

Winter 2016

Community In Action

A newsletter for friends of the Opportunity Council



Island County Responds to Housing Needs, Seeks Recommendations from Task Force

With housing needs escalating, the City of Oak Harbor and Island County have started a Housing Affordability Task Force.

Spearheaded by Oak Harbor Mayor Bob Severns and Island County Commissioner Jill Johnson, the focus of this task force is to stimulate the creation of affordable workforce housing. The group will be tasked with making specific recommendations to the elected officials in a six-month time frame.

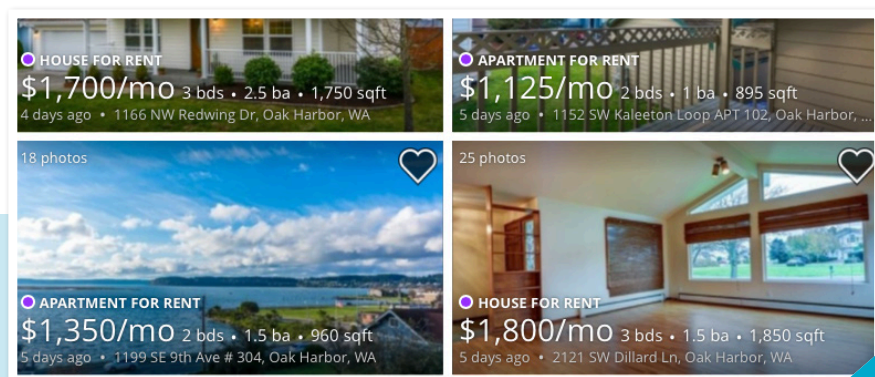
Greg Winter, Opportunity Council Executive Director, was selected to join this group and will be part of the work group focused on financing and funding.

"I'm very pleased that Mayor Severns and Commissioner Johnson set just the right tone at the first task force meeting. This is a very solutions-oriented group," Winter said.

Island County Human Service Housing Resource Center Staff selected members to include representatives from the construction industry, zoning and land use, financing and investment, policy development and community advocacy.

For the next six months members will gather information that will ultimately be presented to both local government with implementable recommendations to improve access to housing and housing affordability. While the initial work of the group will focus on the Oak Harbor area, the work will also feed into the County's affordable housing element scheduled for updates in 2017.

The first meeting was held on November 18th and the plan is to meet with enough regularity to maintain focus and progress. The Task Force is scheduled to complete its work by the end of spring 2017.



Recent apartment searches in Island County show no two-bedroom units available under \$1,100.

Home Upgrades Improve Health

The Weatherization Plus Health (Wx+Health) program is picking up steam.

Also known as the Healthy Homes Program, this program helps clients improve their home's indoor air quality and reduce asthma triggers, while also improving home comfort, durability, and energy efficiency.

We're able to serve clients of any age (not only children) with diagnosed respiratory illnesses such as asthma and COPD.

Since last summer, home educators completed over 40 initial home visits. These visits include a client interview, home assessment, education and tools tailored to the needs of each client. Of those, 20 qualified for the enhanced program because of severe respiratory health issues requiring frequent hospitalizations and doctor visits.

The home improvement work has now completed the
Continued on page 3

Message from the Director

With Your Help... We Can Stay On Course

Greg Winter, Executive Director

This year is ending with momentous political change and unsettling visions of an uncertain future. Due to months of ugly rhetoric during the election season, many of our staff and the families they serve fear they will face increased discrimination and decreased opportunities.

I want to assure the people we serve, the people we employ, and people like you – our loyal supporters – that Opportunity Council will continue to welcome and support all families and individuals who need our assistance. All of the people we serve enrich our experience as we learn about the promise they hold for the future of our communities.

Regardless of the momentous politics of today, the fact remains that at this moment in time, hundreds of people in Island, San Juan and Whatcom County are without shelter, many children lack access to high quality preschool, and far too many parents lack the resources to save for the future.

With support from people like you and our partner organizations, we will continue to serve people who have needed our help.

Over the past 51 years, through many changes of national leadership, in times of war and peace, through periods of economic growth and recession,

Opportunity Council has grown and adapted to meet emerging needs. Our mission to help people improve the quality of their lives has never been more relevant, and we have never needed our supporters more than right now, at this moment of change.

