

Sender: hanse@thelighthousemission.org
Subject: Fwd: Congratulations, and welcome to the neighborhood.
Message-Id:
<CAGqpMy3CmeL1+ytavpsLdEU0pcjxztUm91oEz0UQ3QW7t5=87w@mail.gmail.com>
Recipient: rmsepler@cob.org

From: Hans Erchinger-Davis <hanse@thelighthousemission.org>
Subject: Fwd: Congratulations, and welcome to the neighborhood.
Date: November 12, 2020 at 12:06:01 PM PST
To: "Sepler, Rick M." <rmsepler@cob.org>

Rick,
Just so you're aware of some dialogue with neighbors...
Hans

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Hans Erchinger-Davis <hanse@thelighthousemission.org>
Date: Wed, Nov 11, 2020 at 11:02 AM
Subject: Re: Congratulations, and welcome to the neighborhood.
To: [REDACTED]
CC: Ben Zobrist <benz@thelighthousemission.org>

[REDACTED]
It appears we disagree on a few things. It's concerning that you suggest people experiencing homelessness are like dogs and children. I respectfully return this conversation back to you and Ben.

Hans

Hans Erchinger-Davis
Executive Director
Lighthouse Mission Ministries
360-733-5120 x101

Healing Homelessness with Christ's Power and Love.

On Mon, Nov 9, 2020 at 1:00 PM [REDACTED] wrote:
Hello Hans and Ben,

Hans, thanks so much for taking the time to reply. As always, your communication is thoughtful and considerate which is a major step towards us being good neighbors; thank you for that.

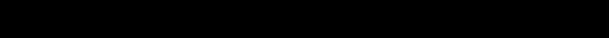
I especially appreciate you taking the time to address each of my ideas, since this shows that you did indeed take the time to read and consider them; again, thank you for that important step in acknowledging each other's concerns.

In reading your responses, it seems as though I did not do a great job in communicating some of my most basic points. Rather than taking time out of both of our busy schedules to write a whole new email, I will share some thoughts highlighted in blue within your email below.

I hope that further clarifying our thoughts will lead to better understanding, and hopefully a path to action.



On Nov 8, 2020, at 4:00 PM, Hans Erchinger-Davis <hanse@thelighthousemission.org> wrote:

Hello 

Your messages were forwarded to me and I thought it best to respond personally. First off, please do keep the ideas coming, as we're always in the mood for solving problems and exploring possibilities, and there may be things we haven't thought of yet. In response to your Proactive point 1: We're indeed very keen on doing outreach to people experiencing homelessness downtown, and we do. **What we are hoping for here is that Ben, or someone else in LMM if that works better for you, act as a coordinator and motivator with the various groups and volunteers that will hopefully be involved in your outreach program. By acting in those roles, Ben could strive to optimize the schedules of various groups in hopes of creating the maximum boots on the ground; and secondarily as community liaison he could share the schedule with concerned individuals in order to establish confidence that this work is actually happening on a sufficient scale, and in an efficient manner rather than occasional hit and miss, which I think is closer to the current perception.** We can't, however, have our people handle criminal situations off property 24hrs a day, as it's outside our scope and authority. As well, LMM desires to maintain its therapeutic relationship with folks on the street, since they could be potential future guests. Our goal is to build trust and get them to take next steps off the street and into Base Camp; and so even if we were somehow able to take on the role of enforcement off property it would likely break the already fragile trust this demographic has and would become a relational barrier to people accessing these next steps out of homelessness. **I agree with this point 110%. In my previous email I tried to distinguish between exercising authority which I understand LMM cannot do outside of its property; and what I referred to as "sympathetic conversation and encouragement of basic social behaviors". I don't believe that our understanding of the goals and methods is much different; our concern is with the apparent lack**

