

Minutes of the Housing Subcommittee

August 21, 2007, 8:00 a.m., Marble Room, The Salvation Army

Members present:

Krissy Todd, Chair; Cara Eule; Brian Wilson; Keylor Chan.

Members absent:

Thomas Griffin and Steve Kodsi.

Staff present:

Yvonne Vassel and Donna Wyche.

Guests:

Cathy Jackson, Homeless Services Network; Brent Trotter, CEO, Coalition for the Homeless of Central Florida; Muffet Robinson, Coalition for the Homeless; Jose Irizarry, Coalition for the Homeless; and Walt Maguire, Local 1765 Florida Carpenters Regional Council.

Chair, Krissy Todd, was delayed and Yvonne Vassel began the meeting by asking everyone to introduce themselves. Ms. Todd arrived shortly after.

Brent Trotter provided an overview of the work done by the Coalition. He said there are several myths about the homeless that influences public opinion. Some of these are: The homeless are all men; the homeless are lazy and do not wish to work; the homeless are all from somewhere else; if you build a shelter, you will attract more homeless people from elsewhere; and if you ignore the homeless issue, it will go away. Trotter said the issue with this last myth, is there are many ways a community can serve the homeless but they are not all productive ways.

“We agree that feeding people downtown does not contribute to getting people out of homelessness,” Trotter said.

He said the Coalition is woefully under serving homeless males, because the only shelter for them is an open-air, screened pavilion where they sleep on mats on the floor. He also said it is extremely difficult for the Coalition’s caseworkers to help the homeless move into affordable, permanent living space.

“The stats say a person needs to earn at least \$16-an-hour in order to afford an apartment in the Orlando area.” He said affordable housing is one of the greatest needs and he encouraged the committee to explore how its 10-year plan can address that.

He also said approximately 60 percent of women living at the Coalition’s WRCC (Women’s Residential & Counseling Center) have experienced domestic violence. An average of 200 children

per night also stay at the Coalition's shelter. He said there are no other programs in the area that accept families with male children older than 10.

Cathy Jackson said the Coalition and the Salvation Army provides more than 70 percent of the shelter inventory in the tri-county area. She said, for example, that the lack of emergency shelters in Osceola County is an issue. "It is limiting the capacity of very well-designed programs to perform because they are overwhelmed by people seeking emergency shelter."

Trotter said case management is a clear need for all programs. There are not enough case managers to fully service the homeless who seek assistance. Caseworkers typically have a caseload of 35 but the best-practice guideline is for them to have no more than 12.

Donna Wyche asked about length of stay at the Coalition. Irizarry said one-of-three stay longer than two months, and those who stay longer than two months average a stay of six months. He said 60-80 percent of residents at the Coalition, who have case management services, move into permanent housing.

Trotter said the Coalition staff has also noticed more and more elderly individuals coming in for services.

Another guest, Walt Maguire, outlined a program the Carpenters Council is beginning that will build affordable housing in Central Florida. One feature of the program is that the unemployed homeless can be trained and paid to assist in building the houses.

"I don't have enough people to build the houses. These houses can be built in five to ten days. We want people working on them to have the first chance to buy them," McGuire said. He invited members to come and see a demonstration home when it's erected.

Following the guest presentations, the Committee discussed areas for further study: such as Housing First. A request was made to have Dr. Jim Wright, professor of Sociology at the University of Central Florida who has studied issues surrounding homelessness, speak to the Committee. The Committee also asked that it receive more detailed information on its homeless services from Seminole County.

Todd asked each member to research various housing issues and report on them at the next meeting. These topics included: current housing options for the homeless; Housing First; resource allocations regionally; and Community Benefits agreements and ways it affects affordable housing.

The minutes of the August 2, 2007 meeting was approved. The next Housing Committee meeting was scheduled for September 4, 2007, 8:30 a.m., at the Asbury Theological Seminary.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 10 a.m.

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