

# Homelessness and State Highway Right of Way

## **Panel Discussion**

March 14, 2023

Washington State Transportation Commission Meeting

# Introduction

**Mike Gribner PE**, *WSDOT Assistant Secretary – Regions/Chief Engineer*

**Andrea Fortune**, *WSDOT HQ Maintenance Policy Manager*

**Tedd Kelleher**, *Dept of Commerce Housing Policy Director*

**Colin DeForrest**, *WSDOT/Gateway Homeless Response Manager*

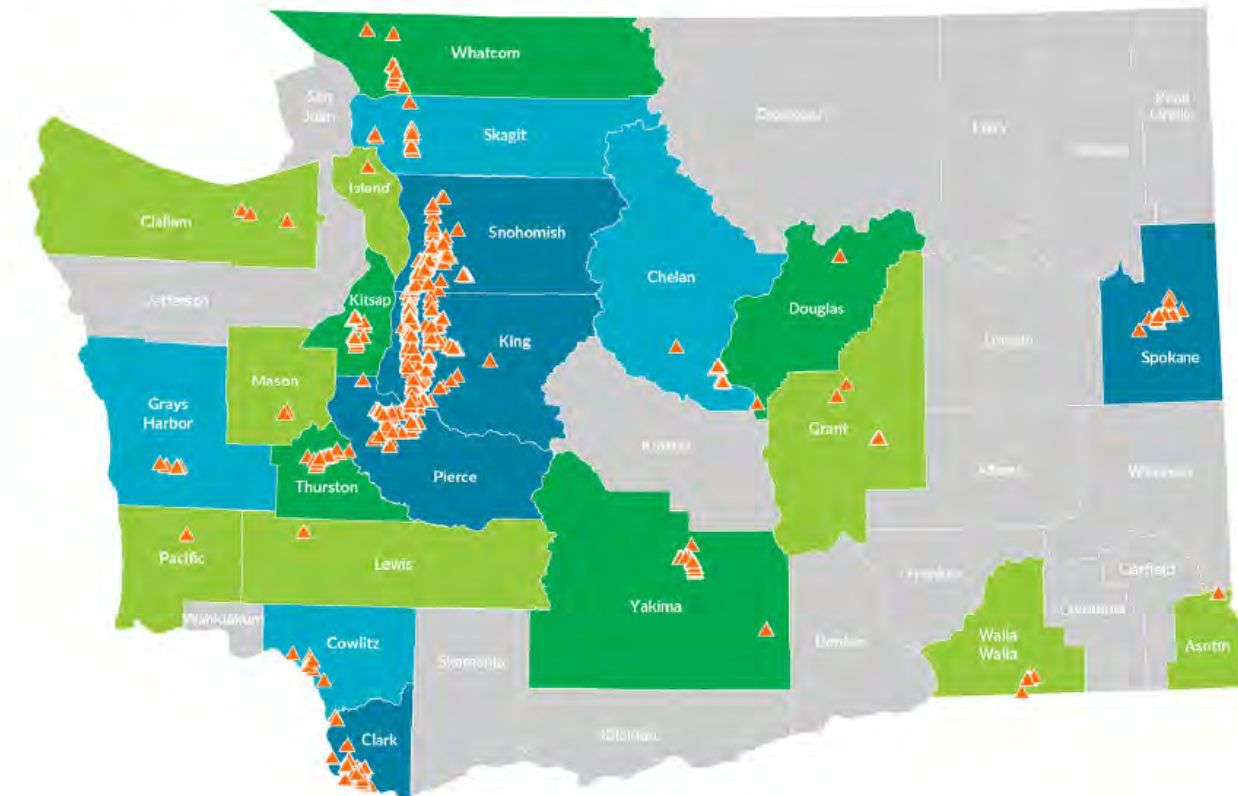
**Colin Maloney**, *DOH Community Health Strategies for Homeless Manager*

## Statewide Perspective

- Not just an I-5 Corridor or Central Puget Sound Issue...Truly Statewide
- WSDOT Maintenance Data Collected:
  - Data points represent evidence of a site...2,121 sites statewide
  - Additional data regarding site size, number of individuals or hazards present not collected

### Reported Encampments in WSDOT Rights of Way

2,121 encampments documented statewide as of Sept. 2022.



