

DRAFT  
HANDBOOK &  
CODE OF CONDUCT  
FOR  
WINTER HAVEN

*A Temporary Safe Camping Community*



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Figure 1: Winter Haven Site Layout

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- Appendix C: Confidential Intake Form
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# 1. BACKGROUND

## 1.1. Purpose

This Handbook and Code of Conduct (“Handbook”) is intended to be a written set of policies and guidelines for the safe and effective functioning of Winter Haven, a temporary safe camping site for the homeless community in Bellingham and Whatcom County.

**Winter Haven is a drug and alcohol-free community.** Winter Haven is intended to provide a safe and stable place for homeless individuals to live while they actively seek permanent housing. Winter Haven residents consist of people who are either working or disabled and who have a source of income. Winter Haven residents are selected based on their ability to succeed in a community living setting.

This Handbook includes a detailed set of general policies for residents, a code of conduct, and a description of services that Homes NOW provides to residents. The policies and guidelines in this Handbook are reviewed regularly by Homes NOW and are amended as necessary based on input from the residents and the public.

## 1.2. About Homes NOW

Homes NOW is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization made entirely of volunteers working together to offer affordable housing options for the homeless in Bellingham and Whatcom County. Homes NOW supports the Housing First model to house homeless people immediately. The goal is for each person to have a sense of home and community.

Homes NOW previously worked with Lummi Nation to build two tiny homes in June and July 2017 which temporarily housed 8 people transitioning to permanent housing. On average, occupancy is 2 to 3 months before moving into permanent housing.

In 2017, Homes NOW assisted 25 people into housing by eliminating barriers. Homes NOW provided: telephone access, avenues for reconnecting family members, assistance with rental applications for those having difficulty reading and/or writing, direction for people entering detox programs, and the stability of an organized permitted camp site at City Hall for 18 days.

## 1.3. Project Incentive

As of 2018, there are over 800 homeless people in Whatcom County. Approximately half of the homeless people in Whatcom County are unsheltered on a given night. Many homeless people are forced to illegally camp on public or private property or sleep in their cars.

Because many homeless people have to camp illegally, they are often forced to move, resulting in instability and loss of personal belongings. Homeless people also lack access to basic human necessities, including bathrooms, showers, drinking water, cooking facilities, garbage

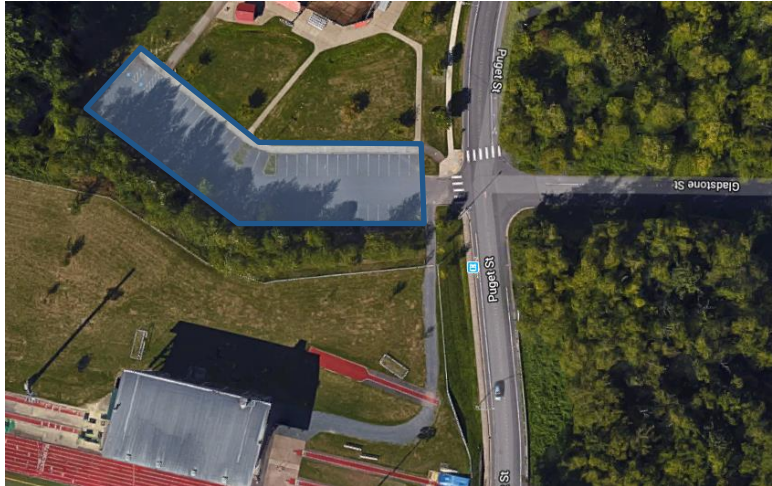
services, etc. Many homeless people are forced to carry all of their belongings with them at all times, which often prevents them from being able to seek employment.

Winter Haven provides a safe legal place for our homeless neighbors to live. Winter Haven gives access to basic human necessities, such as bathroom and kitchen facilities, garbage/recycling service, as well as a sense of safety and community. Winter Haven also serves as a central location for service providers to meet with residents to determine their individual needs.

## 2. WINTER HAVEN

### 2.1. Site Location

Winter Haven is located on the Civic Athletic Complex property located at 1355 Civic Field Way, Bellingham, WA 98225. The property is owned by the City of Bellingham. The property consists of a parking lot that is seasonally used for parking at the Frank Geri softball field. The parking lot is generally not in use from November through March. The site is accessible from Puget Street via a driveway that leads to the parking lot.



The site is surrounded by athletic fields and wooded areas. The nearest residence is approximately 500 feet away from the site. The site has convenient access to nearby amenities.