of implementation through enough people from LMM and its affiliates actually on the streets to make much of a difference. I think we agree on the method, what we ask for is a much larger and better organized effort so that it is visible to everyone in the community, both homeless and hard-working. Ultimately, neighborhood safety is a job for law enforcement, and we do our best to support them. You really have to have both advocacy and law enforcement in play to move people forward out of homelessness, but not by the same entities. Once again we are very much in agreement. I would try to make two points: 1. I think that we both agree that the more problem behaviors can be addressed through conversation and counseling rather than through arrests, the better. We need more counselors on the streets in this area in hopes that arrests will be less necessary. 2. The police are very well-intentioned, but they have two big handicaps; they are very short on both staff and funding. They are discouraged from making arrests due to the current situation with jail space and Covid. The more non-police boots on the ground that can affect behavior, the less stress it will place on the underfunded police and jails. Without both, downtown would have a much bigger problem with more people being stuck in homelessness. Regarding Proactive point 2: great idea, but again, outside our scope. We can only be responsible for our own property. On this point I must very strongly disagree; to be blunt I feel that this is a cop-out on responsibility. If our children act in a way outside of our property that intimidates or threatens the safety and security of the neighborhood, I think that it would unreasonable and unethical for us to say that it is not our problem when they are off our property. If our children invite friends over that also engage in these activities, these other children may not be our legal responsibility, but if our home and family drew them to the area where they are causing trouble, I believe that we would have a moral responsibility to intervene. It is true that it would be within legal rights to just sit back and tell the neighbors to call the police, but I would see this as a shirking of responsibility to the neighbors and to the children who would be better served by counseling than by calling in the police. Regarding Reactive points 1 & 3: off campus illegal activities again need to involve law enforcement. I must admit that I was a little surprised by this statement. While true on its face, I am surprised that you, of all people, see the police as the primary, if not only solution to illegal activity. If these activities are non-violent at the moment, we think that counseling and encouraging changes in behavior are an important step that needs to be tried. Twenty years ago, when this neighborhood was experiencing similar problems, I had many sincere conversations with people on our block dealing with drug and alcohol abuse. If the response I received was threatening, I would walk around the corner and call the police. However, in many cases, a rapore was established that was beneficial to both sides. In some cases, they acknowledged that they and their friends had problems and should probably seek help. In other cases where they were committed to continuing their unhealthy lifestyle, they came to understand that their actions were threatening the livelihoods of families trying to provide good homes for their children. In all three cases, trying to establish communication about behavior and consequences had positive results; whether it was my being on the scene to call the police and identify a threatening drug dealer in a timely fashion, motivating someone to seek help, or just helping someone to realize the negative affects their behaviors were having on people trying to support their families. When the idea of Base Camp was first introduced to us, this is the sort of

intervention that we envisioned on a large scale as a way of allowing our new Base Camp neighbor to coexist without destroying the efforts of hard working people to support their families. Our hope is that Ben can be the person to bring this image to fruition by encouraging and coordinating more boots on the ground, and communicating his efforts and successes on this front to the neighborhood. Much like Peace Health can't control what it's patients do when off their campus in the community, neither can we. Sorry, but I do not believe that this is a reasonable analogy. I do not believe that the patients drawn to Peace Health are often behaving in a way that threatens the safety and security of the community. Just as importantly, they have chosen a location that provides some buffer between them and the surrounding neighborhoods which in itself is a responsible act. They're adults and responsible for their own actions. Sorry, but I believe that this argument avoids the point. They are responsible for their actions, but LMM and the City are responsible for where those actions are taking place and who they affect. A pit bull is responsible if it bites someone; but if I bring a pit bull with a history of causing problems into our neighborhood and it bites someone, the responsibility for the attack is not all on the pit bull. I am the one that put him into a situation with a likelihood that biting my neighbor could occur, and I did not take sufficient actions to avoid that outcome. I share a burden of responsibility for setting up the scenario that led to the bite. All we can do is the hard work of healing them when they do seek our help. Even though we're not responsible for all the homeless of Whatcom County and not all of these citizens use our services it's certainly good for us to hear about the problems. If you get a name or a picture or security video of illegal behavior and they are indeed accessing our services we can address it and work with the authorities to ensure justice is done. We very much appreciate these statements, but we must come back to our main point. What we are asking for is that Ben, or someone else in LMM if that works better for you, organize enough volunteers or trained interventionists on the streets who can get to know people and can be the ones to report illegal behavior as their presence will often lead to them being the first ones aware of it. Employees are at work inside businesses, and may not witness who did what. Even if they do, the paperwork and time commitment required by the police puts an unfair burden on people who did not draw the problems to the neighborhood. More boots on the ground would gain familiarity with problem individuals, leading to the follow-through you are offering. Regarding Reactive point 2 (and part of point 1), do let us know about any garbage concerns and we'll get our garbage contractors on it, as they are active in the neighborhood mornings 7 days a week. The morning cleanup is wonderful, and we believe that the lady involved is dedicated and doing a great job of mitigating the impact on the neighborhood. It was great foresight for the City to supply funding for this. However, if my dog poops on your front porch four times a day, I need to figure out either a way to encourage my dog to alter its behavior, or I need to come home from work a few times a day to clean it up so that you are not stepping in it just to get in and out of your house. (I hope that we are beyond any concerns that I am comparing people on the street to dogs; it just happens to be a good analogy for the problem of poop.) I think that the current morning cleanup efficiently takes care of daily trash, but if someone defecates on or near a business during the day, that needs to be picked up sooner than the next morning. Someone needs to deal with this in a timely fashion, and it should not have to be business employees who do not bare a