**Top 5 counties with the most encampment sites as of September 2022:**

1. King – 922 sites
2. Snohomish – 281 sites
3. Pierce – 215 sites
4. Clark – 205 sites
5. Spokane – 112 sites

Count of Homeless Encampments



0



1-10



11-30



31-100



More than 100



Homeless Encampments

\* Data reflects encampment sites documented on WSDOT right of way from 2015 to September 2022.



## Work Affected By Encampments

- Bridges
- Signal and Electrical Systems
- Drainage and Culverts
- Incident Response and Emergencies







# Safety is top priority

## Safety of our Employees

- Hazardous Materials
- Hypodermic Needles & Drugs

## Safety of those experiencing homelessness

- The right of way is not a safe place to live
- High-Speed Traffic
- Highways not designed for pedestrian foot traffic, attempts to cross traffic

## Safety of the traveling public

- Fires under or near structures
- Debris or pedestrians in the roadway
- Drivers distracted by activities or sites on the rights of way

# Financial impacts

- Statewide Homeless Encampment Cleanup annual costs grew from \$200,000 in 2008 to \$2.8 million in 2022
- Legislative Budget Appropriations in 2021-23 totaling over \$12 million
- Due to COVID-19 restrictions, WSDOT has not actively engaged in extensive cleanup efforts. As such 2020 and 2021 expenditures were lagging

Statewide Homeless Cleanup Expenditures







## Encampment Cleanup Efforts

- High Degree of Coordination Needed
- High Costs
- Challenging Work

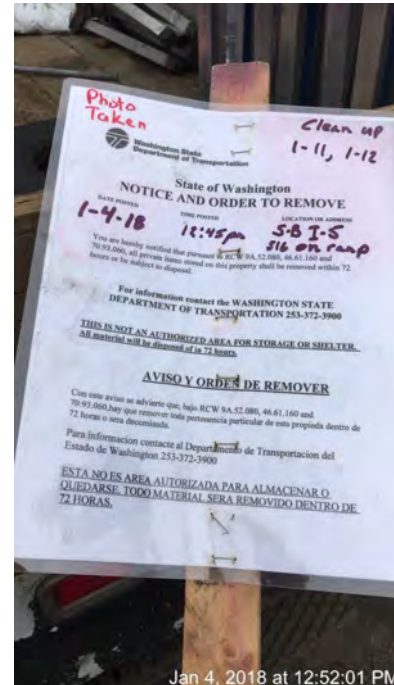






## WSDOTs Policies and Priorities

- **People First:** The Safety of both our employees and unsheltered individuals experiencing homelessness is our top priority!
- **A Coordinated Approach:**
  - Local Agency Engagement and Participation
  - Social Services – Health Care, Housing, Food and Clothing
  - Security – Provided by Law Enforcement
- **A Compassionate Response:**
  - 72-hour Posted Notice
  - Up to 70 Days Storage of Personal Belongings



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# Resources

- Four separate legislative provisos totaling over \$12 million to address the risks to public safety and health associated with homeless encampments
- Semi-annual report to the House and Senate Transportation Committees
- Ability to contract cleanup work through DES master contract
- Department of Commerce primary source for programs and services to address homelessness across the state, including \$45 million in Legislative intent to greatly expand options and action to reduce homelessness



# Right of Way Safety Initiative

Department of Commerce partnering with WSDOT, WSP and Local Jurisdictions

Commerce funding allows for new approaches, including outreach, rapid re-housing and long-term housing

## Goals:

- Transition people into shelter and housing solutions
- Offer people something that is substantially better than what they are currently experiencing by living on the right of way
- Discover and make transparent the barriers for people experiencing homelessness



# Right of Way Safety Initiative – Proviso Language

...transition persons residing on state-owned rights-of-way to safer housing opportunities, with an emphasis on permanent housing...

department must prioritize applicants that focus on permanent housing...

Grant recipients...may not transition individuals from public rights-of-way unless they in good faith offer individuals a housing option that is safer than their current living situation...

provide options that are well matched to an individual's assessed needs...



