

Media Advisory – June 11, 2008

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Finalized homeless numbers increase slightly

Updated numbers show Snohomish County's Point in Time homeless count in January are slightly higher than initially reported.

County staff surveyed outdoor camp sites, shelters and the Snohomish County Jail on Jan. 24 as part of the annual Point in Time count required by the U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development.

New numbers suggest 2,154 individuals were homeless that night, a difference of 335 people. Initial reports in January counted 1,819 people reporting homelessness. In 2007, nearly 2,700 people were considered homeless in Snohomish County.

The updated numbers account for improved gathering of homeless figures from area shelters and in the field, say county officials. Not all information could be gathered during the night of the actual count.

Despite a higher number, the 2008 homeless count shows a drop over 2007 and 2006 numbers. In 2006, there were 2,626 people counted as homeless.

Still, county officials have said they're reluctant to declare homelessness in decline following three previous years of successive gains. The temperatures Jan. 24 were frigid, making it difficult for more than 180 counters to gather an accurate count.

Under the latest figures, 956 people had no shelter during the PIT count, while 1,198 people were sheltered in emergency and transitional housing or were using hotel vouchers for the night.

The Point in Time count helps Snohomish County create policy and programs to assist those who are homeless. County Executive Aaron Reardon has made affordable housing one of his top agenda items, tackling affordable housing and homelessness together.

"This information provides a base from which to determine trends in the county's homelessness issue and how best to tackle those problems," Reardon said. "We're looking for innovative ways to make homeownership affordable and reduce the number of homeless."

In January, Reardon convened the county's Housing & Homelessness Policy Oversight Committee, which is considering how best to establish benchmarks for homeless and housing initiatives as well as guide long-term strategies.

Initial homeless counts from January already have been discussed by the committee, but more is likely to occur.

In 2006, the county approved the “Everyone At Home Now” report, a strategy for ending homelessness here by 2016. The plan calls for the expansion of homeless housing coupled with support services and for the development of programs geared toward specific groups.

Earlier this month, the Housing Consortium of Everett and Snohomish County released its latest affordable-housing report, which calls for the construction of 18,000 new units during the next 10 years.

The executive’s policy committee will be reviewing proposals in the plan for reaching that goal.

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