### 2.2. Project Description

**Winter Haven consists of 20 tent sites.** The tents are either single or double occupancy. Winter Haven provides residents with a secure, stable location to live and store their belongings.

The site is surrounded by a 6-foot tall chain link fence for the security of the residents, which has a 10-foot wide gate for emergency vehicle access, a 3-foot wide gate for pedestrian access, and a 3-foot wide emergency exit. An intake office is located near the front gate and is staffed 24-hours per day, 7 days per week by either a site resident or volunteer.

A community kitchen and dining tent are located on-site for use by the residents for food storage, food preparation, and dining, as well as a place to gather and socialize. A storage container is located on site for storage of donated goods and supplies. A hand wash station is located next to the kitchen. Dumpsters and recycling bins are located near the front gate. Portable toilets are located near the entrance of the site.



**Site Layout**

## 3. GENERAL POLICIES

### 3.1. Participation and Self-Management

Homes NOW is the managing agency of Winter Haven. Homes NOW determines the policies and code of conduct for the site, and only Homes NOW can authorize changes to the policies and code of conduct. Homes NOW also determines who will live at the site and has authority to remove or evict individuals from the site. Winter Haven residents do not have that authority.

Winter Haven residents do not have the authority to ban case workers, police, or other emergency personnel from the site. If residents have an issue with a specific individual entering the site, then the RA should notify Homes NOW so that we can resolve the issue.

Residents are required to participate in operating and managing Winter Haven for the benefit of all residents and the overall community. The site operates as a co-op where all residents have a mutually vested interest in the success of the community. Residents are required to participate in monthly elections of a Resident Assistant (RA) and deputy RA and participate in weekly meetings as described in the Operations Plan. Residents are also required to participate in regular shifts in the reception office, as security lead, and as donation lead.

Residents are encouraged to communicate feedback, suggestions, and complaints to the RA or to Homes NOW.

### 3.2. Identifying Eligible Residents

**Initial residents will be chosen by Homes NOW based on direct knowledge of individuals and their ability to succeed in a community living setting.** Winter Haven is a drug and alcohol-free community. Winter Haven is intended to provide a safe and stable place for homeless individuals to live while they actively seek permanent housing. Winter Haven residents consist of people who are either working or disabled and who have a source of income.

If a resident moves out or finds other accommodations, Homes NOW will choose future residents from our list of applicants. A copy of the resident application form is included in Appendix A.

### 3.3. Training of Resident Assistant

At a minimum, for the first two weeks of occupancy, a Homes NOW Board member (Jim Peterson or Doug Gustafson) will be living on-site to serve as the initial site manager. During that time, a RA and deputy RA will be elected and trained in all duties and responsibilities.

After the first two weeks, Homes NOW and the City will assess the status of the project and determine whether continued occupancy by a Board member is necessary. A Homes NOW representative will continue to live on-site until the City agrees it is no longer necessary.



### 3.4. Rental Costs

No rent is charged for residents living at Winter Haven. Ongoing monthly costs for operations are funded through private donations from the community.

### 3.5. Pet Policy

Pets are permitted under the following conditions:

1. Preliminary Screening by a Humane Society Technician for disease control is required.
2. If necessary, a temporary on-site quarantine is provided by technician for a minimal time needed to confirm pet health and hygiene.
3. Proof of vaccinations must be provided within 30 days and updated as needed.
4. Pets must be clean, well fed, and not have fleas or other parasites such as tapeworm.
5. No animal abuse is tolerated. Any act of violence towards an animal from a person or another animal or from an animal to human will result in *grounds for termination of stay* from Winter Haven.
6. Residents must clean-up after their pet both inside and outside of the site (chewed up or shredded items, spilled food, water, food dishes, etc.)
7. Pet noise must be kept to a minimum at all times.
8. Denial of medical care for animals is not tolerated.
9. Pets are not allowed in the kitchen or showers. Violation of this rule will be *grounds for termination of stay* at Winter Haven.
10. Pet must be spayed or neutered.
11. Only 1 pet is allowed per person.
12. Pet log sheet is kept with the Records Supervisor.
13. Pet waste must be managed appropriately.
14. Residents need to provide an alternate contact number of a person who can care for their pet. In cases of abandonment, pets are placed in the care of a no-kill city shelter.

#### CATS

- Cats must be leashed when outdoors.
- Not cleaning litter box is a form of abuse and is not tolerated.
- Cats should be checked on at least once a day while residing indoors in absence of pet owner.

#### DOGS

- Dogs are required to be on leashes on the site and must follow public leash laws at all times.
- Dogs must be supervised at all times.

