



City Council Agenda Bill

20336
Bill Number

Subject: Community Solutions Workgroup - Downtown Health and Safety presentation

Summary Statement: The Mayor's Community Solutions Workgroup on Downtown Health and Safety convened selected community stakeholders and City staff in Fall 2013 to provide public health and safety recommendations for various downtown challenges. The Workgroup produced 14 recommendations that address mental health, homelessness, crime, clean and safe environment, alcohol and drug abuse, and public education and perception challenges.

Previous Council Action: N/A

Fiscal Impact: N/A

Funding Source: N/A

Attachments: Community Solutions Workgroup - Downtown Health and Safety Report of Recommendations

Meeting Activity	Meeting Date	Staff Recommendation	Presented By	Time
Committee Briefing Information Only	3/10/2014	Information Only	Mayor Kelli Linville	10 minutes

Recommended Motion: .

Council Committee:
Committee Of The Whole

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Reviewed By	Department	Date
<i>Kelli J. Linville</i>	Executive	03/04/2014
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Community Solutions Workgroup

Downtown Health and Safety

Report of Recommendations March 10, 2014

Workgroup Purpose

The purpose of the Mayor's Community Solutions Workgroup on Downtown Health and Safety was to convene selected community stakeholders and City staff to provide public health and safety recommendations for various downtown challenges. While many exciting and positive things are happening in our city center, the vision of this workgroup was to understand our challenges and to come up with solutions.

Scope

The scope of the workgroup included the following goals:

- Convene stakeholders from identified key city departments and community agencies and sectors, including social services, Bellingham Police Department, Bellingham Parks and Recreation Department, Bellingham City Attorney's office, Downtown Bellingham Partnership, downtown property owners, downtown businesses, the Whatcom County Health Department, the Washington State Liquor Control Board, and the Mayor's office.
- Address issues including homelessness, alcohol/drug consumption, Maritime Heritage Park programming, an ambassador program, social service coordination, police/community coordination, petty crime and problematic behavior, communication between agencies and with the downtown neighborhood, and common community goals.
- Identify key challenges and possible solutions, and produce a recommended action plan.
- Complete work by early 2014.

Team Members

City leaders and staff

- Mayor Kelli Linville
- Police Chief Cliff Cook
- Parks Director James King
- City Attorney Peter Ruffatto
- Asst. City Attorney Ryan Anderson

- Lt. Mike Johnston, Bellingham Police Department
- Deputy Chief Flo Simon, Bellingham Police Department
- Vanessa Blackburn, Mayor's office
- Sophia Blamey, Mayor's office

Community members

- Jim Bjerke, Downtown Bellingham Partnership, property manager
- Gail deHoog and Anne Deacon, Whatcom County Health Department
- Greg Winter, Whatcom Homeless Service Center
- Steve Powers, Catholic Housing Services
- Kane Hall, Daylight Properties
- Brian Tines, owner, The Underground and The Royal
- Jan Bodily, Whatcom Counseling and Psychiatric Clinic
- Riannon Bardsley, Northwest Youth Services
- Sheri Emerson, Opportunity Council
- Blair Smith, Liquor Control Board
- Dan Turner, Liquor Control Board
- Larry Thompson, Whatcom Alliance for Health Advancement

Community Solutions Workgroup Schedule

Task	Oct 2013	Nov/Dec 2013	Jan/Feb 2014	March 2014 –
Task 1: Held first meeting (Oct. 24). Defined scope of work and agreed to timeline.				
Task 2: Held five subsequent meetings in 2013. At each meeting, provided summary of progress so far.				
Task 3: Held final meeting on January 24 and produced draft report and action plan to workgroup.				
Task 4: Finalize recommendations and make presentations to City Council and community groups.				
Task 5: Schedule follow-up meetings in 6 months and a year to report on progress.				Mid- to Late 2014

Summary of Findings

This report addresses the work of the Community Solutions Workgroup on Downtown Health and Safety by answering the following four questions:

- What are the challenges or gaps in services downtown?
- What are possible solutions?
- Which organizations and funding sources are available to implement these solutions?
- What are some examples of what other communities have done?

