

**Meeting of Renton, King County, & State Legislators from the 11th, 37th, 33rd, & 41st
Districts
10 a.m. Friday, July 17 - Via Zoom**

Doug Levy - July 20, 2020

Attendees included the following:

State Legislators: Sens. Rebecca Saldana (D-Seattle/37th Dist.); Karen Keiser (D-Des Moines/33rd Dist.); Bob Hasegawa (D-Seattle/11th Dist.); Reps. Steve Bergquist (D-Renton/11th Dist.); Tina Orwall (D-Des Moines/33rd Dist.); Mia Gregerson (D-SeaTac/33rd Dist.); Sharon Tomiko Santos (D-Seattle/37th Dist.); Eric Pettigrew (D-Renton/37th Dist.); Legislative Assistant for Rep. My-Linh Thai (D-Bellevue/41st Dist.); and Noha Mahgoub, Senate Democratic Caucus staff.

King County: Executive Dow Constantine; County Councilmember Dave Upthegrove; County Councilmember Reagan Dunn; DCHS Director Leo Flor; State and Federal Relations Director April Putney; South King County Outreach Director Karan Gill; Chief of Staff to Upthegrove and Dunn (Diana Phibbs, Cody Eccles); County Council Legislative Director Mac Nicholson; County lobbyist David Foster.

Renton & Renton Regional Fire Authority (RFA): Mayor Pavone; Chief VanValey; RFA Chief Rick Marshall; and Regional/State/Federal Affairs Consultant Doug Levy.

DESC: Director Daniel Malone; Deputy Dir. Nicole Macri; and Director of Housing Programs Noah Fay.

City of Seattle: Included homeless/housing issues policy adviser Tess Colby, head of Office of inter-Government Relations (OIGR) Lily Wilson-Codega; State Director Robin Koskey; Quinn Majeski.

The meeting Agenda is cut-and-pasted below - and meeting notes being on Pg. 2:

(1) Welcome

- Introductions
- Walk through agenda
- Executive and Mayor discuss the County's objectives and the City's objectives

(2) Shared interest between City/County: permanent supportive housing for 235 residents

- DESC share intent/status on purchasing hotels
- City & County provide their perspectives
- Legislators offer perspectives, bring up any questions they wish to have addressed
- Discussion about strategy

(3) Existing issues that need to be addressed in connection with the Red Lion site

- City & Fire Authority: identify outstanding issues
- Legislators: identify any additional issues
- County & DESC: identify action items in response

(4) Additional comments/interests not yet identified

- City & Fire Authority

- DESC
- County
- Legislators

Notes from Meeting

- **Senator Saldana**, as the legislator who sought out the meeting, kicked things off. Among other things, she complimented Renton for “going above and beyond” and being “a good partner.”
- **Executive Constantine initial comments:** He thanked Sen. Saldana, thanked the Mayor for being a partner, said the county was there to “see what we can come up with.” He discussed an “unprecedented crisis,” the county’s work to locate isolation/quarantine, Assessment & Recovery, and De-Intensification Shelter facilities, the positive health results from moving those experiencing homeless from congregate settings to a room of their own, behavioral health crises subsided, exercise regimen, some getting jobs - doing better. He described the shelters as an emergency response, short-term, for permanent solutions supportive housing will be required to satisfy. He talked about the need to maintain facilities for now given the epidemiological data. He said shelters should not be accompanied by impacts that can be avoided and he said the county has been working on that and he is “comfortable making more changes on how we best deal” with the impacts. He acknowledged we “need to plan forward” with a hotel type-environment that is long-term and stable and that the Red Lion “might not be the right size, place.” He said he wanted to figure out a way to get together, respect the business community and the residents, look for an opportunity to turn the corner on homelessness.
- **Mayor Pavone:** The Mayor also thanked Sen. Saldana for triggering the meeting and noted he wanted to clarify Renton’s position while seeking out a better way to work with those individuals who are residing at the Red Lion. He said DESC has been forthright and the County has tried to mitigate. He also said there has been a misunderstanding of Renton’s position and how it has treated those who are less fortunate. He gave numerous examples of the City’s work in the homelessness and affordable housing arenas: Converting an old City jail into the Center of Hope shelter; preparing to put nearly \$1 million in CARES Act funding into housing and food assistance; Renton Housing Authority hosting 1,800 units of low- and lower-income housing; the City’s recent work and conversations with the Low-Income Housing Institute; the development of the Family First Community Center; etc. He said the Red Lion had started out as a medical facility, and the words and actions of the county in transitioning it haven’t lined up. He said Renton is willing to work on long-term solutions at a proper location. He said the fact is the Red Lion is not the right location, and it is time to use CARES Act and FEMA dollars to try to figure out the long-term solution. He said there are important questions on this front: Are plans being made? Is there a next facility? He said this is not about vilifying anyone and that Renton wants to have a voice in its own community in figuring out the solution. *(Dow made a brief comment about realizing the challenges with this scale of facility).*
- **DESC - Daniel Malone:** He said DESC is working to manage fast and large changes. The operation moved to Renton from a previous operation at 3rd and Yesler across from the Courthouse. He said these are people with higher needs, a high-needs population and many with significant needs, and hospitals in King County routinely refer folks to this