### 3.6. Parking

A limited number of parking spaces are available for residents. Not all residents will be assigned a parking space. Residents that require a parking space must notify a PM prior to move-in so that a parking space can be assigned. If an existing resident requires a parking space, they must notify a PM to determine if there are any spaces available.

Vehicle maintenance is not allowed on the property.

### **3.7. Bicycles**

One bike is allowed per resident.

### **3.8. Personal Property**

Residents are responsible for securing their personal property. If personal property is stolen or damaged, Resident Assistants (RAs) or Project Managers (PMs) must be notified promptly to access and review security camera footage to account for the incident.

Residents must keep their personal property within the boundary of their designated tent site and not encroach on the neighboring site. Hoarding of excess property is not tolerated.

### **3.9. Single or Double Occupancy**

Residents are assigned a single or double occupancy tent upon move-in. Double occupancy units have a maximum of two individuals (either 2 adults or 1 adult and 1 child). If a resident wishes to change from single occupancy to double occupancy, they must gain approval from a PM. A new application form must be filed to update records. If a resident wishes to change from double occupancy to single occupancy, they may do so upon notifying a PM who will update the record.

If a problem arises between residents living in the same unit where they cannot remain as a double-occupancy home, residents must mutually agree upon who will stay and who will move out. If an agreement cannot be made, a PM will intervene to assist with peaceful resolution.

### **3.10. Move-out Policy**

**Residents are allowed and encouraged to move out at any time upon finding housing.**

Residents should notify the RA or PM as soon as possible of moving plans so arrangements can be made to identify the next new resident and to fill in for any scheduled shifts for the resident who is moving out. Residents are required to remove all their personal belongings upon move-out and return their tent site to its original condition.

### **3.11. Damages**

Any significant damage done by residents, guests, or pets to the tents or other structures must be paid for by that resident. Residents are not held responsible for ordinary wear and tear of tents or structures.

### **3.12. Complaints**

If Homes NOW receives verbal or written complaints regarding a resident, Homes NOW may enter the premises to inspect the tent as directed by the Board. Complaints are disclosed to residents and dates and times of any inspections are made available.

After the first legitimate complaint, residents are given a written warning. If there is a second legitimate complaint for the same problem, the resident may be asked to leave (at the discretion of Homes NOW). Serious complaints may result in *grounds for termination of stay*.

### **3.13. No Guarantee of Alternate Housing**

Winter Haven is operated on the property by Homes NOW as permitted under the ordinance and Bellingham Municipal Code. In accordance with the ordinance, tent encampments may be approved for a period of 90 days, with a potential for an extension of an additional 90 days. The approved project end date will be posted at the site and all residents will be notified of that date prior to move-in.

Once the approved period is over (or if the permit for the project is revoked), the tents will be removed from the site and existing residents will be required to move elsewhere. **Homes NOW cannot guarantee availability of alternate housing for residents.**

### **3.14. Fire Prevention**

**Cooking is only permitted in designated cooking or kitchen spaces.** Cook fires, grills, toasters, and microwaves must not be left unattended when in use.

Patio heaters will be evenly spaced throughout the camping area to provide warmth. The patio heaters will be provided by Homes NOW and will be UL listed. No other heating devices will be allowed on-site.

Fireworks and candles are not allowed on site. Smoking is not allowed inside tents or structures; smoking is only allowed in designated smoking areas.

Smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors are present in any buildings or structures in accordance with state law. PMs inspect all detectors monthly. Fire extinguishers are placed throughout the site in accordance with state law.

In the event of a fire, residents must call 911 immediately and evacuate to a safe location.

### **3.15. Emergencies**

**In the event of an emergency (police, fire, ambulance required), residents must call 911.**

The RA must contact the PM as soon as realistically and safely possible. A PM will be available on-call to assist the RA or residents. The PM will notify the Board promptly of any police, fire, or EMT dispatches. Any emergencies must be documented as incident reports and filed with the RA who will notify the PM.

After any incident requiring police, fire, or EMT dispatch, the Board and PMs will meet to evaluate the cause of the incident and determine if further action is necessary to ensure the safety of all residents. This may include updating policies, updating resident medical information, issuing warnings, and/or termination of stay for a resident, if appropriate.

## 4. CODE OF CONDUCT

### 4.1. Violence/Abuse/Discrimination

Violence is not tolerated. Degrading, ethnic, sexist, or discriminatory remarks are not tolerated. Verbal abuse, threats, and intimidation are not tolerated. Intentional damage to others' property is not tolerated. Rights of fellow citizens must be respected.

Any significant concerns of misconduct must be reported to RAs or PMs immediately. Any illegal activity must be reported to law enforcement.