While the issues facing downtown are complex, the workgroup identified six main challenge areas: Mental Health; Homelessness; Crime; Clean and Safe Environment; Alcohol and Drug Abuse; and Public Education and Perception. The group then identified the top 14 priority challenges for downtown. While the group recognized this is not a comprehensive list that covers every possible solution to downtown's challenges, it does provide a list of solutions that the City and its community partners can move forward with implementation. Much of the content of this report was generated by members of the group, with input and guidance from the Mayor, Mayor's staff and other City staff.

The following is the list of top 14 priority needs and solutions, followed with a more detailed explanation of each item.

Top Priority Needs and Solutions:

1. Create a staffed 24-hour youth drop-in center
2. Provide supportive housing citywide
3. Provide increased social services and outreach coordination between agencies as well as coordinated intensive case management
4. Create a Mental Health Court
5. Create a 24-hour mobile crisis response system
6. Provide police training on how to triage mental health and alcohol issues
7. Increase presence of police patrols during hours of need
8. Implement Maritime Heritage Park development plan
9. Adjust municipal codes and staffing to allow effective intervention and enforcement of the most common infractions
10. Market and support the BPD's Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design
11. Support initiatives to approve a Business Improvement District or Main Street program
12. Initiate a Downtown Ambassador Program
13. Create an Alcohol Impact Area
14. Support the "Homeless in Bellingham" video education series

Need 1: 24-hour Youth Drop-In Center**Challenge**

Members of the workgroup identified that homeless youth are under-supported during non-business hours. Currently there is no 24-hour drop in center for youth or adults in Bellingham.

Solution

Creating a 24-hour youth drop in center was identified as a top solution.

The Workgroup identified the need for a drop-in center for young adults that is an attractive point of engagement for housing and vocational/education programming. This would provide young adults with access to services outside the traditional 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekday work schedule. Identified agencies that could provide support include Northwest Youth Services, Amy's Place, Bellingham First Congregational Church, Bellingham Police Department, all outreach teams (PATH, Hope House, SeaMar, Mobile Outreach Team), Whatcom County Health Dept. and the City of Bellingham.

This priority could begin with an 8-hour drop-in center and grow to a 24/7 program. An example of how this could be useful includes a situation when a police officer picks up a youth (age 18-24) and has a safe, service-enriched destination to drop them off. Police officers did this last year when NWYS operated such a center during a brief window prior to being licensed, after which only minors could be served at the existing center.

Funding

An initial estimate for the minimum staffing for 8 hours a day, 7 days a week would cost \$80,000 per year. A 24-hour youth drop-in center would cost an estimated \$240,000 for staffing. A facility would also need to be secured, which would require additional funding. Possible sources and partners could include the City of Bellingham, Whatcom County, Federal funds, foundations, corporate sponsors, service clubs and organizations, donations and other grants.

Examples from Other Communities

Orion Center in Seattle (www.youthcare.org/find-help/meals-and-drop), and Lambert House in Seattle (www.lamberthouse.org/) are two examples of similar programs. New Horizons Ministries in Seattle also provides a youth drop-in center. It is open only four mornings and four evenings every week, but it provides meals, showers, clothing, and company for homeless youth. It is utilized as the starting point for building a substantial relationship between youth and case managers. The majority of their funding in 2013 came from individual donors, though nearly a quarter came from grants, corporations, and churches and organizations. In the period between July 2012 and June 2013, the drop-in center averaged 230 youth per month and over 1,000 unique clients. (<http://nhmin.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/2013-Annual-Report.pdf>)

Need 2: Provide Supportive Housing Citywide**Challenge**

There is a common public perception that most of the low-income housing is concentrated in the downtown area. However, other neighborhoods such as Barkley and Cordata have proportionally more low-income housing, and specialized housing is dispersed throughout the city. Participants in the workgroup identified that the city does not have enough special needs housing, however.

Solution

Providing citywide supportive housing was identified as a short-term priority.

Both Sun Community Services and Catholic Housing Services have housing projects currently conceptualized. It was recommended that those with influence and authority in the City take all possible steps to encourage the moving forward of these projects. Even if both of these housing projects are permitted and completed, there will still be a gap for permanent supportive housing. The Workgroup recommends that the planning begin for the next housing project. Choosing the best location will be the key early decision, and the Planning and Community Development Department should take an active role in assisting with a location choice.

