



WHATCOM COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY BOARD MEETING MINUTES

JUNE 6, 2024

Present: Sterling Chick (Chair), Julie Terry, Kelli Carroll, Madison Emry, Jon Scanlon, Chris Kobdich, Emily O'Connor, Ashley Thomasson, Greg Thompson, Shu-Ling Zhao, Leah Wainman, Christine Espina, Guy Occhiogrosso, Robyn Phillips-Madson, Teri Bryant, Jeffery Hart, Joni Hensley, Adrienne Renz

Absent: Edna Revey, Vesla Tonnessen, Michael Massanari

Topic	Discussion/Outcome
Call to Order	Sterling Chick presented a land acknowledgment. Roll call of Public Health Advisory Board (PHAB) members.
Approve Minutes	Minutes from the May 2, 2024 meeting were approved by unanimous consent with the following abstention: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teri Bryant
County Council Resolution on expanding shelter capacity and creating shelter subcommittee	<p>Councilmember Jon Scanlon reported that Council discussed the resolution at the June 4 Council Meeting and plan to vote on it at either the June 18 or July 9 meeting. He indicated that he and councilmembers Barry Buchanan and Kaylee Galloway formed a small committee a few months ago to work on homelessness and sheltering issues across the county. He indicated that Council also received the After-Action Report (AAR) from Whatcom County Health and Community Services (HCS) for the Severe Weather Shelter (SWS) that was open over the winter and met with some HCS staff who helped out at the shelter. Councilmember Scanlon said they received a lot of good feedback that they can apply to the resolution. He indicated the resolution is intended to accomplish 2 main things:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish a budget – Working with HCS to get some numbers/options for the Executive to deliver to Council by September 30. Will also help with discussions on biennial budget in the fall. 2. Establish an advisory group that can advise Council, HCS and the Executive on shelter policy, programs, budget, etc. – Housing Advisory Committee (HAC) was tasked with some of these duties, but it hasn't been the priority of that body to do the work around homelessness and shelter, so would like them to establish a subcommittee to make it a priority. The HAC will discuss this proposal on June 10. Councilmember Scanlon invited feedback from PHAB on what other groups, if any, might be a better fit to advise the County on homelessness and shelter. <p>Councilmember Scanlon indicated that they set a goal in the resolution of getting to functional 0 homelessness in Whatcom County within a decade. HCS put together a budget outlining what this would take. They have also asked for feedback from non-profits, community members, and cities by the end of this week. Councilmember Scanlon invited PHAB to send feedback to Cathy Halka, the new Clerk of the Council.</p> <p>Joni Hensley inquired if the County awarded the Lighthouse Mission any funding. HCS Director Erika Lautenbach responded that we used American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to help support their commercial kitchen operation. Joni asked if Base Camp would continue to function as a winter shelter. Erika responded that Base Camp will move from their current location into the new facility at their old location in Old Town. They will</p>



be able to add an additional 100 beds for a total of 300 beds and they'll also have some search capacity for severe weather sheltering. Councilmember Scanlon indicated the AAR for the SWS took this into consideration when outlining cost for next winter. Erika said she would send the AAR slides to PHAB members for review.

Guy Occhiogrosso mentioned that the land owner of the existing Base Camp and surrounding neighborhood, might not be interested in continuing to use that site as a shelter. He also asked how much housing availability comes into play when trying to reach a goal of functional 0 homelessness. Councilmember Scanlon responded that the County and/or partners will need to go out and find new shelter space as the space from last winter is gone. He also agreed that we will need more housing to reach functional 0 homelessness. He said the 10-year Comprehensive Plan that is currently being developed will need to address this. He indicated that they received an update from Planning & Development Services (PDS) looking at population growth projections and acknowledged that there is a lot of work to do. He said they also received PDS's Public Participation Plan, which will involve a lot of community outreach and learning/listening sessions over the next 6 months. Councilmember Scanlon also inquired if PHAB has weighed in on the Comprehensive Plan. PHAB Chair Sterling Chick indicated PHAB received a presentation on the Comprehensive Plan at the last PHAB meeting.

Kelli Carroll asked how the HAC responded to the resolution and if there is staff capacity for this new advisory committee to do this additional work. Councilmember Scanlon indicated there was broad support by the HAC and they acknowledged that a subcommittee would likely need to meet more frequently, but believed there was space for that. He also said that the recommendations of that group would come to the Council of the Executive.