# Right of Way Safety Initiative – Funding

	Flexible Proviso	Rapid Capital	Home Security	TOTAL
King	\$16,620,344	\$19,000,000	\$13,594,206	\$49,214,550
Spokane	\$8,607,817	\$6,500,000	\$10,322,000	\$25,429,817
Pierce	\$9,715,588	\$19,668,070	\$5,517,007	\$34,900,665
Thurston	\$5,803,333	\$14,831,930	\$7,168,070	\$27,803,333
Snohomish	\$4,000,000	Reallocated	\$1,800,000	\$5,800,000
TOTAL	\$44,747,082	\$60,000,000	\$38,401,283	\$143,148,365

# Right of Way Safety Initiative – Beds

TOTAL Projected Beds SFY 2023	
King	145
Spokane	200
Pierce	260
Thurston	184
Snohomish	138
TOTAL	927

# Right of Way Safety Initiative – Status by Site

Site	County		# of Residents as of by-name deadline	Accepted Housing	Still in Housing
520	King	Closed	5	5	5
Olive Way	King	Closed	10	10	10
Dearborn	King	Closed	64	57	57
Northgate	King	Closed	27	24	2
Pasadena (I-5/north Ship Canal)	King	Active	TBD	TBD	TBD
Chinatown-International District *	King	Active	289	89	TBD
McDougall Ave.	Snohomish	Closed	11	10	9
112th	Snohomish	Closed	8	8	8
Smokey Point Rest Area	Snohomish	Active	TBD	2	2
Lilly	Thurston	Closed	3	1	0
Pacific	Thurston	Active	16	4	1
City Center	Thurston	Active	36	11	7
Wheeler	Thurston	Active	TBD	14	10
Sleater Kinney	Thurston	Active	TBD	2	2
Camp Hope	Spokane	Active	467	90	90
84th & Hosmer	Pierce	Active	67	33	28
Bay Street	Pierce	Active	19	16	16
Total		17	1,022	376	269



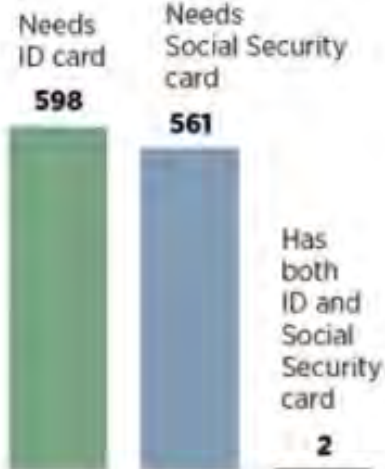
# People Centered Approach

## CAMP HOPE ASSESSMENT

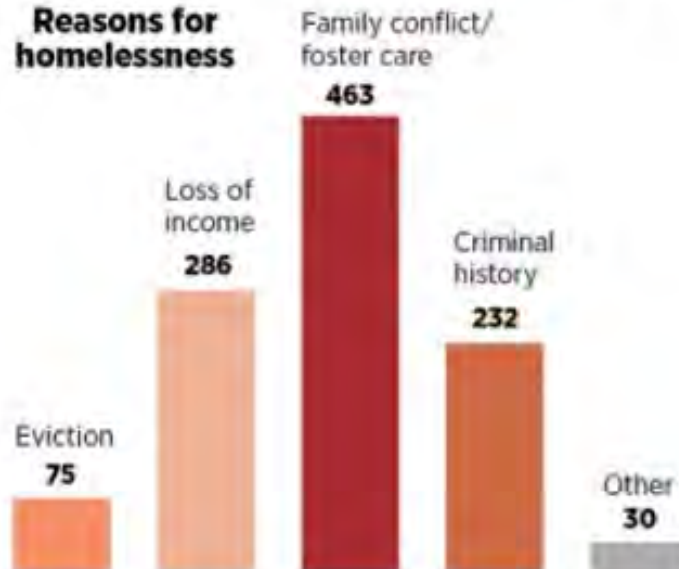
Jewels Helping Hands conducted a survey on July 5-6 that asked the following questions of residents of Camp Hope.

