

MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor Cassie Franklin; City Council President Brenda Stonecipher

CC: Snohomish County Executive Directors Ken Klein and Lacey Harper; Snohomish County Executive Chief of Staff Alessandra Durham; Snohomish County Human Services Director Mary Jane Brell Vujovic; City of Everett Community Development Director Julie Willie; Everett City Council

FROM: A Bounjaktha, Executive Director, Snohomish County

DATE: Thursday, April 6, 2023

RE: Update and Next Steps on the Hope Covenant Church

Background

Since 2019, Snohomish County has funded a congregate shelter for adults located at the United Church of Christ (UCC) in downtown Everett (also referred to as the “2020 shelter”). The church made the site available on an emergency basis for the 2019-2020 cold weather season when no other site could be located. The Salvation Army operated the winter season shelter that year. In late 2020, the site transitioned to being a year-round congregate shelter operated by the Everett Gospel Mission. The shelter is located in the bottom floor of the church and serves an average of 40 adults per night. The shelter also functioned as a COVID-19 relief shelter and as cold weather shelter for the 2021-22 cold weather season, serving an average of 43 additional adults per night. The United Church of Christ has been a valued partner in meeting this community need. Unfortunately, the current facility is not well-designed for shelter, lacks important amenities including hygiene supports, and requires considerable maintenance as a result.

As some of you know, since at least August 2022, staff from the City of Everett Community Development department asked Snohomish County to move operations out of the UCC in downtown Everett and to a new location. The City has regularly asked the County to move operations out of the UCC to a new location since the original request.

As some of you know, in October of 2022, staff from the City of Everett Community Development department alerted Snohomish County that the Hope Covenant Church in the Glacier View neighborhood of Everett was looking to sell. City staff identified the location as a potential suitable replacement for the shelter at UCC, and requested the County evaluate this property.

Snohomish County appreciates our ongoing partnership with the City of Everett to address issues related to homelessness. In the last year alone, we've partnered to: increase the number of Pallet shelters in Everett, increase emergency housing capacity through the purchase of the Days Inn, increase funding for helping professionals serving vulnerable residents, support expanded refuse management capacity and security services throughout the downtown area, and conduct an extensive cleanup along Highway 99.

In the spirit of continued partnership, and with the understanding that we need to significantly increase resources to address the homelessness crisis across our region, the County moved forward with the City's request to evaluate the Hope Covenant Church as a potential replacement shelter location and has been in ongoing contact with City staff throughout this process. A summary of the evaluation and community outreach is below.

Facilities and Services Evaluation

The County has conducted site visits and evaluated approximately a dozen facilities to serve as the new location. These locations did not meet the need due to a variety of factors. Notably, most required significant renovations to be habitable and suitable for shelter, which would have made the project too expensive. The Snohomish County Facilities Department assessed the Hope Covenant Church property and determined that it was in good repair and would not require significant renovations.

From a services perspective, Hope Covenant Church is suitable for a year-round shelter due to its proximity to providers offering physical health care, behavioral health care, as well as substance use treatment programs. It also is close to transit and can be fenced on the residential side of the property, providing additional security.

Once the County evaluated the facility, we entered into negotiations with the seller to determine whether the facility could be purchased at a reasonable price. The negotiations resulted in an estimated purchase price which the County deemed appropriate based on an independent appraisal. No purchase and sale agreement has been signed.

Outreach with Elected Officials

As you know, the County began direct outreach to the Everett City Council in late February. It is the County's intention to ensure broad awareness among all parties involved and residents.

Snohomish County Executive Director Ken Klein and the Director of Human Services held individual conversations with each councilmember during which we discussed the potential purchase of the Hope Covenant Church. Our goal with these conversations was to ensure councilmembers were aware of the proposal ahead of community outreach, so they wouldn't be surprised should constituents have questions or concerns.

The City Council followed up with us to request a full Council briefing on April 5, 2023. We responded to indicate we were not able to attend due to schedule conflicts and would work to find a follow-up time for a briefing.

Neighborhood Outreach

Before moving forward with any purchase, and in a similar approach to previous real estate transactions, the County proceeded to conduct outreach in the neighborhood surrounding the Hope Covenant Church. The goal of this outreach was to provide venues for feedback, hear concerns, and answer questions ahead of any potential public hearings at the City or County Council level.

Outreach began with one-on-one and small group meetings with key partners and neighboring businesses and was followed by door-to-door outreach. There are 309 addresses within 1,000 feet of the church. The County has reached out to 276 of those households to-date. County staff had conversations with those who were interested in talking, and for anyone who wasn't home, left postcards with instructions on how to sign up for updates via email and/or attend an upcoming community meeting to learn more.

The neighborhood response to the potential purchase heard during these face-to-face discussions was mixed. The majority of people were not home. Of those who were home, there was a split between those who expressed explicit support, explicit opposition, and those who were ambivalent or did not express an opinion.

Twenty-three people sent RSVPs for the first community meeting which were scheduled for Tuesday, April 4, 2023 from 5:30 – 7 p.m. at the Hope Covenant Church. The County's intent for these meetings was to hold staff-level discussions that allowed for everyone to participate and share their opinion and ask questions. This approach has been successful in prior outreach efforts for similar projects.

Approximately 70 people attended the first community meeting, and approximately 100 attended the second community meeting held on Wednesday, April 5, 2023, also at the church. Both meetings lasted until approximately 8:30 p.m. At both meetings, the majority of attendees expressed strong opposition to the proposed purchase for the purpose of providing shelter. A number of attendees voiced support for the project and urged empathy and compassion for people experiencing homelessness. A small number of people also spoke from the perspective of having lived experience.

Some key concerns expressed during the two community meetings are as follows:

- A strong feeling that the project would exacerbate existing public safety challenges in the neighborhood, including challenges with encampments, theft, and property destruction.
- Concern regarding siting this property in a residential neighborhood.
- Concern about shelter residents – particularly climate shelter residents – leaving the shelter and having negative impacts on the surrounding neighborhood.
- Concern about transparency around the potential purchase and the outreach process. Residents expressed a strong desire for communities beyond 1,000 feet to be notified.

Attendees repeatedly expressed an acknowledgement of the challenges related to homelessness and the need for shelter and housing services. Overall, attendees did not think this residential area was a suitable location. Many attendees identified downtown Everett as a more suitable location and attendees mentioned several properties that could perform this function that were not in a residential area of Everett.

The above is a summary and is not reflective of all concerns, questions, and support indicated during the meetings. The County is compiling notes from both meetings and is happy to share them once completed. Based on feedback provided by some of the attendees at the first meeting, the County prepared a PowerPoint presentation for the second meeting (attached).

Next Steps

As indicated above, the City of Everett requested the County to find a new location for the shelter at UCC and review the Hope Covenant Church as a potential new location. Because the request came from the City, the County requests the City's guidance on how it would like to move forward.

To ensure alignment, the County requests that the Mayor and City Council consider and vote on a joint resolution indicating how the City would like to proceed. Should the City want to proceed with its original request to the County, it is clear that more community engagement would be necessary, and this engagement should involve both County and City officials.

Snohomish County officials are available to brief the full Council on the results of the outreach done to-date as well as the facilities assessments we've conducted at the Hope Covenant Church.

We remain committed to pursuing collaborative, commonsense solutions that meet the homelessness crisis with the urgency it warrants while mitigating impacts to surrounding neighborhoods. We believe this is the best way to improve public safety in Everett and ensure vulnerable individuals receive the shelter and services they need.