responsibility for the problem suddenly increasing in their neighborhood. People can additionally drop off needles for disposal at Base Camp too if they wish. We have biohazard disposal for diabetics. Ben can make those connections for you if you wish. It is wise that you have safe needle disposal inside Base Camp. However, this again skips the main point that the presence of Base Camp has vastly increased the problem with contaminated needles affecting the health and safety of the neighborhood. To further add the burden of asking employees or customers to pick up needles and leave their work to deliver them to Base Camp seems incredibly unreasonable and lacking in compassion. If my child, or his friends, dumped dangerous trash in your yard and you called me, I do not think that I would feel good about telling you that you need to pick it up, bring it over to our house, and put it in our garbage can. I think a more appropriate reaction would be if I answered that either I, or my kids, would be right over to take care of it in a safe manner. Wouldn't you agree?

On these last two issues, I would like to reiterate my proposal that LMM could provide a win-win by developing a program whereby guests could gain a sense of self-worth and responsibility by volunteering to respond to neighborhood calls regarding immediate issues such as feces and drug needles. Hopefully, dealing personally with cleaning up these issues would lead these people to encourage others not to engage in these activities. We believe that the opportunity to pay-it-back to Base Camp and to be a positive force in the community would be an important step in regaining a sense of self-worth so critical to moving forward.

Your earlier interest in LMM formally stating we won't stay past four years is going before our Board of Trustees at this month's board meeting. You should hear back by the end of the month. Thank you! I have no doubt that this would be a huge boost to the moral, and to a sense of hope for future planning within the neighborhood. In the meantime please consider supporting our efforts to double our impact for those who have already lost everything in this community with a new facility in Old Town both by lobbying for it and by supporting the project financially. I am not sure if you are aware of how much we have personally supported the new LMM facility through numerous email correspondences with City officials, as well as through public testimony during recent City Council meetings. Our fear has been that the City's desire to accommodate Parberry could possibly threaten LMM's future in Old Town, and its ability to build and operate a full service facility. I specifically addressed concerns in the Parberry agreement referring negatively to the low-barrier shelter on Holly, and the City's willingness to succumb to Parberry's objections to a shelter on the property over near Heritage Park. We felt that these set very poor precedents that could lead to future obstacles for LMM. We did succeed in getting the City to change the wording of the Parberry agreement to remove negative references to LMM and the shelter. We have strongly encouraged City officials and the Council to provide assurances that they would fully support and expedite your efforts to build a wonderful facility in your traditional location in Old Town to serve the community. We have received positive replies from some Council members assuring us of secure support for your new project, which we thanked them for. As far as finances, I have started a few conversations about downtown businesses raising funds for the new facility, but quite honestly, many replied that Base Camp has caused them to see LMM as an enemy who lacks compassion for their situations and who may end up destroying the livelihoods that support their

families. They bring up the old complaint that the process was done in secret with contractor's being sworn to secrecy, which right or wrong, did not create good will. Mostly, they do not see LMM as caring about their families or their futures; or at the very least, prioritizing those whose lives revolve around drug and alcohol abuse over those whose lives revolve around working hard to support their families. Everyone agrees that those who I like to refer to as the innocent homeless (as opposed to those who choose a life of drug and alcohol abuse) need prioritized help and support. However, some people in the neighborhood do not see that same level of compassion for protecting those who are brave enough to work hard for their dreams, who feel that their well-being is considered less important than those who choose a lifestyle of drug and alcohol abuse (yes, I realize that "choose" is a controversial word, but from my experience it is accurate at some point. As you said, "They're adults and responsible for their own actions."). From the discussions I have heard, there are three things that LMM could do to change this problem of perception:

1. Show more proactive responsibility that is visible daily on the streets of the neighborhood around Base Camp. Saying that issues outside your property are not your problem does not help with this negative perception.
2. Give the neighborhood the hope they need to stick this out by formally promising that they only have to struggle with the additional burden for three or four years, which is still a very long time. Failing in this would hurt LMMs credibility, and does not speak well of any concern for the level of stress the neighborhood is dealing with between Covid and Base Camp.
3. We understand that the former low-barrier shelter on Holly will be opening to some extent starting in December. Many people have referred to Base Camp by saying, "if only it was not a 'low-barrier' shelter." You could demonstrate a high level of compassion for people in the neighborhood struggling to maintain their livelihoods if the Holly Street shelter became a shelter dedicated just to 'low-barrier' guests so as not to overload it, and Base Camp no longer accepted 'low-barrier' guests. This would be a win-win by; 1. Avoiding the overcrowding at Base Camp that may lead to turning away innocent homeless as it reaches capacity. 2. It would provide a safer and more secure environment for the innocent homeless by restricting exposure to drug and alcohol abuse. 3. It would be seen by the neighborhood as a move reflecting understanding and compassion for the potentially devastating burdens that they are currently facing with a pandemic and a 'low-barrier' shelter combining to destroy their dreams and livelihoods.

Together for the common good, I truly like that statement. The tendency, though well-intentioned, is for each of us to seek the good for the group we care the most about; for you that is the homeless who you see as the most threatened, and for us it is young hardworking families in our neighborhood with a dream to provide a home and security for their families that we currently see as the most threatened and the most in need of protection. You and I have something very much uncommon, and that is our tireless dedication to those we feel an obligation to protect. The challenge for both of us is to see and act for the needs of the other. Only through that can we achieve a truly 'common' good.

Hans

Hans Erchinger-Davis
Executive Director
Lighthouse Mission Ministries
360-733-5120 x101

Healing Homelessness with Christ's Power and Love.

From: Ben Zobrist <benz@thelighthousemission.org>
Sent: Monday, November 2, 2020 3:18:39 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Re: Congratulations, and welcome to the neighborhood.

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you so much for taking the time to write this letter. I can feel the deep concern and care that you have for our community. I am honored to join the team at the Lighthouse Mission. I am also honored to stand with the businesses and families of Downtown Bellingham. You have shared a remarkable history of the resilience of this community. I hope that we can engage that spirit of resilience and work together to create some solutions.

I look forward to meeting the great group of folks who participate in the Neighborhood Advisory Board. Loran will continue to lead this group, but I will actively participate. So in the meantime I am available to meet via phone or in person.

I appreciate the documentation of incidents, this is very helpful. I am keeping my cell phone with me outside of business hours so I am available to at least be a support remotely if needed.

Please don't hesitate to reach out. I would love to connect by phone at your convenience.

Blessings,
Ben

On Mon, Nov 2, 2020 at 12:05 PM John and Janet Crews <jjcrews@me.com> wrote:
Hello Ben,

Congratulations on your new position at Base Camp! As one of the property owners in the neighborhood around Base Camp, we would like to welcome you, and look forward to working with you to achieve the best mutual relationships and outcomes involving Base Camp staff and guests, and the small business families and their employees who support their families through the small businesses in downtown Bellingham.

As you get to know the area, it seems appropriate to share with you a little bit about ourselves, the history of the neighborhood, and a little bit about some of the small business families that hopefully you will be meeting soon. This letter is quite lengthy, but so is the history and the list of current issues facing the area that you will be helping to solve.

Our family (my parents) started a small floor covering store near the north end of Railroad Ave during the late 1940s right after the end of World War II. Since then, we have put much of our time, energy, and resources into developing the north end of Railroad as a home for young entrepreneurial families to start up their dream businesses. It has been a very rewarding journey to watch and help these fine young people to build their dreams and support their growing families through businesses such as [REDACTED]

However, the road has not been without bumps along the way. Back around 2000, there was a growing problem of anti-social individuals starting to hang out in groups along the north end of Railroad. The problem quickly escalated when a well-meaning church group started handing out food from the vacant lot across Champion St from the bus depot. This rapidly increased the size of the problem leading to larger groups hanging out on the corner, food containers littering the sidewalks and storefronts, and daily defecation and urination in and around business entrances. Before this problem began, the Bellingham Chamber of Commerce located its office in our building at the corner of Railroad and Champion because the area represented a thriving downtown. As the problems got worse, the Chamber moved out because they did not want potential investors in Bellingham to see what the neighborhood had become. There used to be a large 18 foot circular planter located on that corner which was filled with beautiful plants and flowers. This became the central hangout, and was soon trampled and covered daily with 20 to 40 individuals involved in harassing passers-by, drug dealing, and prostitution. Since most people became afraid to walk down this stretch of sidewalk, the remaining four businesses in our building moved out which solidified the area as a center for drugs, alcohol abuse, and anti-social behaviors.