**601 residents responded to the survey**

### Core documentation



### Reasons for homelessness



### Of the 601 residents surveyed:

Would go to shelter depending on operator

51



Has phone for contacts

285



Would use pallet shelter or tiny home

601



Needs laundry help

514



Wants permanent housing

279



Has a case worker

43



Wants transitional housing

301



Had previous interventions with a homeless support agency

534



Does not know

21



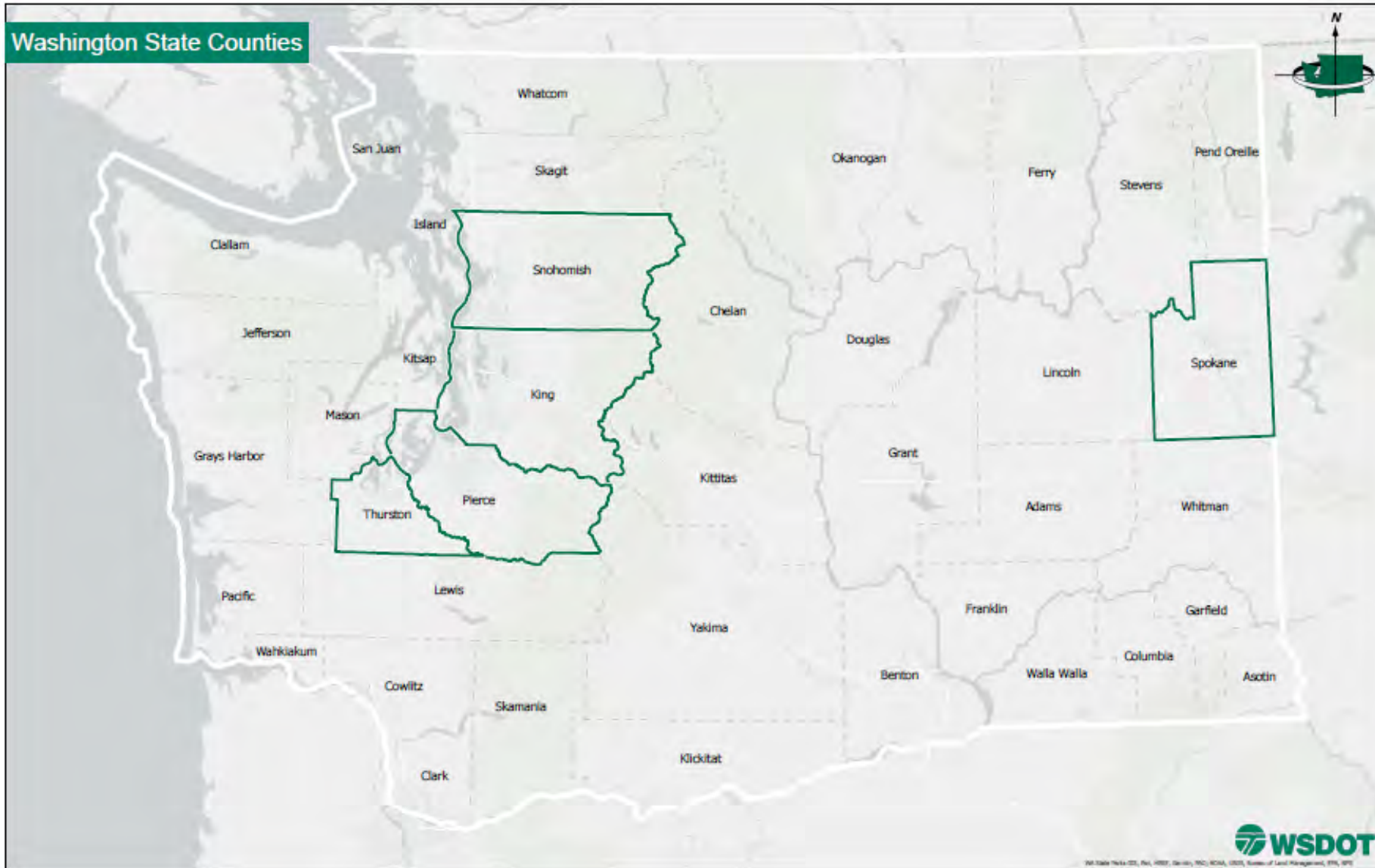
Source: Jewels Helping Hands

MOLLY QUINN/THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

# Process of moving forward



# Where do we start?



Focusing on five counties with the goal of moving statewide.

