



City Council

Special Recognition - Report on Recent Thurston County Code Blue Homeless Response during Hazardous Weather

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Title

Special Recognition - Report on Recent Thurston County Code Blue Homeless Response during Hazardous Weather

Recommended Action

Committee Recommendation:

Not referred to a committee.

City Manager Recommendation:

Receive a report on the recent Thurston County Code Blue homeless response during hazardous weather.

Report

Issue:

Whether to receive a report on how the recent Thurston County Code Blue homeless response operated during hazardous weather

Staff Contact:

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Presenter(s):

Keith Stahley, Community Planning and Development Department Director.
Keylee Marineau, Thurston County Homeless Prevention and Affordable Housing Coordinator.
Captain Mark Stearns, Salvation Army Olympia Corps.

Background and Analysis:

A report will be provided by several community partners who helped to coordinate the recent Thurston County "Code Blue" homeless response during hazardous weather. During this 12 day period of freezing snow and rain, the County worked closely with the City and other community partners to coordinate a system of expanded shelter and homeless camp support. This "Code Blue" response mobilized local government, faith communities, non-profit service providers, concerned

citizens and homeless people themselves to work together to keep our unhoused neighbors alive.

County's Hazard Weather Response to Homelessness:

Thurston County hosts the regional Hazard Weather Task Force (HWTF) that developed and manages the Extreme Weather Shelter Plan intended to provide shelter and other accommodations for unhoused citizens during episodes of extreme weather.

"Hazard weather" is defined in the plan to include: deep freezes, wind storms, floods, earthquakes and other life-threatening hazardous conditions. When the Task Force recommends a declaration of extreme weather, or "Code Blue," the Thurston County Director of Public Health may officially declare a "Code Blue" which sets the plan into motion. The recent "Code Blue" response involved a two-prong approach:

1. **Expanded Shelter Capacity:** The Task Force mobilized an inter-agency team of trained staff to work with volunteers to staff at the following shelters:
 - **Family Support Center:** Pear Blossom Place shelter for families with children (which had to temporarily relocate due to power outage);
 - **Community Youth Services:** Rosie's Place Shelter for transition age youth; and,
 - **Salvation Army Church:** In addition to their year-round and Cold Weather shelter hosted at their Plum Street facility, Salvation Army opened up their Church at 4th Avenue and Central Street to provide additional shelter for single adults.

Additional information about volunteer hours and shelter bed nights will be orally reported.

2. **Camp "Shelter in Place":** Through a collaboration with the Task Force and InterCity Transit (IT), volunteers and staff used IT "Village Vans" to distribute survival goods to homeless camps in the urban hub. Additional information about volunteer hours and the goods distributed will be orally reported.

The recent Code Blue event provided an opportunity to strengthen the Extreme Weather Shelter Plan. The elements of that plan included the following:

- **Planning:** The County hosted planning sessions to mobilize local government, non-profit service providers, faith communities, concerned citizens and homeless people themselves to identify all resources and set timelines for action;
- **Recruitment:** Local government worked closely with non-profits and faith communities to recruit and schedule: volunteers and additional staff to run shelters as well as volunteer drivers with transport vans from Inter-City Transit to distribute survival goods to homeless camps in the urban hub;
- **Shelter Staff Cross Training:** The recent "Code Blue" provided an opportunity for cross-training staff from Interfaith Works, Salvation Army and Union Gospel Mission. This experience allowed the three agencies to continue to forge a shared service model of managed low-barrier shelter based on trauma informed care and other best practices;
- **Food Drive:** Solicit for shelter food items, including: coffee, cup of soup, orange juice, muffins, sandwich-making ingredients and other food stuffs; and,
- **Procurement:** Purchase and solicitation for survival goods, including socks, blankets, tarps, coats, hand-warmers and other goods.

Code Blue Fund Sources: Thurston County is the primary funding authority for "Code Blue" shelter

management and staffing, with funds being made available through contract provisions under existing homeless service contracts. Intercity Transit provided vans through their Village Van program. Numerous government, non-profit and faith-based organizations collected donations of food, blankets and other survival goods from hundreds of citizens. Salvation Army Olympia Corps provided several hundred blankets to shelter providers and homeless camp support networks in fall of 2018. Also in fall of 2018, Thurston County Jail provided several hundred mattresses to Salvation Army for distribution and use by non-profit shelter providers. One notable donation came from Puget Sound Energy which provided a multi-course dinner for 65 shelter residents of the Salvation Army Church shelter. Additional information about donations and services will be orally reported.

Recent Code Blue Timeline: Thurston County declared “Code Blue” on January 31, 2019 for a start date of Sunday, February 3 and ultimately extended it 12 days through Thursday February 14, 2019. Originally anticipated to be a three (3) day response during heavy snow, the County maintained the “Code Blue” response until temperatures rose and the snow abated.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

All neighborhoods and community stakeholders have a compelling interest in a well-run homeless response plan during hazardous weather.

Options:

- 1) Receive a report on the recent Thurston County Code Blue homeless response to hazardous weather.
- 2) Do not receive a report on the recent Thurston County Code Blue homeless response to hazardous weather at this meeting and instead request a report at later date.

Financial Impact:

The Code Blue response did not create additional direct costs to City of Olympia beyond the significant participation of City staff. Additional financial information will be compiled and can be provided at a later date.

Attachments:

Thurston County Homeless Shelter Network 2018-2019