councils on how the first year of ART has gone, what we have learned and where we hope to go.

**Co-Response:** In partnership with the Whatcom County Sheriff's Office, the Co-Responder program is in full swing. With two highly trained and skilled Behavioral Health (BH) specialists, the team is able to respond with deputies to calls for service that have a BH concern. Co-Responders are able to bring services and support to community members in the moment, provide some follow-up and free up deputies to be available for other calls.

Similar to ART, we are working with a 3rd party evaluator in the pilot year of Co-Response to assist our community in understanding the need for a Co-Responder program, areas of growth and data analysis.

In April, staff members from the Co-Responder and GRACE programs will attend the 2nd annual Co-Responder Outreach Alliance of WA conference. This will be an opportunity to meet with co-responder programs from across WA state.