Other identified possible community partners for this priority include developers, the City, funders, neighborhood associations, Bellingham Housing Authority, Opportunity Council and Whatcom Homeless Service Center, Northwest Youth Services, the Whatcom County Coalition to End Homelessness, Lighthouse Mission, Whatcom County Health Dept., Interfaith Community Health Clinic, WAHA, St. Joseph's Hospital, Whatcom Sheriff's Dept. and the Bellingham Police Dept.

Funding

Funding for development of housing could come from the Bellingham Housing Levy, the Home Fund, Washington State Housing Trust Fund, Department of Commerce, the Washington State Housing Finance Commission and federal grants. For services, funding may include City and State funds, HUD and other federal agencies. Major foreseeable obstacles include the sheer expense of these projects in both the short- and long-term as well as a public perception that these housing projects not only increase crime and nuisance in the area around the project, but also are already focused in the downtown area.

Examples from other communities

A study by the National Alliance to End Homelessness showed that supportive housing initiatives in New York City and Denver saved the public entity enough money to entirely offset the cost of initiating the permanent supportive housing initiative. The same study showed that Portland, Oregon didn't quite offset its costs in the first year, but saw a significant decrease in public money spent on healthcare and incarcerations. A second report, by Seattle's Downtown Emergency Service Center, identified Seattle, San Francisco and Portland, Maine as having successful supportive housing operations in addition to the cities already listed. That report provides evidence of the cost reductions and positive health outcomes of supportive housing in those cities.

Need 3: Provide Increased Social Services and Outreach Coordination Between Agencies and Support Intensive Case Management

Challenge

Throughout the Community Solutions Workgroup, it became clear that each agency encompasses important resources that often overlap. It is in the best interest of the agencies as well as the public to have a single point of contact that could provide coordination of resources. The Workgroup also repeatedly came back to a related concern of addressing individuals through the entire spectrum of needs. Often individuals would benefit from a host of resources addressing mental health, homelessness, addiction, and various other challenges.

Solution

Providing increased social services and outreach coordination between agencies was identified as a top priority, as well as supporting intensive case management. The goal would be to rapidly engage with people to help divert them from criminal justice and emergency health services toward stable housing, behavioral health treatment, and "health homes."

Coordinated services could include a team of psychiatrists, doctors, case workers, housing resources, and chemical dependency specialists. Visions on implementation differ, but one idea is a part-time position within the Homeless Service Center that could manage the coordination of the various services.

Another potential solution is to create a position within the new Whatcom Alliance for Health Advancement (WAHA) Intensive Case Management program that takes a team approach to providing housing, stability, mental health and addictive illness treatment, health care, and employment services to people who are homeless or are engaging in inappropriate behavior downtown. WAHA is endeavoring in a multi-organizational project to create intensive case management, which engages individuals in a set of constructive activities that will address the constellation of problems in their life. The focus will be on a cooperative rather than a "silo" approach (www.whatcomalliance.org).

Partners in these efforts include WAHA as a lead agency, with support from Northwest Youth Services (Detour), Opportunity Council, Whatcom Counseling and Psychiatric Clinic (PATH, Mobile Outreach Team, Rainbow Center), Catholic Community Services (Hope House), Emergency Medical Services, Police, Lake Whatcom Treatment Center, Interfaith Clinic, PeaceHealth, SeaMar, Lighthouse Mission, Whatcom County Health Dept. as a funding partner, and the City of Bellingham (Police, Parks and Recreation, Mayor and City Council).

Funding

Initial ideas for funding sources pinpointed the City of Bellingham's general fund and potential State and Federal funds. Foreseeable obstacles include that there are various visions for the type of position that could effectively provide coordination, and therefore the ultimate cost is ambiguous. Whatcom Homeless Service Center is an important partner in WAHA's endeavor, and many other organizations would likely play a part in successful implementation of intensive case management as envisioned. Funding for this project could possibly come from WAHA, various foundations, charities, City grants, and the hospital. Both funding and partnerships are crucial in moving the idea forward.