We were faced with a tough decision; whether to give up on our hopes and visions for the neighborhood, let the building run down, and rent to the only businesses who were interested which would mean adult book stores, smoke shops, and liquor stores. Against the advice of most who saw it as a hopeless cause, we decided to try to revitalize the area. We began by doing a very costly complete overhaul of our building to attract positive neighborhood businesses, bull-doing out the remains of the once beautiful planter that our family had previously paid for the City to install, and working with the mayor and the police to discourage the rampant crime in the area.

At first no one would even look at our rebuilt new business vacancies, since people were still afraid to get out of their cars when a realtor would drive them up to take a look; people still thought we were crazy to try and save the neighborhood.

After a couple of years of this, the turn-around moment happened when a young woman, barely 20, with a dream to support her new family by opening a [REDACTED] approached us. [REDACTED] did not have the resources to start a new business on her own, but we were so impressed by her positive energy and dedication to her dream, that we helped her to get started. She built most of the [REDACTED] shop with her own two hands, learning each trade as the need arose. With the help of the Downtown Bellingham Partnership and the wonderful Bellingham Police, [REDACTED] went toe to toe with drug dealers and pimps and let them know that her family's well-being depended on the success of her [REDACTED], and she would defend her family and her new Cafe. This young woman turned the tide of an entire neighborhood.

Soon other young people with dreams saw the success she had in turning the neighborhood around, and our building filled up once again with hardworking families with their own dreams. Our vision of a healthy and successful neighborhood had once again come true and has been thriving ever since; until now.

Covid hit these business families and their employees hard. Some are still not allowed to open, and most of those that can open are restricted to 50%. These are not the kind of people to give up as long as they have hope, but they are operating under a great deal of emotional and financial stress and their remaining hope is being sorely tested.

Then came, what many of them fear to be, a final blow. There was no warning, since the City swore everyone to secrecy about their plans to move a low-barrier shelter into the neighborhood. Contractors who were consulted on the proposed building were forced to promise that they could not share the information with friends in the area who owned businesses. The evening that City officials came before a public City Council meeting to ask for approval of the necessary funding, City officials calmly stated that they were still considering five or six different sites and had not made any decisions yet. The next morning, a lease that had obviously been drawn up over preceding days was signed, and it became clear that work had already begun on the inside of the building. The neighborhood that had gone through collapse and redemption was in shock and fear because of the words "low-barrier" which were attached to the new shelter.

The City and LMM promised that the fears were exaggerated and unnecessary. They said that there would be numerous staff and volunteers out on the streets to discourage inappropriate behavior, and the affects on the surrounding neighborhood would be minimal. LMM promised to be a good neighbor.

Fast forward to the present; these are recent quotes, color coded by who and when they were reported, from business owners within two blocks of Base Camp:

"-Friday, September 11, 2020 around 1:00 pm

A co-worker and clients observed a man yelling at a couple of pedestrians who were attempting to cross the street at Cornwall

and Flora (at the corner of Base Camp). They appeared to be upset by it and once they crossed and continued on, the man continued walk around that intersection yelling randomly loud enough to be heard in the waiting room area of our business.

-Friday, September 11, 2020 at 4:54 pm

A co-worker observed a man with a Fireman's axe in his hands riding around on a bicycle haphazardly on Cornwall towards Flora Street.

-Saturday, September 12, 2020 5:00 pm

A co-worker and client watched a female who appeared to be in her late teens prowling cars on Cornwall, attempting to open car doors and screaming "Hello" in people's faces. She then went and sat on the corner at the end of this block and appeared to fall asleep on the sidewalk.

-Wednesday, September 16, 2020 11:30 am

A co-worker and our brand new neighboring small business owner saw a group of 4 people sitting on the sidewalk in front of Base Camp's front fenced area where our clients park doing drugs (appeared to be smoking crack). Police pulled up as my co-worker and woman from next door were talking about what to do.

-Wednesday September 16, 2020 5:30 pm

Man laying in back parking lot in a parking space. Not responsive. Coworker called 911 for well check.

-Thursday, September 17, 2020 6:30 pm

Co-worker saw a man behaving aggressively on Cornwall, screaming "Fuck you" and other expletives while walking up and down the block. Entered Base Camp, continued to scream loud enough to be heard inside the salon.

-Saturday, September 19, 2020 7:30 pm

Woman smoking crack in the doorway to our business, refused to move out of doorway when asked. Coworker called 911 and she proceeded to urinate in front of the door then walked to Base Camp and continued to smoke crack in front of the fence.

-Monday, September 28, 2020 9:30 am

Myself and a coworker observed a large amount of clothing, trash, and personal belonging strewn across the sidewalk from our back parking lot to all the way around the corner at Arlis's."

