

Whatcom Falls Neighborhood Meeting

Joe Coons from Whatcom Falls

WFNA MEETING ATTENDEES LEARN ABOUT HOMELESS CAMPS, CATASTROPHE PLANNING AND MORE AT JUNE MEETING

Our Whatcom Falls Neighborhood meeting was held on June 14 in a classroom at the Kulshan Middle School, and about 20 people attended. In addition to the usual routine items including the minutes and the treasurer's report as well as introductions, we had the opportunity to be updated on several matters of significance.

HOMELESS CAMPS AND POLICE ACCREDITATION

Neighborhood Officer Eric Osterkamp gave an interesting presentation. In addition to reporting that the BPD had completed securing accreditation under the National Law Enforcement Accreditation Program, he gave us some in-depth information about the way law enforcement and other community organizations were dealing with the issues of homeless camps.

The steps the city is taking with these camps appear to be comprehensive. The process, a new one, is following the lead of other communities who have had success dealing with the homeless. In a nutshell the over-arching goal is to get everyone out of the camps and into some kind of housing as soon as housing availability and funds make possible.

Here, in general, are the steps that Eric told us about: When a report is received from citizens about a camp that is an annoyance, a police officer (Eric or the other Neighborhood Officer, Dante Alexander) is dispatched to review conditions and eliminate any disturbances or illegal activities. To help with this, the city and organizations which have an interest in this area of community activities have developed a complete checklist that the police, as well as others follow. The officer, in essence, reviews the site as to its size, cleanliness, health conditions, its exposure to youth, and other criteria to determine what can be done to alleviate any problem.

These homeless campsites house a variety of people. Eric said that they include some folks who merely prefer to live in an outdoor environment, mentally disturbed people who cannot get along with others, those who are indigent and cannot afford to live elsewhere, criminals who may use the camps as a base of illegal operations, as well as those who are addicted to various substances including alcohol and who may also be petty thieves. In addition to dealing with the character of the occupants, the police have to recognize that the camps themselves might be very unsanitary and cause significant health risk from used needles, unsanitary conditions because of the lack of facilities, and the danger to young people especially if schools or commonly used paths are nearby.

Depending upon the severity of findings, a complaint is dealt with in a variety of ways. In the least troublesome situations, the occupants may be permitted to stay as long as they continue to live in a sanitary and unobtrusive way; in the most troublesome cases, all the occupants will be relocated to

other housing (with significant help in this process from the Opportunity Council). Serious offenders may be jailed, and a significant and complete cleanup will be undertaken by city departments including particularly the parks department.

LOGGING OPERATIONS

Association president Rick Sawyer gave us an update from Nielsen Brothers Logging in the project at the end of Raymond Street near the power line. Application has been made to the Department of Natural Resources for some further logging in an area that is part of the existing project. Although Rick's contacts were not recent, it appears that most or all of the project work is complete (he based this upon the fact that few trucks are still exiting from Raymond onto Lakeway, with apparently only a few cleanup loads apparently still to be taken away). In answer to some questions and discussion, Rick indicated that the city is still very much involved in being sure that this work is done properly. Citizens with concerns can contact Kurt Nabbefeld, Bellingham Development Services Manager at 360-778-8351.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

We had an interesting presentation by Paul R. Gadzik, involved in the City's emergency management program. With our meeting just a day after the "Cascadia Rising" emergency drill, it was a timely discussion!

Paul discussed flooding, winter storms, thunderstorms and tornadoes, landslides, earthquakes, volcanoes, tsunamis, wildfires, and accidental discharge of hazardous materials. What a risk list! A number of these were discussed casually as not being significant to Bellingham, but certainly the issue of volcanoes is a significant one and Rick seriously recommended that every homeowner have some kind of emergency kit to enable self-sufficiency.

Paul urged us that if we are forced to evacuate our homes we remember the 3P's: pills, pets, and purses (money, ID, very important papers).

(At least for your reporter, it was clear that in our household we have overlooked one critical thing to have on hand in the event of the power shortage and disconnection from public utilities that would occur in an earthquake: bottled water in a significant enough quantity to last us for three or four days! I mean to pick up a few cases and put them in our storeroom...)

A couple of great sites on the Internet will help you with your planning: <https://ready.gov> and www.whatcomready.org.

LIKE AN EXTRA \$5 MILLION?

That's what Bellingham is trying to win in the National Energy Prize Contest. After a little over a year in the contest, with about seven months to go, Bellingham is number four in the nation in this

competition. The goal: to have the most significant energy savings and plans for continued savings out of all the other competitors!

We learned this from two representatives of the Bellingham Energy Prize organization, Emily Larson Kubiak and Amy Vergillo. Emily and Amy told us about programs underway from a variety of vendors and community services to help homeowners reduce their utility bills and live in greater comfort, while reducing the load especially on carbon fuel. You can get a lot more information about this at the website, www.bellinghamenergyprize.org.

WRAPUP

President Rick Sawyer reminded us that our next meetings are on September 13 and November 15 (we do not meet during the summer when school is closed because our room rental at the school would be exorbitant, considering custodial costs to open it!)

---Submitted by Joe Coons with help from Steve Williamson, WFNA Secretary