Examples from other communities

Examples of intensive case management have been popping up around the country over the past

few years. The most well-known example is from Camden, New Jersey and was described in New Yorker Magazine and used by Barack Obama in several health care speeches. These programs all identify the highest risk individuals and provide interdisciplinary services designed to stabilize these individuals and reduce their use of expensive resources such as hospitals and jails by wrapping around them a continuum of social and health services. Results from 10-20 prominent examples typically show cost reductions of 20-40% accompanied by improved health and outcomes.

Need 4: Mental Health Court

Challenge

Many of the people committing crimes in Bellingham, including in the downtown area, do so because they are mentally ill and are not receiving adequate mental health treatment. The mentally ill frequently end up in jail, often far longer than offenders who are not mentally ill, which imposes large costs to the community, increases jail overcrowding and interferes with access to resources and treatment opportunities. Without adequate treatment and other services, the public is less safe and criminal behavior is frequently repeated.

Solution

The workgroup identified a mental health court as a top solution. The City is already working with Whatcom County to create a mental health court in Bellingham. A mental health court is a therapeutic approach that directly addresses a problem causing criminal behavior. The two governments plan to create the mental health court as a pilot project in the Bellingham Municipal Court to address the needs of mentally ill offenders who commit misdemeanors and/or gross misdemeanors in Bellingham. Research by both City and County officials supported the creation of this approach. The process is in the planning stage and includes representatives from the executive branches of both governments and the Bellingham Municipal Court.

Mental health courts have proven effective in numerous locations. A study in King County showed that their mental health court dramatically reduced recidivism, violence and incarceration rates while saving taxpayers money. Studies across the country have found similar results. A mental health court works by connecting mentally ill offenders with treatment and other services in a timely manner, providing supervision by specially-trained probation officers, and ensuring accountability by judicial officers who employ a successful problem-solving approach.

Funding

The City will contribute existing judicial resources and the County will contribute funds from the existing County-wide mental health tax. Most of the treatment and other resources needed by program participants are already available from federal, state and local programs.

Examples in other communities

Mental health courts exist in most of the larger counties in western Washington. Additionally, mental health courts and other types of problem-solving courts, including drug courts, veterans courts, and community courts have been successful in communities across the country. Locally, the Bellingham Municipal Court operates a specialized domestic violence court and Whatcom County Superior Court operates a therapeutic drug court.

Need 5: Create a 24-Hour Mobile Crisis Response System

Challenge

Struggling with mental illness is one of the major challenges facing much of Bellingham's homeless and vulnerable population. There is a need for a 24-hour response system to help people in crisis.

Solution

Creating a mobile crisis response system, including promoting of Whatcom Counseling's Mobile Outreach Team, is a top solution. This may include the creation of a triage center.

Whatcom Counseling's Mobile Outreach Team provides mental health support to individuals who are having mental health difficulties, but are not yet in crisis. Service is available only to those individuals who are not already enrolled with a mental health provider.

Other organizations who provide mobile outreach are Northwest Youth Services, Hope House, Lighthouse Mission, Opportunity Council and the Bellingham Police Department. Although these outreach services have never been fully coordinated, there is potential for partnering between these agencies to better target the most highly vulnerable individuals. Whatcom Homeless Service Center could also provide support in these efforts.

Funding

Potential funding could come from the partner agencies as well as grants issued through the City, the County, and the North Sound Mental Health Administration.

Need 6: Provide Police Training on How to Triage Mental Health and Alcohol Issues

Challenge

The Bellingham Police are often the first contact for citizens who have encountered individuals suffering from mental illness and/or addiction despite the fact that often times a social service provider would be the most effective contact. Additional training is needed to help police officers with screening and assessment with mental health issues.

Solution

Providing mental health and alcohol issue training to the Bellingham Police Department is a high priority. This has also been identified in the draft downtown implementation strategy as a recommended item.

Bellingham Police Chief Cliff Cook has already begun implementation of training to address mental health and alcohol issues and better coordinate with social service agencies. Mental health training for BPD is underway for all officers and direct customer service providers (DCSP) to receive the initial State Certified 8-hour core Crisis Intervention Team training course within 2014. The eventual goal is to have all BPD sworn and DCSP personnel receiving the remaining 32 hours of CIT Training by end of 2018.