### 4.2. Weapons Policy

**Firearms and knives longer than 3.5-inches are strictly prohibited from the site;** possession of a firearm or knives longer than 3.5-inches at Winter Haven is *grounds for immediate termination of stay* and intervention by law enforcement for removal.

Items deemed as weapons (other than those that are prohibited) will be stored in a safe location. Use of any item as a weapon to injure, threaten, or harass others is not tolerated and is *grounds for immediate termination of stay* and intervention by law enforcement for removal.

### 4.3. Quiet Hours & Guest Policies

Residents are expected to behave respectfully and cooperatively and consider the impact of their behavior on the rest of the community.

**Quiet hours** on the site are from 9:00pm to 7:00am Sunday through Thursday and 10:00pm to 8:00am Friday and Saturday. During quiet hours, residents are expected to minimize noise so that it cannot be heard outside of their tent and does not disturb their neighbors. Any time a resident reasonably requests another resident to lower their volume, the neighboring resident is expected to respectfully do so. Residents are asked to bring any recurring complaints to discussion at meetings to find peaceful conflict resolution.

**Visitors/guests** must be checked in and out by the resident. **The resident must be present on-site at all times while visitors/guests are present.** The resident is responsible for the behavior of their visitors/guests. Visitors/guests are not permitted to stay overnight.

### 4.4. Cleanliness

Residents must maintain cleanliness of their living space (inside and outside their tent). As well as common areas. Residents are expected to minimize offensive odors and scents that may disturb their neighbors. Any time a resident reasonably requests another resident to address offensive odors, the neighboring resident is expected to respectfully do so. Residents are asked to bring any recurring complaints to discussion at meetings to find peaceful conflict resolution.

### 4.5. Substance Use

**Winter Haven is a drug and alcohol-free community.** Residents are not allowed to consume drugs or alcohol on the site. Residents are not allowed to possess any controlled substances

which are illegal under Washington state law. Additionally, a case worker may determine that a legal substance is harmful and limit use for that resident. WA state law must be abided by for any substances used. No smoking is allowed in tents or other structures. Smoking is allowed in designated smoking areas only.

Case workers may determine substance abuse treatment is necessary (for legal substances). Drug testing may be required if requested by a case worker or when suspicious conduct is visibly evident.

- Residents are not drug tested unless consumption of an illegal controlled substance is suspected due to secondary signs of behavioral misconduct.
- Erratic behavior, mood swings, increase in mental instability, anger management issues, or other reasonable concerns that warrant a drug test are thoroughly investigated and reviewed by Homes NOW. A resident's intake health record is used to determine reported health conditions that may account for unusual behavior unrelated to substance abuse.
- Homes NOW and professional outreach team(s) coordinate to direct residents to services related to any health needs that become apparent while residing at Winter Haven.
- Unresolved and reoccurring concerns are subject to review by the Board.
- Residents in rehabilitation are required to work closely with their case worker.
- Illegal drug-use at Winter Haven is immediate *grounds for termination of stay*.

## 5. SERVICES

### 5.1. Food

The community kitchen is open 24 hours per day, 7 days per week for the convenience of the residents. Residents will prepare their own food and will be responsible for properly storing and disposing of their food, and maintaining a clean kitchen and dining area.

HomesNOW will coordinate with the Bellingham Food Bank to provide food for the residents. The Sikh community will provide a community meal once per week. If other volunteers or businesses would like to provide food donations, all public health regulations on food handling and storage will be followed. Any volunteer that prepares food will be required to have a WA State Food Workers card.

### 5.2. Supplies

Supplies such as hygiene products, blankets, furniture, and other donated items are available and distributed by the PMs or RA. An inventory log is updated as supplies are distributed.

### 5.3. Transportation

Bus tickets or bus passes are available as needed. Other modes of public transportation may be available to residents based on specific personal need.

### 5.4. Support Services

Winter Haven will serve as a central location for service providers to meet with residents to determine their individual needs. Homes NOW will coordinate with other service providers and providers of shelters for homeless persons within the County and will inquire about the availability of existing resources with these providers.

It is recommended that any chronic health and/or mental health conditions be assessed as a prerequisite for residency. Case worker(s) will identify which support services are needed (if any) based on a preliminary evaluation. Examples of support services may include:

- Eligibility for residency
- Job training accessibility
- Mental health assessment
- Counseling for drug/alcohol recovery
- DSHS follow-ups and reviews

Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) may provide additional services to the residents of Winter Haven. DSHS may host mobile community services at Winter Haven once per month. DSHS may assist residents with determining eligibility for cash and food assistance programs, child care benefits, Medicare, and Medicaid. Applications for aid are available at the on-site office.