- **King**
- **Pierce**
- **Snohomish**
- **Spokane**
- **Thurston**



# King County: I-5 at Olive Way

## All people transitioned from site

- 6 people offered shelter or housing
- 5 people accepted shelter or housing
- 1 person left location prior to cleanup

## WSDOT crews performed traffic control, clean-up and fencing

- Six truckloads of material removed (including 20 propane tanks- some still full)
- Crews placed 300 feet of temporary fencing around the perimeter of the area

Before



During cleanup



After cleanup and fencing





# King County: SR 520 at Portage Bay Bridge

## All people transitioned from site

- 10 people offered shelter or housing
- 10 people accepted shelter or housing

## WSDOT cleaned and modified site

- Work required 8-10 staff per day
- 56,000 pounds of trash and debris removed
- 101 propane tanks removed for recycling
- Painted over the graffiti on columns
- Installed fencing

## Next steps

- Turn site over to Walsh Construction for laydown yard
- Install tight mesh steel fence to prohibit access by climbing nearby tree over retaining wall

Before cleaning



After cleaning





# Spokane: Camp Hope Progress





# Thurston County: I-5 Pacific Way

## Divided site into sections

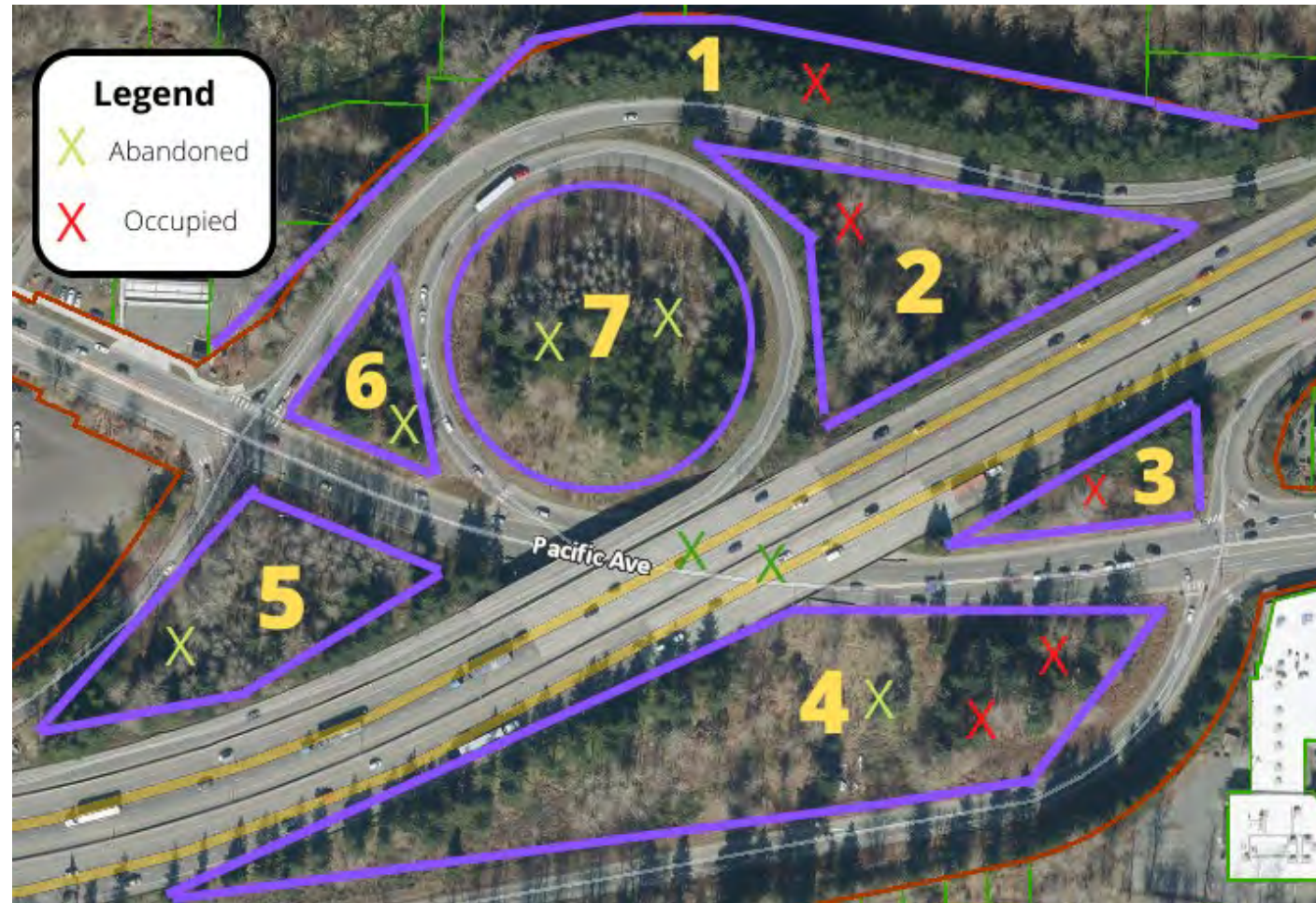
- Identified as abandoned or occupied

## Incremental approach as beds are available:

- No trespass signs posted
- No new people allowed to inhabit while site clearing prep continues (List made by outreach groups; WSP to visit site as needed)