Funding

The funding is already in place.

Need 7: Increase police in times of need**Challenge**

Downtown residents and citizens who frequent the downtown core notice certain times of day where there is increased criminal activity or a perception of increased criminal activity but not a visible police presence.

Solution

An increase of police in the downtown area in times of need was identified as a short-term priority. The draft downtown implementation strategy also identifies this as a need.

Bellingham Police Chief Cliff Cook explained that much of the current extra presence downtown is heavily reliant on officers working overtime. In addition to the existing bicycle and vehicular patrol, his goal is to hire two new positions dedicated to the City Center who would not be pulled into other areas of the City.

Funding

Funding for the additional officers would come from the general fund and would need to be approved by City Council.

Need 8: Implement Maritime Heritage Park development plan**Challenge**

Maritime Heritage Park has frequently been referenced as a location that citizens avoid because they feel unsafe or are otherwise uneasy.

Solution

The workgroup identified the programming of Maritime Heritage Park as a top solution. The City of Bellingham Parks and Recreation Department has released a report and list of recommendations for the programming of Maritime Heritage Park. The recommendations for programming include designating funding for city staff to oversee the project, designating funding for support of collaborative programs, streamlining event approval, and developing a program to support local performers. In addition to recommendations for programming, the report also provides recommendations for improving the park infrastructure, adding enforcement and increasing social service presence. The infrastructure recommendations include leasing the park building for commercial use, installing a playground, enhancing lighting, and installing technology such as security cameras and call boxes.

Funding

Within the report, the Parks and Recreation Department has estimated the costs of each of the recommendations as well as provided a general timeline for rolling out the programs between now and 2017. Much of the funding is anticipated to come from the City of Bellingham via the Parks and Recreation budget. This plan is underway.

Examples from Other Communities

This report follows a similar strategy to that of Seattle and Portland that have seen success in their similarly troubled parks.

Need 9: Adjust Municipal Codes and Staffing to Allow Intervention and Enforcement of the Most Common Infractions

Challenge

Some citizens and members of the Workgroup expressed concern regarding instances in which the Bellingham Police Department is limited in terms of enforcement when faced with an infraction or when there are no police officers on the scene when these infractions are committed.

Solution

The Community Solutions Workgroup determined that allowing enforcement of the most common infractions is a top solution. Addressing panhandling laws in the City of Bellingham was also identified as a short-term priority. The draft downtown implementation strategy also identifies this as a need.

The City of Bellingham already has an ordinance regarding pedestrian interference that addresses "aggressive begging." Additional criminal code provisions focused on panhandling may not be in the City's best interest, however. The City could consider greater regulation of panhandling or enhancement of Bellingham's existing ordinance regarding pedestrian interference. The Workgroup recommends launching a public information campaign regarding alternatives to giving cash to panhandlers.

The solution outlined in the draft downtown implementation strategy includes adjusting municipal codes as necessary to allow the BPD to enforce the most common infractions. It also calls for initiating changes to the Bellingham Municipal Code, including stricter penalties for breaking open container laws and extended hours for restrictions on sitting and lying on the sidewalk, to assist officers with enforcement.

Possible community partners for this enforcement include Northwest Youth Services, Hope House, the Whatcom County Health Department, the Bellingham City Council and Mayor, the City Attorney, and the Liquor Control Board.

Funding

Funding would likely come from the City of Bellingham general fund. Foreseeable obstacles include devoting the necessary resources toward developing proposed municipal codes, increased demand on prosecutors, as well as toward hiring more officers.

Examples from other communities

Some cities who have begun the endeavor of addressing panhandling have had concerns with the constitutionality of criminalizing begging. Spokane, however, chose not to criminalize begging but to prohibit aggressive panhandling within a small boundary for safety reasons. The cities of Marysville and Arlington have taken a different approach to curbing panhandling by targeting the people who give money rather than those who ask for it. City leaders say that the small investments for signs to educate the public have reduced the number of people willing to give cash to panhandlers.

Need 10: Market and Support the BPD's Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design

Challenge

Loitering is a frequently identified challenge by downtown business owners and residents. Though some resources already exist to curtail instances of loitering, many of the affected citizens are not aware of them.