Any mild health conditions that progress negatively must be addressed immediately. Residency at the site is subject to re-evaluation. Sobriety and stable mental health are mandatory for communal living at Winter Haven to ensure safe conditions for all residents.

### **5.5. Security Services**

The site is monitored by 24/7 surveillance. 720P HD security cameras are placed around the perimeter of the property to monitor all activity occurring on and surrounding the perimeter of the site.

- Camera use on the site is necessary to protect rights of all residents as well as neighbors in the area from any potential problems or unlawful activity.
- Site location is monitored remotely by Homes NOW through an application on phone and/or PC to ensure stability of the site.
- Security cameras are **not** installed inside tents or bathrooms; this measure is to preserve the privacy and rights of the site residents.

### **5.6. Waste Management**

Services to maintain hygiene are provided on site with detailed explanation at all stations. Health and sanitation guidelines are visibly posted at all portable toilets, handwashing stations, and food preparation sites. Residents are expected to adhere to all state laws and county health regulations. Every resident must practice responsible self-care and proper waste disposal to avoid cross contamination, illness, and/or disease.

Dumpsters and trash bins are provided on the site for use by residents. Residents are responsible for disposal of their trash and/or recycling and maintaining a clean and orderly environment on the premises and surrounding areas. Every resident is responsible for trash detail, recycling, and waste management.

### **5.7. Repairs and Maintenance**

Repairs and maintenance are handled by Homes NOW. Residents must notify either the RA or the PM of any needed repairs or maintenance promptly. If an emergency repair is required, residents must contact the on-call PM as soon as possible.

## 6. NEW RESIDENT INTAKE PROCEDURES

The following provides a description of the intake procedure for new residents:

1. New residents are greeted with a warm welcome and treated with respect.
2. Government issued valid photo ID is required and is scanned and kept on file. If no ID is available, resident is signed-up for an ID.
3. Free screening of residents with police dispatch (if available) is conducted. Background checks will be conducted by the Bellingham Police Department to reference the sex offender list, criminal history, warrants, etc.
4. General policies and code of conduct are explained to all new residents.
5. New resident signs lease agreement.
6. The PM or RA gives the new resident a tour of the site.
7. New residents are assisted with filling out registration forms and confidential intake forms. Intake forms document contact information, emergency contact information, education/family history, mental and physical health, and medical insurance status.
8. Confidential intake forms are filed with the PM and maintained by Homes NOW.
9. Residents are assigned their designated tent. Community map is updated with new resident location.
10. The PM or RA shows the new resident to their tent and provides them with any supplies needed for initial move-in.
11. Residents will be provided with a street map and a bus schedule. Residents will also attend a safety orientation.
12. Meeting with a social worker may be immediately provided in some cases. All residents are required to meet with a social worker to determine an individual plan within seven days of arrival.

The following forms and documents are required for intake processing and will be filed by the Records Supervisor:

- New Resident Registration Form
- Copy of issued identification card – or – Form for ID is filled out and signed
- Confidential Intake Form
- Signed lease agreement
- Social worker documents and plans for self-care (within 7-days of arrival)
- Pet agreements and pet health records (as reported needed by technician)



## 7. GROUNDS FOR TERMINATION OF STAY

**Theft** of any kind is not tolerated. Proof of theft is *grounds for termination of stay*.

**Violence, threats, or harassment** of any kind is not tolerated and *grounds for termination of stay*.

**Pet mismanagement** may lead to *grounds for termination of stay* as described in the pet policy.

**Physical evidence of suspected substance abuse** results in immediate probation, social worker review, and is *grounds for termination of stay*.

**Drug use** results in immediate eviction from the site. No exception.

**Firearms on the premises** is cause for immediate intervention of law enforcement and removal from the site. No exception.

Any activity resembling the above that adversely affects the site and/or residents results in immediate review and potential *grounds for termination of stay*. Conditions resulting in removal from the site may involve a police or medical escort if necessary.

Respectful behavior and interaction with residents and neighboring residents are expected at all times.

Residents are encouraged to report any concerns to the PM or RA, or in writing to Homes NOW so that appropriate action can be taken to reach a resolution.

Homes NOW will consider the policies outlined in this handbook along with input from PMs, the RA, and residents to determine whether eviction is appropriate or necessary.

**Appendix A**  
**Resident Application Form**

**Appendix B**  
**New Resident Registration Form**

**Appendix C**  
**Confidential Intake Form**

**Appendix D  
Lease Agreement**