"- A man randomly screaming profanities at Base Camp just outside the salon so loud that it was disrupting the conversation inside the business. It went on and on. My coworker was working alone with her client and both women were nervous. This was late morning.

- An elderly client was scared to leave her vehicle because a man had been turned away for lunch service and he was screaming threats and profanities at the shelter. She did not feel physically safe leaving her car while he was on the sidewalk outside her vehicle. This was lunchtime.

- I had to run a quick errand (on a very tight time constraint) for some business supplies and ended up having to call 911 after watching a man take a 2x4 out of his shopping cart and beat the glass out of a newer Jeep parked at a meter on Flora. He went toward downtown on Cornwall and meandered up and down the 1500 block with the cart and 2x4 until the police showed up. This was at 3:00 in the afternoon.

- A male client waiting outside the salon for his appointment became very nervous when 2 different groups of homeless people on opposite corners of the street at the Cornwall/Flora intersection began screaming threats and profanity at each other and continued ramping up. This was around 4:30.

- The same evening as the previous encounter a middle aged female client was waiting outside for her appointment and a homeless woman

wandered toward her with a plate of food. She stopped in front of the gown and glove shop next to my salon and looked in the windows then turned and glared at my client and aggressively walked toward her, veering off before contact. She started to walk away then threw the plate of food at my client, missing her by a couple feet but covering the sidewalk with food. My client was horrified and felt scared. This was around 5:30 and the street was mostly empty.

- When I was leaving the salon, I walked outside and found an RV parked in front of my business selling a Costco size bottle of liquor through the passenger side window to a man crouched on the sidewalk who was trading cash for the bottle. He glared and stared at me. I had to lock my door then walk around the back of the block to our parking lot. No one around, felt very nervous. This was around 7:30 in the evening."

"The danger here is that people are feeling unsafe and people are disgusted by behaviors. Employees and customers are looking elsewhere. The downtown is the soul of Bellingham and your decision has placed its economic viability at real risk. Once this settles in then no one will want to visit here or work here.

What do we tell employees who are telling downtown business owners that they feel "unsafe"? What do we tell employees who say they are deeply offended by seeing people urinating and defecating in public? What do we tell employees who witness drug transactions? What do we tell the small business owners who call us and say my life's investment is evaporating? What do we tell customers who say "boy this is a rough neighborhood"?

One business owner emailed me and indicated that their employees were seriously considering the need to carry a handgun. I strongly advised against that but when people feel unsafe, they can make a bad decision.

As we have said, the LMM customers are settling in and realizing that their brazen behavior has no consequences. Attracted by the

services of the LMM, they spend their days misbehaving downtown before reporting in for the evening meal or the morning breakfast. Their behavior is becoming much more brazen and indeed some of these LMM customers seems to revel in confrontation. Some seem to enjoy standing their ground. One group routinely congregates on blankets in the car travel areas of the City's parking lot. I have no doubt that with this behavior the risk of an accident or an assault is escalating."

"The situation is very tense around here. Simply stated, the problem is getting worse as these folks settle into our neighborhood. They are becoming bolder as they realize that the police will not take any action. The group in the north of the City parking is there every day and sits in the path of cars. One guy had his pants down and was squatting in the travel lane of the parking lot and almost got hit by a car. In my view, Unless the City takes decisive action before this pattern settles in the northern part of downtown will be set back ten years in development and then spreading south. Very sad situation to derail downtown development in the midst of the Covid-19 crisis."

Verbal recordings from the Advisory Group meetings describe business families and employees needing to do daily clean up of feces and drug needles from store entrances. These are not things that store owners or their employees should face on a daily basis.

And lastly this which was sent to us by one of our tenants last week, ***"We are increasingly concerned about the location being so near the drop in center. This is a very serious issue for downtown. This is our 2nd broken window in a short amount of time and we found a used hypodermic needle on our windowsill the other evening."***

We want to acknowledge the hard working staff at Base Camp. They are good folks doing a tough job, and they have tried to be helpful to their neighbors. However, up to this point there has not been enough staff available to fulfill the assurances about having people on the streets and sidewalks of the neighborhood to discourage, intervene, or mitigate problem behaviors as was promised by the City and LMM. We

were recently told that if a problem happens, people should contact you and hopefully there would be a response "by the end of the day". I hope you can understand why that timeline is not comforting or reassuring.