Solution

Marketing and supporting the Bellingham Police Department's Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) was identified as a top solution.

This issue is also identified in the draft downtown implementation strategy as a need to market the BPD's Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design resources. There are some examples of local business owners successfully implementing environmental design on their property, including installing lights and speakers, utilizing cameras, and making physical improvements to discourage loitering. The Bellingham Police Department has staff who are trained in CPTED, which consists of three basic overlapping design principles: Access Control, Natural Surveillance and Territorial Reinforcement. The Police Department offers free analyses for individuals who are building or remodeling. Marketing the resource could lead to higher usage by citizens and business-owners and therefore decrease crime in the downtown area.

Possible partners for implementation of this solution include the Downtown Bellingham Partnership, Puget Sound Energy, business associations such as Sustainable Connections and the Bellingham/Whatcom Chamber of Commerce, and the Bellingham Planning and Community Development Department and Building Services.

Funding

Funding for marketing and supporting this resource could come from the City of Bellingham, property owners, Puget Sound Energy, or potentially Business Improvement District or Main Street funds.

Need 11: Support Initiatives to Approve a Business Improvement District, a Main Street Program or a similar tax credit incentive program**Challenge**

Some downtown business owners have expressed challenges with security, marketing, and environmental design. Many also feel that the downtown area could be improved by a coordinated funding effort.

Solution

Establishing a Business Improvement District (BID) or instituting a program like Main Street was chosen as a top solution.

A Business Improvement District is a self-assessment program authorized by state statute to enhance vitality and provide services, such as facilitating commerce, cleaning streets, providing security, making capital improvements, constructing pedestrian and streetscape enhancements, and marketing the area. The services provided by a BID would be supplemental to those already provided by the City. A BID is a special self-assessment district that can raise funds to provide management, services, facilities, and programs to the district. A BID may be initiated by an initiation petition by the owners or property located within the area or by a City Council initiation resolution.

A program modeled after the state's Main Street Program would also help to revitalize the economy, appearance and image of downtown through using a comprehensive, incremental approach to revitalization. The approach uses the tools of economic restructuring, design, organization and promotion to provide a flexible framework that puts the traditional assets of downtown to work as a catalyst for economic growth. A Main Street tax credit incentive program could provide a Business & Occupation (B&O) or Public Utility tax credit for private contributions given to eligible downtown organizations.

Besides leadership from the Mayor and City Council, possible partners in these efforts include the Downtown Bellingham Partnership, business groups such as Sustainable Connections or the Chamber of Commerce, the City's planning department and building services, and downtown businesses and property owners.

Funding

The BID would be funded through self-assessment, but additional sources of funding could be the parking fund and/or business and operations tax. A Main Street program could be funded through private contributions that are eligible for tax credit incentives.

Examples from Other Communities

Many cities in the state of Washington have active BIDs including Olympia, Poulsbo, Richland, Seattle, Spokane, Tacoma, and Yakima. Main Street programs are also in 13 communities in Washington state including Bainbridge Island, Chelan, Ellensburg, Gig Harbor, Kennewick, Mount Vernon, Olympia, Port Angeles, Port Townsend, Prosser, Puyallup, Walla Walla, and Wenatchee.

Need 12: Initiate a Downtown Ambassador Program**Challenge**

Another challenge in the downtown area is the presence of individuals who are in need of assistance or are loitering and creating an unfriendly atmosphere.

Solution

The workgroup identified a Downtown Ambassador Program as a top solution. The draft downtown implementation strategy also includes this program as a priority. An ambassador or similar program would provide a consistent visible presence on the street. Ambassadors could supply social service and/or tourism resources, as well as act as a liaison to Bellingham Police Department officers.

While there are several visions for what a downtown ambassador program could be, some ideas include providing a public relations role by communicating with downtown merchants and residents as well as shoppers and visitors. Other ideas envision a focus on social service in which ambassadors interface with individuals who are in the downtown area and are in need of assistance. Most ideas for the ambassador program include a liaison to the BPD as a major aspect of the program.

Partners would include the Downtown Bellingham Partnership, Opportunity Council, the Bellingham Police Department, Northwest Youth Services and Rainbow Center, with strong ties to outreach coordination and intensive case management programs.