With your help, regardless of politics, we can stay on course to address vital needs in our three-county service area: building a much-needed food bank and youth recreation center in East Whatcom County, developing 40 units of homeless supportive

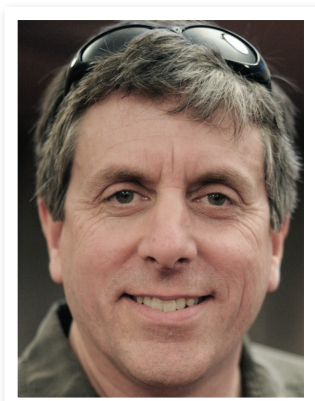
housing in Bellingham, helping seniors live independently by repairing and weatherizing their homes in Island and San Juan counties, assisting hundreds of child care centers and licensed

homes to provide high quality environments to help children thrive.

As the story of Opportunity Council's next 50 years unfolds, we will continue to fight for inclusion and systems changes that increase opportunities and values the dignity of everyone in our communities. We look forward to your continued support on this journey.

NOTE: Opportunity Council staff also recently shared comments and suggestions for how we will work to continue to welcome and support everyone in our community. See page 4.

With support from people like you and our partner organizations, we will continue to serve people who have needed our help.



Greg Winter



Greg Winter joined Congresswoman Suzan DelBene (WA-01) in October when she visited the Opportunity Council's Building Performance Center in Bellingham. (l-r) Kyle White, Weatherization & Home Repair Manager; Ross Quigley, Community Energy Challenge Manager; Rep DelBene; Greg Winter; Jim Harmon BPC Coordinator

Kitchen Fundraiser is 10% from Goal

Many people know about our Maple Alley Inn program in Bellingham and our amazing volunteers who help serve healthy meals in a safe and welcoming environment to anyone who is hungry. In partnership with local faith communities, we serve breakfast on Tuesdays at St. Paul's Episcopal Church and lunch on Wednesday and Thursday at Faith Lutheran Church.

In addition to being a high-quality, nutritious meal program, Maple Alley Inn is a community of low-income families, homeless veterans, isolated seniors, and individuals in recovery who feel welcomed to dine together, share stories and offer companionship. Our guests also get access to services, referrals or classes on health and nutrition.

"Maple Alley is like my home kitchen," said one guest.

Why Upgrades Are Needed

What you may not know is that our meals feed 100 to 150 people at a time and are prepared in a kitchen that resembles your average home kitchen. Cooking weekly meals for large groups of people on residential appliances can be a challenge.

To improve kitchen efficiency and safety for both our staff and volunteers, we are working hard to raise funds to purchase some larger, commercial appliances.

And We're Almost There!

Thanks to a variety of grants and private donations we have nearly 90 percent of the funding needed for a \$70,000 kitchen improvement project.

You can help us continue to feed people in need and create a community that welcomes everyone. Consider a donation that will help raise the last 10 percent for this project. Visit the Opportunity Council site, www.opcco.org, for more information and a link to donate.



High-quality, fresh ingredients are an important part of meals at Maple Alley Inn thanks to donations and volunteers who support our garden at Faith Lutheran Church along with our garden manager Ed Wood.

Home Upgrades Improve Health

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first of these projects. With physical improvements such as upgrading a home's ventilation system, replacing old 1970s-era carpet with hard flooring, and fixing the gutters so they move water away from the home, the program is having a real impact on the health of the home's residents.

The goal for this program is to complete 50 projects in the coming year.

San Juan Workgroup Offers Housing Strategies

The San Juan County Housing Workgroup is close to completing their Strategic Action Plan. The group held their last meeting in November with a final document expected by early January 2017.

Mark Tompkins, director of San Juan Health and Community Services and Opportunity Council board member, spearheaded the workgroup that looked at addressing housing needs in the community.

"Accessible affordable housing is essential for the health of our community. The next step is to implement the actions as identified in the plan," Tompkins said.

The workgroup developed a list of strategies that include updating the Housing Needs Assessment and working to develop a public and private partnerships to build affordable housing.

How can a gift at the holidays make a difference...

Your gift helps provide housing, heat, food and other basic resources for people in need.

Send a contribution today to the Opportunity Council administrative offices at
P.O. Box 2134, Bellingham, Washington 98227

Or make a gift online
www.oppco.org/donation-information

Donating made easy!

Is your Fred Meyer card updated? Are you sure?

Last quarter we received over \$200 from our Fred Meyer shoppers who simply “linked” their Rewards Card to the Opportunity Council. But that amount could have been even more. After the summer re-enrollment period, Fred Meyer customers who did not re-link their card with a nonprofit on Community Rewards were dropped from the system on July 1.

Please make sure your Fred Meyer Rewards Card is linked to the Opportunity Council.

Just go to **fredmeyer.com** and click on Community Rewards near the bottom of the page and re-link your card. It costs you nothing, it is a painless way to make a donation and you keep all your reward points. It’s a win/win for everyone!

