



City of Ferndale

POVERTY TASK FORCE REPORT

MEETING DATE: Oct. 2nd, 2019

SUBJECT: Follow up on September 4th, 2019 Meeting

DATE: 9/27/19


FROM: Riley Sweeney, Communications Officer

PRESENTATION BY: Riley Sweeney


SYNOPSIS: Here is some notes on programs, opportunities and issues raised at our last several meetings. **Subsequent updates have the date next to them.**

STAFF NOTES: I'm hoping for this to be a rolling report – each month, I'll dig into the proposals raised and do more research on opportunities for the city. As I research each


program, I'll tag it as  "Recommended"  "Possible/Requires More Research"

 "Ineligible/Not Recommended". The recommended and possible options will end up on a big list when it is time for us to do our final report.

RESEARCH:

 **Homeless Outreach Team (HOT):** The Bellingham Police Department works with Opportunity Council to develop the Homeless Outreach team that makes one-on-one connections with those living on the streets to help connect them with services and provide an interface that is not necessarily law enforcement.

Proposal: They come out to Ferndale once a week/once a month to check in.

 **Housing Levy:** In 2012 and again in 2018, the voters of Bellingham approved the Bellingham Home Fund. This measure adds a \$0.36 property tax on every \$1,000 of assessed value on a home, amounting to \$108 annually for a \$300k property. This generates approximately \$21 million dollars which is then used as matching funds or seed money for private investment and grants.

The levy needs to be placed on the ballot by a majority vote of the City Council and passed by the City of Ferndale with a 50% +1 majority.

These funds were used to construct 215 new units and preserve 299 units of rental and transitional housing for households that earn less than half the area's median income (\$26,512/year). The measure is projected to preserve or assist at least 1,300 home over the next five years.

The funds were also used to weatherize/improve aging houses individual rent subsidies for those who need it. More details about how they used the funds can be found here: <https://bellingham.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Cascade/index.html?appid=144b4a582a4f409caf10f5e76c1ff262>

Doing some back of the napkin calculations, passing a levy as the same rate as Bellingham would generate approximately \$558,000 a year.

I would need to do more research on this to identify the best use of those funds in our city before this moves forward.

8/30/19: The law requires a thorough plan be included in the ballot measure for how to spend the funds. I've reached out to the Municipal Research Service Center (MRSC) to give us some samples as we move forward.

9/27/19: Details secured, set to be discussed at the November meeting.

Proposal: Recommend placing a Housing Levy on the Ballot.



United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development Housing Grants

The USDA has several grant opportunities aimed at providing rental or housing assistance in communities with less than 20,000 residents and below certain income thresholds. I will continue to research these programs and identify potential grants.

7/31/19: Spoke with Congresswoman DelBene's staff, she will connect us with the best grants for housing projects.

Proposal: Federal Grant money to fund housing projects



Northwest Justice Project Partnership

Northwest Justice Project is a non-profit law firm in Washington State that works with vulnerable populations. They handle civil legal problems facing low income people, including domestic violence, eviction, loss of housing job conditions, transportation needs and more. They have an office in Bellingham but do very few cases out of Ferndale.

Proposal: Develop a Satellite office and partnership in Ferndale.



Washington State Housing Trust Fund

Washington State Department of Commerce offers funding for projects that purchase existing housing stock to create affordable housing, with over 30% of the funding allocated to rural communities. Project proposals could include rent subsidies for a current facilities, acquisition of low income housing units, matching funds for social services directly related to providing housing for special needs tenants, technical assistance or design projects related to affordable housing and homeless shelters.

The city will need to develop a few projects and put in grant applications for them. The projects are then approved by the state legislature.

This is by far the most promising grant program I've come across.

Proposal: Apply for housing funding from the WA State Housing Trust Fund.



Density Bonuses for Affordability

As part of our permitting and building process, the city can offer incentives to developers based on affordability. These incentives can involve allowing more housing units in a single lot or a reduction of fees.

Since the city is currently offering two rather large tax breaks for developers, the Multi-Family Tax Incentive and the Catalyst Program, that are aimed at adding more multifamily to our downtown core, I'd be very hesitant about recommending more incentives until these have had a chance to run their course.

Proposal: Offer Density Bonuses for Private Development that includes affordability clauses.



Meet and Greet with Social Services in Ferndale

Greg Winter noted that many of his employees at the Opportunity Council have not met or had any familiarity with the minimal social services structure in Ferndale. There are often questions about who to call for what, and those in Ferndale have expressed similar confusion. Therefore the City is moving forward to host a meet and greet for all interested in September and is currently working with the Opportunity Council to make that happen.



Surplusing City-owned Land for Development into Affordable Housing

Currently, the City owns a few properties that are not being used. The best possible option for this proposal would be the land adjacent to Michael Moore park.



Originally conceived as a possible loop trail, the park was never developed beyond the playground and the nearby busy road makes it a less-than-ideal location for future park development. However, it would be a natural place for affordable housing.

I have reached out to Dean Fearing, Executive Director at the Kulshan Community Land Trust about potential project ideas at that location.

Proposal: Surplus Michael Moore park land for affordable housing.



Staffing at the Community Resource Center

Currently the Ferndale Community Resource Center is only open four days a week, 9:30am-12:30pm although they recently expanded to being open one Saturday morning a month. It is staffed entirely with volunteers, who are passionate but not necessarily trained or certified in social work.

This group discussed expanding the work of the Community Resource Center, to include bringing in Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) to do visits with clients, applying for grants, providing training opportunities for the County Health Department and providing expanded services.

