

City of Bellingham/Whatcom County Winter Shelter Public Affairs Engagement Plan Outline

GOALS	
•	Effectively communicate City/County's comprehensive efforts to provide shelter for unsheltered individuals as the cold season approaches
•	Contain misinformation and prevent the loud but few voices of critics from being mistaken for the many in public forums and media coverage
•	Grow public understanding of City/County efforts and promote a united sense of purpose
•	Preclude any future divisive, damaging, and dangerous protest encampments on City parklands
	<i>Convey this is part of a larger strategy to address HOUSING STABILITY (homelessness & PREVENTING homelessness)</i>
STRATEGIES	
•	Proactively define the public discussion around City/County efforts to respond to the needs of unsheltered individuals in positive terms that convey how needs are being met, rather than allowing the public discussion to be defined by and devolve into criticism of those efforts, by:
○	Crafting clear, concise, compelling, consumer-level messaging to communicate the breadth and depth of City/County preparedness and response to the needs of unsheltered individuals – including ongoing proof points of the programmatic collaboration, problem-solving, innovation, and coordination among City/County officials, staff, and community partners
○	Coordinating a comprehensive, consistent, coherent communications effort among the City, the County, and community partners
○	Leveraging an array of visible communication channels and forums to elevate and disseminate the message
○	Conducting an ongoing regular drumbeat of communications to create a full surround of information and messaging throughout the fall and into winter
TACTICS	
•	Brand the preparedness and response effort, with logo and positive imagery (cf. the City of Seattle's "Pathways Home" Initiative)
•	Launch public website to serve as information and message clearinghouse, including but not limited to:
○	Brand and logo Hire graphics design for help with this
○	Infographic of relevant data points
○	FAQ
○	Myths versus facts
○	Video explainers
○	Brief outline of existing programs and resources
○	Brief outlines of new programs and resources
○	Policy priorities
○	New policy proposals
○	Community engagement
○	Future goals
○	Calls to action
○	Nightly shelter capacity percentage
•	Define the problem and the City/County response with speeches from Mayor Fleetwood and Executive Sidhu in a joint City/County Council session or joint press conference, including future goals, new ideas, new stakes in the ground, points of shared accountability, and calls to action

City of Bellingham/Whatcom County Winter Shelter Public Affairs Engagement Plan Outline

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launch a Facebook advertising campaign targeting Whatcom County residents and directing them to the website to learn about City/County actions to meet the needs of unsheltered individuals this winter
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schedule interview for Mayor Fleetwood and Executive Sidhu with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bellingham Herald editorial board KGMI Konnects with Joe Teehan City Club of Bellingham
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initiate a mini-campaign of op-eds and other authored pieces from City/County officials and community partners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct outreach and offer interviews to reporters at Bellingham Herald, Cascadia Weekly, Whatcom Talk, The Western Front, Northwest Citizen (and potentially KUOW and KING 5)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Craft a talking points one-pager for City/County officials to reference in public forums, constituent communications, and with media
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build a partner communications toolkit with common messaging and guidelines for use in web content, newsletters, social media, media interviews, etc.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Host a tele-town hall, panel, or public forum providing members of the public an opportunity to engage
Work with partners to create a full menu of meaningful, genuine ways people can volunteer or get involved (beyond just donating money)
<u>PARTNERS</u>
Catholic Community Services
Christ the King
GRACE
HomesNow!
Interfaith Coalition
Kulshan Community Land Trust
Light House Mission Ministries
Low Income Housing Institute
Lydia Place
Mercy Housing Northwest
Northwest Youth Services
Opportunity Council
Pioneer Human Services
Road2Home
Sean Humphrey House
Sun Community Services
Whatcom Alliance for Health Advancement
Whatcom cities
Whatcom Homeless Service Center
YWCA
Western Washington University, Whatcom Housing Alliance/Bellingham for Everyone, Downtown Bellingham Partnership

City of Bellingham/Whatcom County Winter Shelter Public Affairs Engagement Plan Outline

My favorite message is this one. Addressing homeless through shelter is a bandaid; City & County have goal of housing stability done through a whole continuum of supports & intervention (from shelter to homeownership). This is most critical message to have underscoring all this communication re: homelessness & unsheltered.