## Outreach continues throughout the site

- 3.97 tons of debris and trash cleaned from sections 4 & 5
- 680 pounds of trash removed from sections 6 & 7

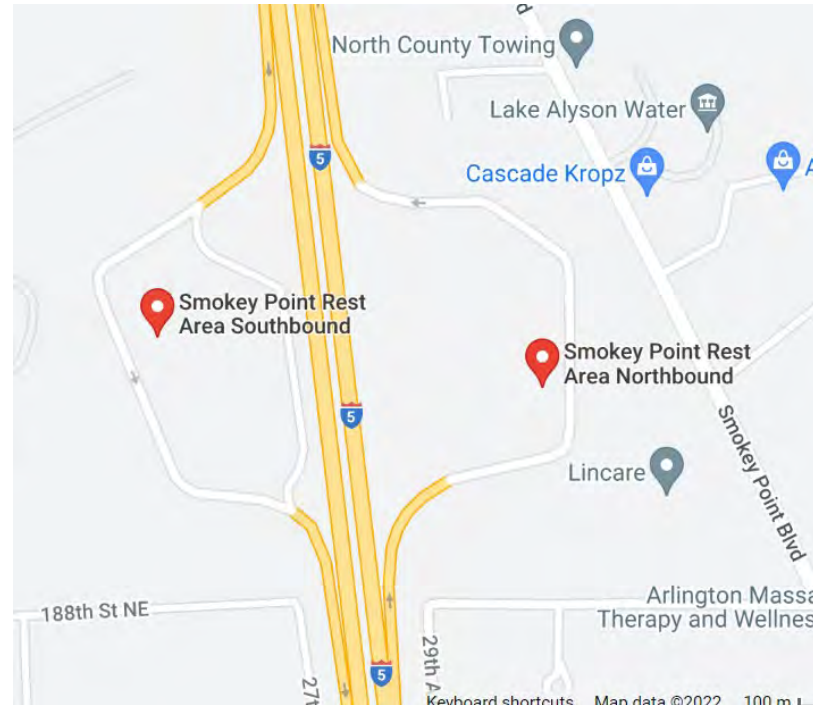


# Snohomish County: Smokey Point Rest Areas

## Closed for site cleaning

## Changes when reopened:

- RV parking remained closed, but RV dump site is open
- New re-worded parking limit signs installed
- Increased WSP patrols
- Numbering and stenciling parking stalls to assist with enforcement
- Flier with resources being shared with people needing assistance







# COMMUNITY HEALTH STRATEGIES FOR HOMELESSNESS

Environmental Public Health Division

# Program History & Goals

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## **New area of work for Department of Health**