We got to know Loran, the former liaison, as being a very good person; sincere, concerned, and deserving of our respect. However, he was having to fulfill multiple full-time jobs, and was usually working out of his office in Old Town far from Base Camp. Our sincere hope is that your presence as the first full-time liaison can alter the challenges heaped on the surrounding neighborhood in a way that will once again give people hope, before they abandon their dreams and the neighborhood. We have approached both the City and LMM to give these people some long-term hope by backing up with solid assurances their statements that Base Camp is not intending to remain at its current location beyond the end of the current lease. So far neither the City nor LMM has been willing to provide people with any written assurances that would help them to hold onto their hopes for the future.

You should know that 'Letters of Intent' to lease spaces in the neighborhood were withdrawn the moment that Base Camp was finally made public. A few businesses have already shared that their plans of staying in the neighborhood are now in question. If a few businesses give up and abandon their dreams to the drug use, property destruction, and anti-social behavior that they are witnessing, it will begin a cascade that will leave a neighborhood of vacant storefronts, broken windows, and a center for criminal and anti-social behavior much greater than what the neighborhood fought its way out of 20 years ago. We feel that the term 'businesses' can often dehumanize what is really at stake, which in reality is families, and their employees families. If these businesses are forced to close down, the result will be real families forced into unemployment, and potentially joining the roles of the homeless. Never let someone contrast the needs of small businesses with the needs of people; they are one and the same.

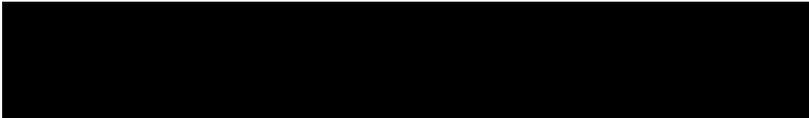
We are sorry to heap all of this onto you as you are just settling in, but hopefully we have given some perspective on the neighborhood, what it had to overcome in the past, and what they fear will be too much for too long to overcome this time around. We are currently only three months into a three/four year situation, and already the dikes are crumbling. A few laudable efforts have been made to address issues like car-camping, and public restrooms; but so far most of the security efforts have been to protect the guests of Base Camp. What is needed is boots-on-the-ground staff and counselors to intervene and deal with anti-social behaviors that radiate out from Base Camp to the surrounding neighborhood. Local employees were offered crisis intervention training, but this cannot, and should not, be added to the burden of business families already struggling to survive Covid. This role should be fulfilled by staff or volunteers organized by LMM. Hopefully you will be able to take on this role.

You have probably heard that as one of his last acts, Loran decided to postpone the next Advisory Group meeting, which have previously been held every two weeks, and push it back to three weeks for the first time. Perhaps a great way for you to hit the ground running would be to contact the Advisory Group and ask that they have a chance to meet you on the previous two week schedule. These are all great people; level headed and willing to listen to both sides of a problem. They have all stated that

they want to support the worthy purpose of Base Camp, but they are feeling overwhelmed by the problems radiating out from it. They can be a great team for you to work with.

We pray for your success in finding the necessary wisdom, insight, and tools to turn the current situation around and help this neighborhood of hardworking families that is already struggling under Covid, to find the help and hope that they need to get through this trying time.

Very sincerely,



--

Ben Zobrist
Downtown Bellingham Liaison
Lighthouse Mission Ministries
360-483-9561

Healing Homelessness with Christ's Power and Love.

On Thu, Nov 5, 2020 at 11:30 AM



Dear Ben,

Thank you for your kind and thoughtful reply. We were excited to hear the positive tone of your email, and equally excited to have a full-time community liaison now stationed at Base Camp.

In the spirit of sharing ideas, we would like to suggest some of the key actions that we hope you might consider and pursue for everyone's benefit.

We will break these suggestions into two categories; 'Proactive' interventions to avoid problems, and 'reactive' efforts to deal with problems after they happen in a way that mitigates the impacts and provides opportunities.

One of the most common complaints we have heard is that well-meaning actions by Base Camp staff have been mostly reactive instead of proactive. Staff will sometimes briefly emerge from Base Camp to react to a call, but we have not seen evidence of

people regularly out on the street attempting to affect behaviors preemptively as was promised when Base Camp was first presented to the public. Enacting more proactive measures and programs would do wonders for the health and spirit of the community.

Here are some proactive ideas that we think should be pursued:

1. We ask that you put together a schedule with LMM staff, outside organizations, and volunteers that would provide boots on the sidewalks of the area within two blocks of Base Camp for a set period every day, say from 8:00 AM to 7:00 PM. The role of these good people will be to keep an eye out for anti-social behaviors, and provide intervention and counseling to change or discourage anti-social behaviors early-on, or even before, they take place. LMM is doing an outstanding job of this within their property, but the surrounding neighborhood where problems are spreading is left on its own which is not what was promised.