There could also be an expanded marketing effort to increase awareness about the Community Resource Center, and to make into a one stop shop for civic engagement opportunities and resources. It could also potentially serve as a small cold weather shelter.

This work would require a full-time staffer and a dedicated funding source. Staff is working a potential job description but recommends this proposal in conjunction with a funding source.

Proposal: Fund a full-time staffer at the Community Resource Center



City works with Ferndale Food Bank to Recruit Volunteers, Internships

One of the main challenges the Ferndale Food Bank faces is having enough consistent volunteers to facilitate food distributions. The City could use their communication channels to help recruit and retain long-term volunteers.

Proposal: City assists Food Bank with volunteer recruitment



Capital Needs for Ferndale Food Bank

The Food Bank will need a larger location at some point – a combination facility that has distribution on the bottom, offices for social services on the second floor and low income housing on the third would be ideal. The first step would be identifying a location and developing a site plan/grant application.

8/30/19: Spoke with Rockwood Realty about some potential locations in the greater Ferndale area – options are limited but will continue the search.

9/27/19: Could be combined with the Community Resource Center for a single social services hub.

Proposal: City explores potential public/private partnership to develop Food Bank facility in conjunction with other services.

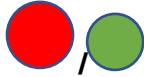


Funding Needs for Food Education

SNAP Education budget was just reduced at the federal level and to continue youth and adult food education services, additional funding would be required. The City could assist with this program.

8/30/19: The City could utilize our organizational grant program to fund this effort however that would most likely require a dedicated funding source to sustain in the long term.

Proposal: If funding source secured, the City could assist with food education services,



**Second Community Garden at ~~Diamond Lane Natural Resource Area~~
Oxford Park**

Currently the City provides space for the Ferndale Friendship Community Garden that helps grow produce for the Ferndale Food Bank. In an effort to augment these efforts, the City has discussed converting the Diamond Lane Natural Resource Area into a community orchard/farming space in conjunction with Vista Middle School, the FFA or another community organization. This project is part of our Parks Master Plan and has been added to the 6-Year Capital Projects list for Parks.

8/30/19: Further investigation into the Diamond Lane Natural Resource Area shows that it is unsuitable for a community garden – it is underwater most of the year. However Oxford Park has an area that could be used, this suggestion is being handed over to the Parks, Recreation and Trails Advisory Board (PRTAB) for future development.

Proposal: Convert part of the Diamond Lane Natural Resource Area into a community orchard/garden.



Assess WTA Ridership as Unitycare on Portal Way becomes a regional health care center

Currently WTA ridership does not justify more routes to the City of Ferndale but assessments were last undertaken before the opening of the new Unitycare facility on Portal Way. As this changes ridership, the City would work with WTA to expand bus access to the City.

Proposal: Work with WTA to get accurate ridership numbers after Unitycare is fully staffed.



Continue to Support Multifamily development near other Multifamily development

WTA said that the best thing the City can do to lower barriers to people using the bus is to encourage multifamily development next to other multifamily development – where it is close to the street, there are quality sidewalks and accessible ramps.

Proposal: Continue city goals of dense multifamily development in our urban core and full street improvements adjacent to multifamily developments.



Investigate Free WTA Ridership Program for Events

Currently the WTA offers free rides the entire week of the Lynden Fair – the City and WTA both indicated interest in exploring a similar endeavor for Pioneer Days or the Street Festival.

Proposal: Enter into a partnership to provide free bus service during a Ferndale citywide event.



Utilize a Transportation Benefit District to Subsidize Bus Service

If there is demand but not the usage to justify more routes to the City of Ferndale, the City could put a Transportation Benefit District on the ballot to fund bus service. The City of Bellingham did this six years ago to provide for Sunday service in light of state and federal budget cuts. More research required.

9/27/19: Details on this will be included in the November meeting on taxing measures.

Proposal: Place a Transportation Benefit District on the ballot to fund additional bus service in Ferndale.



Install/Make Available More ADA Compliant Public Restrooms

Assessible bathrooms can be a serious issue for those with mobility challenges, the City should provide more access to ADA bathrooms.

Proposal: Expand the hours of the Star Park Bathroom and the Riverwalk Bathroom beyond current availabilities.



Establish Cold Weather Protocol for Opening Warming Station

A warming station during daylight hours that is staffed by volunteers would provide an opportunity for those without housing to stay warm during cold weather. This would require a temperature-based trigger point to open and provide synergy with overnight shelters being established in Bellingham, with Ferndale Police providing transportation at the end of the day down to Bellingham.

Proposal: Establish warming station in Ferndale, pass policy that establishes a temperature-based trigger point when it is opened.



Work with Homeless Outreach Team and Community Resource Center to establish better communication with vulnerable populations

One of the largest challenges in an emergency is getting information out to the public and that is additionally difficult for vulnerable populations that may not be receiving online updates. Building these communication networks is essential.

Proposal: The City should establish as a goal developing a communication system capable of reaching vulnerable populations.



Involve Ferndale CERT in local emergency response drills

Ferndale has an active Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) which provides the public training and organization on how to best assist in a crisis.

Proposal: The City should help recruit more members and involve them in emergency response drills with a focus on assisting vulnerable populations.



Establish Emergency Phone Line Voice Mail with Shelter/Snow Info

Building on the communication and warming station recommendations above, having a designated voicemail with emergency information is a good easy first step.

Proposal: Establish a voice mail that is updated daily with emergency response information.