



Skagit County Board of Commissioners

Ron Wesen, First District

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MEMO

To: Skagit County Planning Commission

From: Monica Negrila, Commissioners' Office

Date: January 14, 2025

RE: North Star Overview

GOAL:

The purpose of this presentation is to provide an overview of the North Star Collaborative with focus on North Star's efforts in addressing housing affordability.

AGENDA:

- NorthStar - Overview & Background
- Structure, priority population
- Vision
- Strategic Pillars
- Accomplishments
- Housing Task Force
- Future Workplan
- Questions & Answers

NORTH STAR – OVERVIEW & BACKGROUND

In July 2022, Skagit County Commissioners and city Mayors established North Star – a collective, solutions-driven approach to tackle challenging issues that impact all of us throughout Skagit County.

The driving force behind North Star is two- fold:

1. **The housing and behavioral health systems are in crisis.** People we care about are suffering, and they are not getting the care or housing to help them thrive. Service providers and first responders are stretched thin and limited in their capacity to provide help due to lack of services.

2. **North Star allows us to do something together that the State and county can't do alone.** Like many communities across our nation, addressing homelessness has been challenging and complex. Significant public resources are used for our very most vulnerable, with significant impact to taxpayers with poor outcomes. North Star provides an opportunity to leverage limited resources and enables us to move from managing our most pressing community problems to solving them.

STRUCTURE & PRIORITY POPULATION

North Star is led by a Leadership Team currently composed of four City Mayors and three Skagit County Commissioners. Multi-sector advisory group of community leaders, and taskforces with technical experts are working together to identify and implement solutions across county in areas of behavioral health, co-response, and affordable housing. City councils have representative on the Advisory Group.

VISION – All Skagit Thriving:

- No one in our communities as to live in their car or on the street.
- Everyone can get the services they need when they need them.
- Our key partners know what North Star is and want to be a part of it.

STRATEGIC PILLARS

To help keep us accountable to deliver on our vision, we've prioritized three strategic pillars to anchor our work. These include:

- Securing the necessary, sustainable resources and community support to build a resilient infrastructure that empowers us to be successful.
- Creating an effective, coordinated community-based system of care.
- And ensuring communities throughout Skagit County have access to more supply and diversity of housing options.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The following are some of the highlights of the collaborative to date:

- Created Leadership Team, Advisory Group, Council Convenings. Advisory Group has City Council representatives.
- Implemented 3 Task Force Groups: Housing, Recovery and Co-Response.
- Selected Vital Conditions for Framework.
- Hired staff dedicated to this initiative.
- Secured over \$40. mil in new funding.

- Broke Grounds on the Skagit STAR Center.
- Revamped the Coordinated Entry system.
- Implemented Julota, a care coordination software to allow for collaboration and coordination among jurisdictions.
- Proposed Aligned Housing/Development Policies.
- Secured funds for temporary shelter and permanent supportive housing.
- Created funding criteria for workforce housing using county allocated funds.

HOUSING TASK FORCE

The Housing Task Force has been actively working on implementing the Husing vision of creating safe, stable housing for everyone:

- 2033 Goal: Communities throughout Skagit County benefit from access to more supply and a diversity of housing sizes, types, and styles.
- Rental vacancy rates are 5%, and residents at all income levels enjoy greater choice.
- Skagit’s agricultural land, natural areas, and open spaces are preserved and at least 80% of new construction is within cities and urban growth areas, consistent with Countywide Planning Policies.

North Star’s recent Housing Call to Action:

- Allow mixed-use development outright in commercially zoned, transit-served corridors. Relax or eliminate density limits in such areas.
- Adopt "By Right" permitting in residential zones by eliminating discretionary review processes for submitted projects that meet zoning code.
- Reduce parking requirements for affordable housing projects and housing located in transit accessible areas.
- Reduce fees for affordable housing, especially for smaller housing types and centrally located housing with good access to transit, services, and employment.

FUTURE WORKPLAN

- Explore additional funding resources, enhance existing mechanisms for input and decision-making process, strengthen collaboration among cities and the county, and expand the North Star network.
- Expand behavioral health and recovery services.
- Continue to make and influence regulatory changes across jurisdictions to promote faster housing production and help increase the supply and diversity of housing.

For additional information, please feel free to contact us at info@northstarskagit.org, or www.northstarskagit.org.