Teri Bryant asked what functional 0 means in this resolution and explained that there is a difference between having available housing and available beds. She expressed concern about housing costs. Councilmember Scanlon acknowledged the challenge of creating adequate housing and reiterated the fact that the goal is functional 0 within a decade, which coincides with the 10-year Comprehensive Plan. The plan will need to include policies, programs, budgets, etc. to reach this goal. This resolution is the start of setting big goals, which will require a whole lot of work.

Ashley Thomasson clarified that functional 0 would mean housing for every person, not just shelter. Sterling shared the analogy of having a "big lobby" just to get people inside. Councilmember Scanlon agreed that having a "big lobby" reduces morbidity and mortality. He also acknowledged the need for more housing.

Councilmember Scanlon shared that he's been spending time over the past few weeks with a variety of people who provide services in our community, including the Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) team, the Alternative Response Team (ART), the Sheriff's Deputy and 911 staff. He said all providers emphasized the need for more housing of a wide variety, including tiny home villages, permanent supportive housing and market rate housing. He said this resolution is one part of addressing those needs in our community.

Madison Emry mentioned a couple of gaps she noticed last year with severe weather sheltering. She said unaccompanied youth with assault charges or charges related to substance abuse are not accepted at places like The PAD or the Oasis Teen Shelter, which have restrictions in place. She also mentioned that people out in the county, like those in Kendall, had no shelter options at all. She expressed the importance of considering these populations when making policies.

Emily O'Connor thanked Jon for his efforts in this area. She also highlighted the fact that families with kids are often forgotten when we talk about shelter. She mentioned that Lydia Place tried to design a facility for families a few years ago, but the operating costs were estimated at \$1.6 million and the project died. She cautioned against starting with "the problem" rather than "the resources." She encouraged looking at both so we can make sure we have the resources necessary to fund the components.

Councilmember Scanlon acknowledged that there will be tough decisions for Council and the Executive, but we won't get there without asking. We may need to consider cutting spending somewhere else, going to the State/Federal government or creating more revenue. He said getting numbers will help us figure out the options.

	<p>Leah Wainman echoed Emily's concern for families and children, saying that taking them into consideration reinforces that we don't want to see this problem in the future. She also mentioned that there are a lot of state plans around homelessness prevention, including the 10-year Poverty Reduction Plan, which could help guide our plan.</p> <p>Joni commented that we also need to look at the demographics in Whatcom County. She said that, nationally, the largest growing homeless population is women in their sixties, so we need to look at both ends of the vulnerable spectrum. She said the Aging Well advisory group is a good resource to find out what is going on with the elderly in our community.</p> <p>Councilmember Scanlon said he's been working with Jason Miguel at Northwest Youth Services (NWYS) on some language he'll be adding into the resolution. He also invited PHAB members to send him data, reports, language, etc. on other populations. Shu-Ling Zhao asked if there was an intentional linkage to the A Way Home Washington Anchor Community Initiative in Whatcom County, which is working on functional 0 for youth and young adults. Councilmember Scanlon indicated he did talk to Jason about that. Shu encouraged collaboration with NWYS on this.</p>
<p>All Hands Summit and PHAB involvement</p>	<p>Emily, joined by Consultant Elizabeth Boyle, shared details about the All Hands Whatcom Opioid Summit happening on June 25 & 26 at Bellingham High School. This year's Summit will be focused on youth and how we can build systems and a community where our young people can thrive. She said the timing is perfect as it intersects with the Executive Order regarding fentanyl and the resulting Operations Plan from HCS. Emily strongly encouraged PHAB members to attend the Summit and said many of our local leaders, including Erika and Jon, will be sharing what they're working on and engaging with participants. She also mentioned that Whatcom County youth have been heavily involved in the planning and delivery of the Summit as well.</p> <p>Joni asked if there is a detailed agenda. Emily shared a draft of the agenda and said the final draft will be sent out this week and also available on the website (https://www.chuckanuthealthfoundation.org/allhands).</p> <p>Kelli asked how PHAB members who are not able to attend can help support the work. Emily responded that the Summit sessions will be recorded and posted on the website in the Learning Library. She said they will also be gathering input from participants throughout the Summit and then using that feedback to shape their webinars throughout the year.</p> <p>Sterling encouraged all PHAB members to go if they can and said they can bring some of this content into the PHAB retreat in September.</p> <p>Councilmember Scanlan pointed out that the next joint Health Board/PHAB meeting is currently scheduled for June 25, which conflicts with the Summit. Erika confirmed that meeting will not be held, but said they have not yet decided whether to cancel or reschedule it. Emily said they had hoped to have the meeting live at the Summit, but just couldn't make the technical logistics work for that. She reiterated the desire to still have everyone who would have been present at that meeting attend the Summit and invest that time in hearing from our young people.</p>
<p>Health Director/Health Officer Update</p>	<p>Whatcom County Health Officer Greg Thompson shared that this will be his last PHAB meeting, as he will be resigning from HCS at the end of June and working internationally. He indicated that Dr. Amy Harley, Co Health Officer, will continue in her role and will be working with Erika to determine what that role will look like going forward. Dr. Thompson also shared that the work we are doing in Whatcom County, particularly around the fentanyl issue, is getting noticed around the state/country. He said he has been invited to a few speaking events regarding the impact of opioids on children. He attended the Children's Justice Conference last month and spoke with the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) this week. He reminded PHAB that our overdose data is updated on the second Monday of each month and can be found at https://whatcomoverdoseprevention.org/data/. He also thanked PHAB for all of their work.</p>