Funding

Potential funding sources are grants, the parking fund, the City's general fund, and funds from either a Business Improvement District or Main Street program.

Examples from Other Communities

Several cities in Washington have ambassador programs, including several in Seattle. The City of Olympia has a downtown ambassador program in partnership with The Capital Recovery Center. That ambassador program provides services such as cleaning, responding to business concerns, helping people access resources, and assuaging public perception concerns. The ambassadors also provide directions and city information. Downtown Seattle also has an ambassador program. For more on the Metropolitan Improvement District and their ambassador program, follow this link: www.downtownseattle.com/mid/programs/

Need 13: Create an Alcohol Impact Area**Challenge**

The downtown area is perceived to be a location that struggles with public inebriation and alcohol-related criminal activity.

Solution

The initiation of an Alcohol Impact Area was identified as a top solution. It's also included as a recommendation in the draft downtown implementation strategy.

An Alcohol Impact Area (AIA) would help to mitigate problems with chronic public inebriation and illegal activities linked to the sale or consumption of alcohol within all or a portion of downtown. For example, this initial voluntary AIA will ask stores selling high-alcohol content low-cost beers and wines to remove these products from their shelves.

In the late 1990s, the Liquor Control Board adopted rules that allow municipalities to create Alcohol Impact Areas. In order to designate a portion of the city as an AIA, the City must adopt an ordinance with findings of fact to demonstrate that the area has a significant problem with either chronic public inebriation or illegal activity associated with alcohol sales and consumption. The initial step is a 6-month period of voluntary compliance for businesses within the designated area. Once it is adopted, the alcohol impact area gives the local jurisdiction more time to review liquor license applications as well as allows the jurisdiction to restrict retailers from selling certain types of alcohol, generally with a high-alcohol content. The impact area would be reviewed annually.

Potential partners in forming an AIA include leadership from the City Council and Mayor, as well as the Liquor Control Board, the Bellingham Police Department, the Bellingham City Attorney, the Downtown Bellingham Partnership, social service agencies, outreach and intensive case management programs, and adjacent neighborhoods outside the delineated impact area.

Funding

Resources for creating an AIA mostly come from the City departments who would be involved in its implementation: City attorney's office, public works and police.

Examples from Other Communities

Jurisdictions in the state that currently have alcohol impact areas include Seattle, Tacoma, Spokane and Olympia. The City of Seattle has documented positive changes from the Alcohol Impact Area in conjunction with other public safety improvements. The creation of an AIA may not solve the problem entirely on its own, but could be an integral piece of a broader set of solutions.

Need 14: Support the “Homeless in Bellingham” Video Series**Challenge**

There are challenges with the public perception of the homeless population in Bellingham, which could create a reluctance to assist these individuals or programs that work with the homeless.

Solution

The production of the “Homeless in Bellingham” video series is a short-term priority.

A local filmmaker, in partnership with the Whatcom Homeless Service Center, is creating a video series to illuminate the stories of several homeless individuals in Bellingham. As well as interviewing many people who have faced homelessness and service providers who provide homeless-related services, Mayor Kelli Linville will be a policy maker who is featured in the intro to the films. This project is in the works as part of the Whatcom County Coalition to End Homelessness communications plan. Opportunity Council provided seed funding to produce the first three short videos, but more funding is needed to complete the first series totaling 12 short videos, each focused on a different aspect of homelessness in Bellingham. The purpose is to raise the level of understanding about homelessness.

Potential partners include the Opportunity Council, Homeless Coalition (includes about 20 organizations), Fredrick Dent (producer/filmmaker), City of Bellingham leaders and departments, Whatcom County Health Dept., local foundations, private donors, Downtown Bellingham Partnership, and the downtown community.

Funding

Funding for this project is estimated at \$40,000 and could potentially come from the Whatcom Community Foundation, Chuckanut Health Foundation, and various grants and private donors.

Additional identified needs

While many additional challenges and solutions were discussed by the group that did not make the final recommended list, through those discussions the Mayor has identified two additional needs that should be addressed:

- Quality interim or transitional housing
- A 24-hour drop in center for adults