



## King County

### Department of Community and Human Services

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Dear White Center Neighbors,

I am writing to respond to the questions and comments regarding the proposed White Center shelter for people who are homeless.

To provide context for this proposal, for the last few years, the County has heard from White Center residents that there are many people who are homeless in White Center and that the County should address the issue. The annual One Night Count last January confirms this, with at least 100 people counted in White Center who are unsheltered. Most are adults.

There are no shelters for people who are homeless in White Center. Both local and national data show that people who are homeless generally stay close to wherever they were living when they became homeless. Accordingly, many of the people who are living unsheltered in White Center likely have ties to White Center. Many are residents who have had a crisis in their lives, such as fleeing from domestic violence, a medical issue, or an inability to meet yet another rent increase. Many of the stereotypes of people who are homeless are simply that, stereotypes.

The County began examining unused county facilities in May to determine if any were usable for shelters. (Information circulating stating that the County has been planning a White Center shelter since last year is incorrect). Much of the former public health building in White Center has been vacant for several years. Currently, the White Center Food Bank uses part of the facility, as does Southwest Youth and Family Services. Because it is an underutilized county facility, the White Center former health clinic was identified as a potential temporary shelter site.

The County and regional partners are expanding shelter in all regions of the county. King County currently funds nearly 2,000 shelter beds and has been working to address the increasing need for shelter and other housing resources around the region. Two other shelters are currently being discussed on county properties – a 100-bed shelter at the Eastgate Public Health site in Bellevue and another shelter in Kenmore.

It is significant to note that the White Center public health clinic was identified as a potential *temporary* shelter site. The reason that it would be temporary is that the County was approached by several White Center community groups, including White Center Community Development Association (CDA) and Southwest Youth and Family Services regarding redevelopment of the

property. These local community groups are exploring constructing a new facility to house the food bank, provide community space that would be programmed by these agencies, and develop family housing. Their projected timeline is two to three years for redevelopment. Due to the rising costs of housing and the ongoing displacement of people due to rising rents, developing safe and decent housing that families can actually afford is a priority for the county.

As part of exploring a temporary use for the former White Center Public Health Clinic, the County sent out notice to 77 neighbors of the clinic in August and contacted the White Center Now blog, White Center News, King County Sheriff's Office, North Highline Fire Department, adjacent schools, and several community groups, including the North Highline Unincorporated Area Council and the White Center Food Bank. County staff began discussions with Southwest Youth and Family Services and the White Center CDA in July about the shelter. In addition, White Center CDA door-belled neighbors to let them know about the proposal. The community meeting was well-attended.

King County is committed to making homelessness rare, brief and one-time. We are transforming shelters to ensure case management is available to all. We identify barriers to employment and housing, and work with local service providers, counselors and homeless people to help them overcome those barriers. We hold homeless services vendors accountable and measure their success in moving people to permanent housing. We follow national best practices that achieve results and improve lives.

Fighting homelessness is an intense process, but we have so many success stories to share. We are currently engaged in a productive community conversation about the proposed shelter, and continue to explore alternative sites. We welcome suggestions from the community, and are actively exploring those suggestions and comments. It is our goal to find common ground and offer services before winter so that every White Center resident can sleep indoors.

We look forward to sharing our findings and next steps in the near future.

We will continue to update our website at <http://www.kingcounty.gov/whitecentershelter> as we have new information to share.

Sincerely,



Adrienne Quinn