The reason that LMM has offered for this disconnect is that their staff does not have off-site authority. However, we are not envisioning the application of authority, but rather the use of sympathetic conversation, and encouragement of basic social behaviors.

Business employees are not able to leave their duties for the lengths of time required to successfully pursue this approach, so LMM needs to take responsibility to engage people who have been drawn to Base Camp and are active beyond the boundaries of their property. These proactive promises are something that people are still hoping to see fulfilled.

Once this program is set up, we ask that you publish a weekly schedule of how many staff or volunteers are out on the streets at any given time so that people in the area will have an increased sense of security and confidence that proactive measures are in place.

2. A big concern has been for the safety and security of female employees leaving work as it starts getting dark earlier. These female workers, as well as their employers, have expressed a deep level of fear as it starts being dark when they walk to their vehicles to head home. There have been discussions about having people available to walk these female employees to their cars, but to my knowledge nothing has been formally set up yet. If the above program for scheduling on street presence is pursued, these same people would be available to escort female employees without the need for additional staffing. Please set up a system, that accommodates when businesses close, for people to be available to escort female employees safely to their vehicles. It must be acknowledged that the new presence of Base Camp has made the area much less safe for these female workers, especially after dark, so this dangerous problem needs to be addressed before something very serious happens. If no proactive steps are taken, LMM and Base Camp will have to take full responsibility for any attacks that happen in the surrounding area. Let's avoid that ever happening.

To the, hopefully limited, extent that these 'proactive' efforts do not prevent all of the issues that we are currently seeing, there needs to additionally be some structured 'reactive' plans in place.

Here are a few reactive plans that we ask you to set up and bring into effect:

1. If a child from our household when next door to your home and defecated on your front porch, I think that every reasonable person would agree that we need to come right over and clean it up before you have to. Base Camp needs to have people available to respond to defecation calls and clean things up before neighboring businesses have to deal with it, as they currently do. Hopefully enacting the proactive suggestions above will minimize the need for Base Camp to be reactive with this, but a quick response program needs to be in place.
2. If a person from our household left used drug needles on your back porch, I think that everyone would agree that you should not have to be exposed to the dangers of handling used needles. Base Camp needs to have medical plastic containers that are designed to receive used needles. A business should be able to call in to Base Camp and have someone promptly show up with one of these safe containers to remove used needles. If business employees simply throw used needles into the trash, there is an ongoing danger of someone down the line being punctured and exposed to hepatitis, HIV, etc. Once again, sufficient proactive measures may reduce this need significantly.
3. One of the current problems that business families and their employees are facing involves people walking into business restrooms, locking the door for an hour or so, and then leaving a completely trashed restroom that employees must leave their duties to clean-up and repair. If someone from our household went into your home and trashed your bathroom, everyone would expect us to go in and clean up the mess. Surrounding businesses need to have a program in place for them to call and have someone come right over and clean-up the damage so that the restroom can go back into service.

The above three items involve basic decency responsibilities that need to be recognized and cured.

Since we realize that staffing for these reactive measures presents a challenge, we now suggest this 'win-win' solution.

For many people who find themselves in the situation of the guests of Base Camp, part of the problem is a lack of purpose and a lack of being able to contribute. Being totally dependent on others without being able to feel helpful or productive is a very unhealthy mental trap. During a very short experience I once had of observing a drug treatment center, one of the most effective tools was providing a person in trouble with the opportunity to help someone else. The resulting sense of responsibility and self-worth that created often resulted in positive life changes.

We are hopeful that LMM may be able to find people to help with the three items in our reactive plan by encouraging the guests of Base Camp to take on a positive role in the community by showing that they are part of the solution rather than part of the problem. These efforts by some of the guests of Base Camp could play a large role in changing perceptions and actions. Having guests of Base Camp chip in to mitigate negative impacts on the neighboring businesses can change mutual perceptions, and needing to clean up the problems left by others drawn to Base Camp may encourage Base Camp guests to take on an increased level of responsibility to discourage these

activities in others; a win-win situation that could very positively fulfill your role as liaison between Base Camp, those drawn to Base Camp, and the surrounding community.

Thank you for considering these ways that LMM and Base Camp can help to relieve some of the distressing burdens that have been placed on the shoulders of business families and their employees through no fault of their own, and thereby greatly improve the relationships between everyone involved.

Sincerely,



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Hans Erchinger-Davis
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Healing Homelessness with Christ's Power and Love.