MESSAGE IMPERATIVES
Convey that what transpired last winter regarding our community's response to meeting the needs unsheltered individuals was damaging, divisive for the community and cannot be repeated
Convey that everyone – from volunteers, activists, nonprofits, governments, faith-based organizations, businesses, higher education institutions, and concerned members of the public – are welcome to contribute their energy, solutions, time, and resources to the crisis
Convey that it will take all of us to meet the full measure of progress we can achieve on behalf of our unsheltered neighbors
Convey that directing outrage, mistrust, and vitriol at City/County staff while questioning their motives and humanity only adds conflict, stress, exhaustion and depletes morale – a self-defeating strategy that anyone who cares about unsheltered individuals would do best to reject
Convey that the City and County are not responsible for the homelessness crisis in the sense that no action or policy on the part of the City or County caused the situation where individuals are living without shelter in nearly every community in America
Convey that the City and County ARE responsible in the sense that we accept the obligation to act on behalf of the community and <i>in concert with</i> the community to do all we can to mitigate the harms in our community among our own neighbors presented by this national crisis
Convey that, after the major failures of many massive systems, local government is the system of last resort – and is also the system with fewest resources that are already strained to address dozens of other urgent community priorities
Convey that our response to a crisis that is larger than us can never be perfect and therefore can always be criticized – but that this true of any community facing the challenges and complexities of this national crisis (which far exceed state and federal capacity to address let alone that of local governments)
Convey how we are all responding the best we can with the resources we have to address a problem we did not create – which is why our responsibility must be rooted in a shared sense of compassion rather than blaming or shaming
Convey that we can address this crisis together, with a united sense of purpose and an adult understanding that it will be hard, that we won't always get it right, but that our effort will be the sum total of our collective energies directed toward a common goal of making real progress for those in need
Convey our prioritization of meeting the needs children and families experiencing homelessness
Convey that shelters are the safety net of last resort, and that the City/County's strategy has been effective in meeting the needs of many individuals and families experiencing homelessness who are not visible to the public precisely because these efforts have prevented them from going unsheltered
Convey that shelters, as the safety net of last resort, must absolutely remain safe for all who rely on them
Convey the availability of resources for unsheltered individuals, both previously existing and new
Provide an answer to the question of where individuals can go when shelters are full
Provide continuous transparency into the standing offer by the City/County to community partners to add capacity by making new sites available for more tiny home shelters, to find operators to run additional low-barrier sites, to make money available for credential professionals, to buy more pallets, etc.
Convey that seeing individuals living in tents does not mean they do not have options
Convey that, while individuals have the right not to stay in a shelter, they do not have the right to stay on public lands – nor does the City have an obligation to relinquish park lands for encampments
Convey that the City will not allow the establishment of encampments on City park lands this winter, and be transparent about the enforcement protocol in order to discourage plans to challenge the City's policy
Convey that the City will not tolerate protest encampments, and that enlisting unsheltered individuals in this kind of protest is exploitative, reckless and – by adding to human stress and suffering to individuals in an already vulnerable circumstance – harmful and counterproductive
Communicate concrete opportunities for activists to behave as partners with the City/County rather than as detractors and adversaries

City of Bellingham/Whatcom County Winter Shelter Public Affairs Engagement Plan Outline

Communicate concrete opportunities for members of the public to contribute to the community's responsibility to meet the needs of unsheltered individuals

Convey that, while cities may be where homelessness takes place, they cannot be where the sole responsibility for addressing homelessness resides, and communicate a call to action that the public can answer to elevate homelessness to the national dialogue and mobilize an appropriate federal response
--