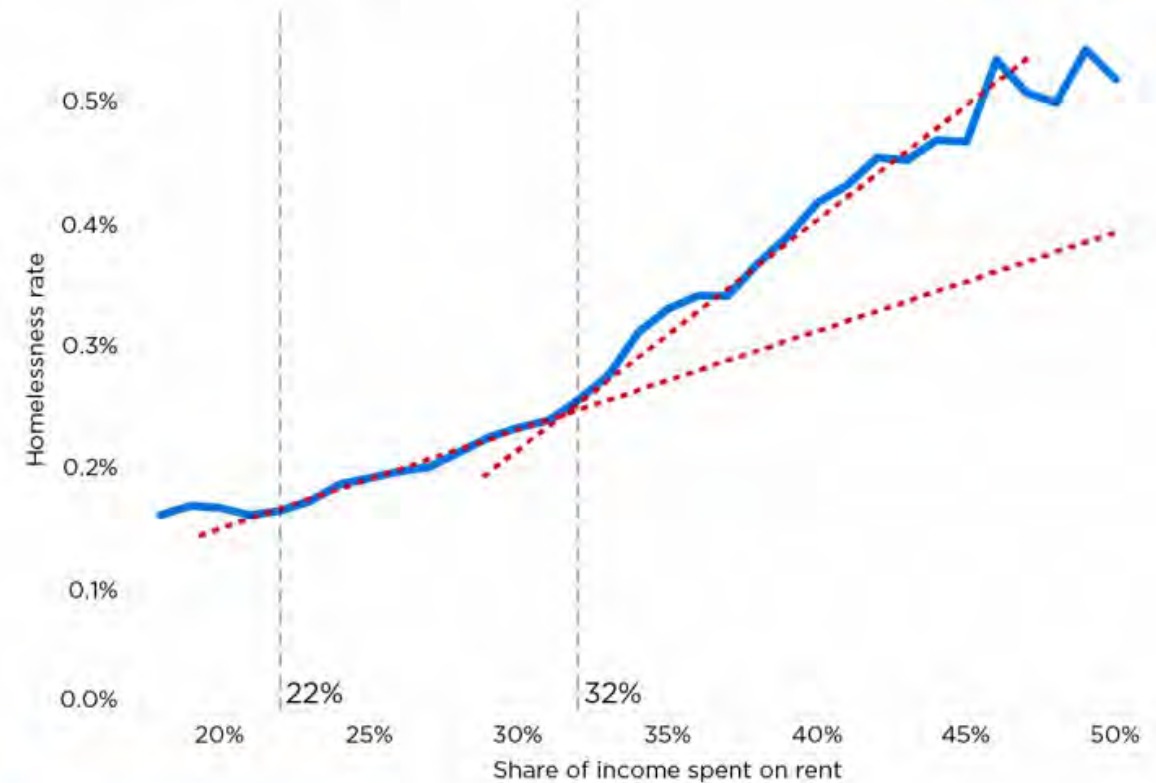
- Strategic planning for DOH around housing and homelessness
- Reports to EPH's Equity & Social Justice Manager
- Working closely with EPH's Climate & Health team
- Develop and model programs through Foundational Public Health Services
- Collaboration with local health jurisdictions to assess needs



# Homelessness is a Housing Problem

## Homelessness climbs faster when rent affordability reaches 22% and 32% thresholds

An uptick in rent affordability beyond 22 percent translates into more people experiencing homelessness. Beyond 32 percent means a faster-rising rate of homelessness — which could mean a homelessness crisis, unless there are mitigating factors within a community.



**Zillow Economic Research** | Source: An analysis by Zillow Research Fellow Chris Glynn of the University of New Hampshire, Thomas Byrne of Boston University and Dennis Culhane of the University of Pennsylvania.

# Homelessness & Health Equity

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## Homelessness in Washington

- 2022 Point in Time Count identified *25,000 people* as homeless in Washington.<sup>1</sup>
- In Washington, Black, Hispanic, and Native Americans are *more than twice as likely* to live in poverty.<sup>2</sup>
- Black Washingtonians are homeless at *five times the rate* as White residents and Native Americans are *more than ten times* more likely to be homeless.<sup>3</sup>
- LGBTQ+ youth are *more than twice* as likely to experience homelessness.<sup>4</sup>
- Life expectancy for people experiencing homelessness can be *up to 20-30 years shorter* than people who are housed.<sup>5</sup>

# Identified Areas of Need

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## **Address Health Issues Associated with Homelessness**

- Establish health and safety standards for shelter settings
- Provide guidance for supporting health in managed encampments
- Reduce impacts from vehicles used as residences
- Support development of extreme weather responses
- Expand access to core document (birth certificates, IDs)
- Safe disposal of biohazardous waste
- Address aging onsite sewage systems to prevent loss of homes

# On-Site Health & Safety Promotion

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## Managing Conditions and Building Relationships

- Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) needs
  - Drinking water, hand-washing, bathrooms
- Personal Safety
  - Higher quality tents, raised platforms
  - Planned layouts with fire/access lanes
- Clinical care outreach
  - Preventive care
  - Sexual health needs
- Overdose prevention and intervention
  - Access to naloxone and supportive services



# DOH Resources

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## **Currently Available**

- COVID-19 and Flu vaccinations through Care-a-Van program
- Access to birth certificates through Vital Records office
- Sexual health partner notification
- Outreach for naloxone distribution

## **Potential Future State**

- Guidance for managing sites
- Hazardous waste disposal support
- Collaboration with DSHS for benefit enrollment
- Further collaboration with DOL for ID support

# Questions?

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