facility. He said he is glad to hear the concept around permanent supportive housing as the best solution for those with profound challenges. He said from the shelter at the Morrison Hotel across from the Courthouse, when the opportunity came to move people from “cheek to jowl” to an environment that is more housing-like, conditions improved. He indicated there are six (6) times fewer 911 calls compared to Seattle (reiterated by Nicole Macri) and that there has been some improvement from April to today with problem-solving work with Renton Fire, PD. He called the Red Lion a success story. He said he didn’t want to resume the shelter where residents are so close together they can’t think straight. He mentioned a vision DESC has for replicating the Red Lion at a different location “if we can find the property.”

- **Executive Constantine:** Said he wanted to talk about the \$500,000 mitigation fund for impacts, identify how to get folks into permanent supportive housing. He said timing-wise, “we just don’t know where this pandemic is going, and so it has been difficult to make concrete projections on when it will ease...I can’t put an end date to it, which I realize is what the City would like.”
- **Councilmember Upthegrove:** Clarified that the \$500,000 mitigation fund is for *all* cities hosting shelters, and that the way the Administration interpreted the funding, it CANNOT be used to assist businesses. “My recommendation is to enhance the funding and to clarify” an allowance to use it to assist businesses.
- **Mayor Pavone:** Said it would be helpful to enable the Mitigation Fund to assist businesses but said more importantly, “If this (supportive housing) is the model, why don’t we use the dollars and the time” to get there, “if that’s the solution.”
- **Chief Marshall:** Mentioned his 37 years of experience and service and said with respect to what’s happened at the Red Lion, “let’s not confuse luck with fact.” He pointed to anywhere from 230 to 300 people doubled up in rooms, can’t fully enforce face masks, pages and pages of fire infractions, chain-link fencing had been illegally put around the building at first (that ceased), locked exit door, piles of materials blocking exit corridors, tampering with alarm systems, water leaks, inoperable fire doors. He said trying to run this shelter out of the Red Lion is “putting a round peg in a square hole.” He said “I would argue we’ve been lucky...this is a life-safety issue...I’ve got the fire union breathing down my neck and my board breathing down my neck. I’m extremely frustrated. This was called a success story - I would say we have been getting lucky and I don’t want to keep betting on that.” He said he had dealt with 100+ calls the last four (4) months, has had to institute bi-weekly building inspections, and had to be at the Red Lion four separate times on one day.
- **Leo Flor, DCHS Director** - asked to comment by Dow Constantine: Said the county is actively planning on how to permanently house not just the 235 at the Red Lion but some 11,000 countywide in need of permanent supportive housing. Said contrary to what he heard referenced earlier, the county cannot use short-term emergency response CARES Act dollars for a long-term response (NOTE: I diplomatically challenged this in the Chat Box), referenced a councilmanic sales tax opportunity for housing/homelessness. Said the county has been curing problems at the shelter and committed to continuing.
- **Executive Constantine** commented on “considerable effort going into an inter-local agreement.”

- **Nicole Macri, DESC Deputy Director and also a State Rep., 43rd Dist:** Made comments about “Renton trying to evict us” by Aug. 9 and that while Renton has tried to be a good partner, “it makes it difficult when we’re under an eviction notice.”
- **Mayor Pavone:** Responded immediately, said he wasn’t going to get into the details, but this was about frustration and taking action and wondering at what point Renton was going to have a say in what happened in its own community.

