

City-County Meeting Notes: September 30, 2021

Attendees: Jeff Reading, Communications Consultant; County: Ann Beck, Jennifer Moon, Jed Holmes, Chris D'Onofrio, Barbara Johnson-Vinna; City: Janice Keller, Tara Sundin, Kate Bartholomew, Samya Lutz, Katy Sullivan

- Objective 1: walk away with the tactics that are optimal to pursue. After which, Jeff will put together a timeline for us, working back from a “drop” date of Nov 7.
 - o Suggest that the branding and logo work be the very first thing to get underway.
 - o How to get approval on that before Oct 15? We need to get buy-in from the Exec and Mayor before that date.
 - o Send thoughts on ‘key messages’ to Jeff over email; copy others if possible so the group can also view your feedback.
- Objective 2: to coalesce around the brand for this effort.
- Objective 3: discuss how to get buy-in from elected official and help them be comfortable remaining on message, even in the face of criticism.

Discussion & Feedback:

- Goal #4: adjust language to make this a communications goal, not an overall goal; move on and be aspirational about what we will do, not dwell on what happened last year. Communicate that we will not tolerate encampments, AND what we’re doing to avoid that.
 - o Jeff will work on this language a bit more; send him any specific feedback or suggestions
- Goal #1: weave in that this is part of a larger strategy, even though we will prioritize unsheltered homelessness for this effort
- Strategies:
 - o In addition to developing comprehensive, consistent, and coherent communications, we need to build in some discipline to stay on message. This group will need to work on a strategy specific to elected officials to help them be comfortable adopting and sticking to this message.
 - o Add to the strategy somewhere that we are compassionate in our efforts
 - o Identify as a key strategy that we will target specific audiences with this messaging

Tactics

Tactic #1: Brand the preparedness and response effort with logo and positive imagery

- Feedback:
 - o Brand and logo will be key to this engagement plan
 - o Jeff’s initial idea for a brand/logo is a theme around “All Hands on Deck” (conveys urgency, unity of purpose, comprehensiveness, compels buy-in across sectors)
 - Pros of this proposal:

- This acknowledges pinch points in the system, acknowledges a strain in lack of federal resources (not passing the buck, acknowledges a need for help and community buy-in)
- Allows the space to figure out what we're going to honestly say about overstretched capacity, and how we can frame expectations around future initiatives (i.e, City only has so much capacity to bring new initiatives online each year)
- How do we develop logo? Local graphic design firms in town that regularly partner with the City who could be a resource on this, Kate and Janice to follow up
 - Newsletter to mailed out city-wide at the end of October, so lining up logo and brand with this newsletter would be great

Tactic #3: 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

- Feedback:
 - Important to note on the media strategy that the media environment in Bellingham is different than in Seattle. There is a question of how to draw media attention with a press conference, how to draw adequate attention with an op-ed, etc.
 - Re: the op-ed, an idea was raised around implementing a series around themes like FwC, youth, drop-in shelters (LMM & CTK), tiny homes?
 - This is an opportunity to not center media around electeds (emphasized a need to buffer City & County executives away from day-to-day problems)
 - Could create videos for each part of the series, videos are ideal because they can easily be posted to social media, reaches a new audience
 - If utilizing community partners for this, need to reach out asap

Proposed Tactic: Create ways for members of the community to support and volunteer in a way that moves the needle in the right direction

- Next steps:
 - The group to review the plan and provide any further feedback to Jeff by close of business on Friday so he can revise and come up with a timeline for priority tactics.