Do you shop Amazon?

Amazon will donate to the Opportunity Council every time you make Amazon purchases through smile.amazon.com and have selected the OC as the recipient organization.

“I just ordered something from Amazon and they suggested I go to **smile.amazon.com** to pick a charity and they will give OC 0.5%. I signed up, and it took me less than a minute,” Mike Parker, Whatcom Homeless Service Center director.

AmazonSmile is a simple and automatic way for you to support your favorite charitable organization every time you shop, at no cost to you. On your first visit to AmazonSmile (smile.amazon.com), you just select Opportunity Council to receive donations whenever you make an eligible purchases.



Thank you Windermere Real Estate and Windermere Foundation for providing Thanksgiving boxes for residents at Dorothy Place in Bellingham and winter coats for children in Oak Harbor.

On the heels of a divisive political season, staff shared how we can support everyone in our community.

We can strengthen our knowledge of what it means to be an ally and implement behavior that instills hope and shows our love and support for the people around us, no matter their political affiliation.

Kaitlyn Miller

OC Administration Department

I will try to maintain a positive attitude, talk with people on both sides and keep a level head. Our friends, family and neighbors need a voice right now and we can help by creating a positive, united front – while continuing to assist however we can.

Robyn Kauppila

OC Building Performance Center

We believe in the strength of this community and see it every day in the dedicated efforts to address the needs of our most vulnerable. Thank you for joining us in our work. We look forward to creating a better future with you.

Summer Starr

OC Volunteer and Event Coordinator

Volunteering To Make A Difference This Winter

The Volunteer Center of Whatcom County is gearing up for a busy winter season. The House 2 Home program kicked off the holiday season with its 12 Days of Deliveries. Between December 9th and 20th volunteers are delivering furniture to people who were homeless and have recently acquired housing.

House 2 Home helps ensure that children have beds to sleep in and families have a dinner table to share meals together. One beneficiary shared, "Thank you so much. My place is perfect now. Having my place and everything that makes it home allows me to get on with my sobriety. Without all of it, my chances would be small."

In January the Volunteer Center will be partnering with the Whatcom County Health Department to coordinate volunteers for the annual Point in Time count. This is an opportunity to collect critical information about the homeless population in Whatcom County. This data helps inform policy-making and funding allocations for homeless housing programs, creating a profound impact in our community.

The Volunteer Center will also be promoting two campaigns this winter: the annual MLK Day of volunteering, January 16th and Random Acts of Kindness week February 12th to 18th. These campaigns provide a connection point between community members and non-profit organizations that are looking for extra helping hands for a one-time project or who are looking at ways to develop long-term volunteer relationships.



There are many ways for community members to bring a little warmth to their winter by volunteering. For help recruiting volunteers for your project, or for more information about current volunteer opportunities, visit <http://www.whatcomvolunteer.org>

Since 1965, Community Action has been a vital part of life in the Pacific Northwest,

providing local solutions to local needs. For the past 50 years, your Community Action Agency, the Opportunity Council, has been "helping people, changing lives." Your contributions help us provide shelter, heat and care for people in our community today.

Name (s) _____ Mailing Address _____
 Email Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____
 Phone _____

Check: Enclosed is my tax-deductible gift for \$50 \$100 \$200 \$500 \$1,000 Other _____
 Please make checks payable to "The Opportunity Council"

Credit Card: \$50 \$100 \$200 \$500 \$1,000 Other _____

Card number _____ Exp. Date: ____/____ VISA MC

Signature _____

Friends of the Opportunity Council are appreciated and may be publicly recognized.
 Please check here if you prefer to remain anonymous.

Your contribution can be mailed to the Opportunity Council administrative offices at
 P.O. Box 2134
 Bellingham, Washington 98227

We Appreciate Your Support

- We salute our community's amazing donors, volunteers, corporations, small businesses, foundations and others who value and support our work in our community all year long.

Thank you to these major donors who have* recently supported this work:

Anonymous
 Steve & Deborah Adelstein
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Umpqua Bank Charitable Foundation
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 United Way of Whatcom County
 Veterans of Foreign Wars
 Wallace Rice Benefits
 Whatcom Artists Of Clay and Kiln
 Whidbey Presbyterian Church
 Stephen and Diane Woods
 Romyne Zanchi

**Through Nov 20, 2016*

A special thank you those who supported our Oktoberfest event that was, due to what we are now naming "the storm of the century that never was," cancelled on October 15. We especially want to recognize the generosity and support of our sponsors: presenting sponsor Jack Mountain Meats, Pacific Continental Realty, Larson Gross CPAs & Consultants, 92.9 KISM Classic Rock, and Lithtex NW.