	<p>Erika invited interested PHAB members to contact her about working in a small time-limited group that will make recommendations to the Council regarding the 10-year Comprehensive Plan. She also shared that HCS has several items on the agenda for the June 18 County Council meeting. At the Public Works & Health Committee meeting, the Food Systems Committee will share their annual report. In addition, the Veterans Program staff will give a presentation and Environmental Health staff will share their Climate Vulnerability Assessment (CVA). Erika said she will also be going over the Fentanyl Ops Plan at the Committee of the Whole meeting. She also expressed gratitude to Greg for all of his work on behalf of Whatcom County and emphasized that he will be greatly missed.</p>
<p>Sub-group Reports</p>	<p>Sterling invited each PHAB sub-group to share updates.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equity: Shu reported that they met yesterday for the first time. They discussed the why, what, and how of an equity framework for moving policy forward. Shu highlighted the resolution affirming racism as a public health crisis and how we look at equity, diversity and inclusion in our contracting. She also invited PHAB members to share what they know about existing policies and procedures related to equity that are impacting or limiting their work. Ashley indicated their goal is to complete a policy review by the PHAB retreat in September. Leah asked what level of policy they're looking at and Shu indicated they're hoping for a comprehensive overview. • Nominations: No update was shared, but Councilmember Scanlon asked if PHAB has a representative from PeaceHealth. Sterling said they do not yet and Jon expressed his preference for having someone from higher level management who could initiate action at PeaceHealth based on PHAB recommendations. Emily shared her concerns about working on "the who and the how" before working out "the what and the why." • Communications: Joni said they will meet for the first time on June 12. • Code Changes: Sterling reported that Erika is working on the code changes and will forward them to the sub-group members for feedback. He said it won't really be a meeting format, but more like a work group. • Board/Commission Assessment Implementation: Christine Espina reported that they worked on mapping out org charts for the current boards and commissions to figure out who comprises/authorizes these bodies and who is already on the spokes of the model. • Operationalizing the Hub & Spoke Model: Sterling reported that they are working on coming up with a statement of intent. To summarize, he said the hub and spoke model populates PHAB in a new way and makes it easier to fill positions and replace members as needed. He said they also need to figure out how to line up with the 8 tasks given to them by the Legislature. They are hoping to have a matrix to present at the retreat that will help PHAB focus on 2-4 things in 2025. Councilmember Scanlon indicated that we may need changes in our code to fully operationalize the hub and spoke model.
<p>Public Comment</p>	<p>The following people spoke:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natalie Chavez • Misty Flowers • Markis Dee • Katherine Orłowski

Final Comments/Next Steps	Sterling commented that he appreciated hearing from so many PHAB members during the meeting.
Adjourn	The meeting adjourned at 8:33 AM.
Next Meeting	There will be a joint Health Board/PHAB meeting on July 30, 2024 at 10:00 AM.