Comments by State Legislators

- **Note - Senator Keiser** - did not comment verbally but wrote two paragraphs in the chat box, one urging that there be a transition plan and the comments from Chief Marshall should motivate action, and another that there needed to be a better location found than Red Lion.
- **Rep. Pettigrew:** Without some sort of timeline, aside from having an emergency, the urgency gets lost. Businesses are already sensitive to the economic climate, and when you throw a pandemic in there on top of that, it gets worse. Having a plan in place is extremely important.
- **Rep. Orwall:** Said DESC is very good at what it does, but South King County simply doesn’t have the infrastructure to take on this scale of permanent supportive housing and services. She also said the area doesn’t have a Seattle Levy to generate funding to do this work.
- **Rep. Santos:** Indicated she is “very concerned about the capacity of the building to hold the numbers in there (Red Lion), and the spillover affect to the community.” She said the last two times she has shopped at Uwajimaya there have been incidents - “it says to me there does need to be some way to mitigate the impact to local businesses and to safety issues to other residents who may be shopping there.” She said even when the County was first looking at Sam’s Club, she expressed a significant concern to the county’s lobbyist that, unlike Seattle, Renton has long had older and established residences right next to the downtown. She said whether it’s a Work Group or something else, she would like to help and that this is significantly more than Renton can be expected to sustain. She also clarified that while Daniel Malone and Nicole Macri talked about how many fewer 911 calls vis-à-vis Seattle, it was still far more calls than Renton typically experiences (*Mayor made a brief comment about having provided data - didn’t go into details*).
- **Sen. Hasegawa:** He said, “I agree with the other south-end legislators you heard from. He said “framing this as an eviction issue is just not helpful” and that he sees it as the result of Renton’s frustration and a lack of communication. He gave the expectation and reality of the Mitigation Fund as an example. He said he heard Seattle had just paid a couple million \$\$ for vacant hotel rooms in Seattle and wanted to know if that could be part of the solution.
- **Mayor Pavone:** Made the point that the Mitigation Fund as constructed and the rigidity of the rules on CARES Act dollars meant it yielded very little for Renton. Called on me to add anything.

- **Doug Levy:** I said we have an opportunity with potential properties - as noted by DESC in a weekend article. I indicated it seemed like there could be creative thinking on the use of CARES Act and FEMA dollars and that idea of maximizing the dollars had just come up at a Tuesday King County Council Committee of the Whole meeting. I also noted that in all likelihood, with hard work by the Legislature to enact a 1/10th of 1 cent councilmanic sales tax for affordable housing/homelessness, it was very likely the County Council would be enacting it by an end-of-September use-it-or-lose-it deadline and that would be another source of funds to utilize.
- **Senator Saldana:** Thanked people for coming together, expressed the desire to look for solutions.

Next Steps - April Putney of Executive Constantine's office summed up some next steps she had heard

*Work Group of legislators to assist on permanent supportive housing

*Actions to Mitigate and expanding the fund to include assistance to businesses while increasing flexibility for cities to use

*Checking on Sen. Hasegawa's question about Seattle and monies used to secure vacant hotel rooms

*Other locations in Renton for some of the 11,000 in need of permanent supportive housing - county would like to follow up with City

*Use of CARES/FEMA dollars to pay for hotel purchase for permanent supportive housing - explore further

Some Bottom-Line Items and Outcomes

- Strong legislative support for an action plan and a recognition Renton has done its part
- Numerous comments about Red Lion not being the appropriate, right, or ideal place - Chief Marshall's "round peg in a square hole" comment
- No legislators cast Renton as a NIMBY and Mayor's comments helped dispel the idea that Renton lacks caring or compassion for those in need
- Numerous comments about the need for an Action Plan
- Numerous points about harnessing funds - CARES Act, FEMA, 1/10th of 1 cent sales tax, the apparent \$2M expended by Seattle for vacant hotel rooms
- A recognition that the \$500K Mitigation Fund as currently constructed doesn't work well for cities and prohibits assistance to businesses

Some next steps we are working on - vis-à-vis post-meeting debrief with Mayor

- Doug Levy provide notes from meeting - DONE
- Mayor would like to send short thank-you note to all attending legislators - Doug will do

- Follow-up meeting with Sen. Saldana - tentative for Monday. Also seeking a follow-up with Rep. Bergquist/Rep. Hudgins (Zack could not attend)
- Follow-up meeting with County Councilmembers Upthegrove and Dunn