Had we been able to host this event, it would have raised money for Volunteer Programs, including House2Home and Chore that support housing for local families and aging neighbors. If you can help us make up a funding shortfall for these programs, visit our website, www.oppc.org and donate today.



Board members Mamie Lackie, Steve Jones and Faith Whaley discuss revisions to the agency mission statement at the annual board-staff retreat in October.

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Extend-a-Hand Gifts Provide Housing, Medical Prescriptions

Last winter, a family that was living in a tent came to the Opportunity Council for help. They had recently gained employment and could afford a rental, but were unable to save enough money to cover first month's rent and deposit.

Thanks to Extend-a-Hand donors, this family got the assistance they needed to move out of the cold and into a safe, warm home. More than a year later, this family is still housed in their rental unit and working full-time.

Extend a Hand donors helped over 100 households get into housing or avoid eviction in 2016. These donations also helped over 200 individuals afford prescriptions through Unity Care NW (formerly Interfaith Community Health Center).

The Opportunity Council is teaming up with The Bellingham Herald and Unity Care NW to promote the annual Extend-a-Hand campaign again this year to help people get the housing and prescriptions they need when no other programs or resources can help. Last year local donors contributed nearly \$40,000 people to Extend a Hand. The Herald covers administrative costs so your gifts go directly to support people in need.

This local support makes a huge impact in people's lives. Housing is not only difficult to find, the move-in costs are prohibitive for many families. And Unity Care NW reports an increasing number of its patients struggle to meet their out-of-pocket prescription expenses even if they have insurance.

If you would like to help make a difference this year, your Extend a Hand donation can be mailed to:

**Extend-a-Hand, c/o Opportunity Council
PO Box 2134, Bellingham, WA 98227**

or drop off donations to

1419 Cornwall Ave., Bellingham

Details: Jackie Lafata-Rinker, 360-734-5121, ext. 333



OC News Briefs... Around the PNW

Child Care Aware of NW Washington staff opened an office in Mount Vernon this fall. Child Care Aware provides families in Island, San Juan, Skagit, Snohomish, and Whatcom Counties with information and referrals to licensed child care facilities and supports child care providers by offering education, resources and onsite consultation. For more information, visit the Child Care Aware of NW Washington website at www.opcco.org/cca/.



The Food Lifeline Mobile Food Pantry distributes food on the second Saturday of the month from 10:30am - 12:30pm at East Whatcom Regional Resource Center located at 8251 Kendall Rd, Maple Falls, WA 98266. This monthly distribution serves people in the Foothills Food Bank area in need of fresh food. No appointment is necessary to receive food.

Columbia Valley Community Connections meetings are held every second Wednesday of the month, from 2:00 to 3:30pm at East Whatcom Regional Resource Center in Kendall. These meetings provide a place for residents to gather and connect to build a stronger community. For more information, call 599-3944.

Opportunity Council programs include: Community Resource Center • Homeless Housing • Dorothy Place • Marjie's House • Homeless Prevention • Rental Assistance • Child Care Aware • Nutrition • Basic Food Education & Outreach • Maple Alley Inn • Energy Assistance • Weatherization Home Repair Loan Program • Early Support for Infants and Toddlers • Emergency Child Care • Early Achievers • School Backpack Drives • Head Start • Early Head Start • Early Childhood Education Assistance Program • Building Performance Center • The Energy Project • Conservation Education • Community Energy Challenge



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Contributors to this issue include Greg Winter, Lisa Clark, Debbie Paton, Mark Schofield, Lisa Sohni, Mark Tompkins, Kaitlyn Miller, Robyn Kauppila, Summer Starr, Jackie Lafata Rinker, Jessica Bee, Kathy Washatka.

For mailing address changes, newsletter submissions and comments, please contact us at (360) 734- 5121, ext. 333.

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Our communities are tackling affordable housing issues

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Child Care Aware opens new office in Mt. Vernon

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Event Calendar

December 26

OC offices closed for Christmas holiday

January 2

OC offices closed for New Year holiday

January 16

OC offices closed for Martin Luther King holiday

January 26

OC board of directors meeting, 4pm Bellingham.

For more info: **360-734-5121, ext. 333**

February 1

Deadline for restaurants to sign up for Dine Out.

For more info: **360-734-5121, ext. 333**

February 20

OC offices closed for Presidents Day holiday

February 23

OC board of directors meeting, 4pm Bellingham.

For more info: **360-734-5121, ext. 333**

March 23

Joint OC board of directors and ELAFS policy council meeting, 4pm Bellingham.

For more info: **360-734-5121, ext. 333**

