

Central Florida Regional Commission on Homelessness
(Orange, Osceola & Seminole counties & City of Orlando)

Commission Meeting Minutes

December 12, 2007, 9:30 a.m.
Orlando City Hall, 9th Floor Overlook Room

Members Present:

Chairman Tracy Schmidt, Dr. Richard Baxley, Steve Kodsi, Keylor Chan, Cara Eule, J. Marsh MacLawhorn, Thomas Griffin, Bryan Malenius, Paul Partyka, Margaret Sanders, Brian Wilson, Pastor William Andrews, Diego “Woody” Rodriguez, Rabbi Steven Engel, Dr. David Medley, Orlando Police Chief Val Demings, and Evelyn Herrera-Jackson.

Members Absent:

Meredith Griffin, Krissy Todd, Dr. Brededette Hardy-Blake, Paul Sladek, Waldemar Serrano, and Warren Houglan,

Co-chair Tracy Schmidt called the meeting to order. Minutes of the November meeting were unanimously approved.

Maureen Brockman – vice president of Marketing and Communications at the Metro Orlando Economic Development Commission, who also chairs the commission’s Communications Subcommittee – went over the results of a recent tri-county survey on homelessness and also presented the logo designed for the commission.

Brockman said her only concern with the *“Ten Years 2 End Homelessness”* logo is that there is a promise being made. She said the Commission needed to fully support that idea. Dr. Baxley asked about adding the term “involuntary” to the logo or as a tagline. Paul Partyka said he believes it’s too early in the process to begin drawing that type of distinction. Tom Griffin said including that type of distinction also creates a continually changing goal.

Schmidt said he is not afraid that too much is promised in the *“Ten Years 2 End Homelessness”* logo but he would discuss the possibility of adding a clarification tagline for Commission materials.

Brockman also said monitoring of local and state media over the past few months showed a key interest in the issue of homelessness statewide. She said WKMG Ch. 6 General Manager Henry Maldonado has embraced the idea of focusing on the issue. He has assigned a reporter to do stories, and a series will be broadcast in January 2008 that will focus on the issue in all three counties. WKMG has also developed a public service announcement on the issue that will also be broadcast.

Brockman said Schmidt would meet with the Orlando Sentinel’s editorial board following the January 9, 2008 meeting to discuss the draft 10-year plan. Margaret Sanders questioned whether speaking to the Sentinel would actually benefit the process. Brockman said it’s always best to get ahead of the process by sharing as much as possible. Schmidt pointed out that George Diaz, a member of the Sentinel’s editorial board, was in attendance at the meeting.

Rabbi Engel commented that the success of the plan would depend on who is driving the process and wondered what Schmidt's thinking is about how to get the plan to move forward successfully. Schmidt said there are many details yet to be worked out, but that he would likely be recommending to the Commission that there be two co-chairs of the permanent commission, one political and one civic, and that both of these people needed to be prominent in their area.

Schmidt congratulated Val Demings on her recent promotion from Deputy Chief to Orlando Police Chief and said he had been honored to have her serve on the Commission. Everyone applauded enthusiastically.

Cathy Jackson, executive director of the Homeless Services Network (HSN), reported on the Homeless Connect event held the previous week in Orlando. She said 380 people volunteered – with the largest contingents coming from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (the Mormons) and Northland – A Church Distributed – at the event and more than 900 homeless persons attended and sought services.

Jackson said HSN plans to have four Homeless Connect events in 2008 and one will be focused on serving homeless veterans.

In a comment on the Commission's earlier discussion, Jackson said she believes adding the word "involuntary" to describe the homeless in the 10-year plan, "reinforces the stereotype that it's a choice."

Audience member Santos Maldonado, a current employee at Orlando's Second Harvest Food Bank, told the Commission that he was once homeless and lived in the woods and at Orlando's Coalition for the homeless. He said the homeless need a roadmap of how to get from one point to the next and that there needs to be enough room in programs to handle the need. He said, while homeless, he tried to get into a detoxification program ten times before getting in on his eleventh try. He thanked the Commission for addressing the issues confronted by homeless persons.

Audience member Karen Akers said she was disturbed by how many affordable homes are being lost to new condo and other developments. Pastor Jeff Linman, of the Spirit of Joy Lutheran Church in east Orlando, said he is part of a task force of religious leaders that is eager to see a 24/7 service center built on the east side. "When you guys are ready to get that going, you will have a partner," he told the Commission.

Another audience member, Kim Denmark, said she was walking across the U.S. to draw attention to the issue of homelessness. She commended the Commission for working on creating a regional model to address homelessness.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 11 a.m. to give its Committees a chance to discuss individual strategies for getting their final recommendations together.

The next Regional Commission meeting is scheduled for January 9, 2008, in the 9th Floor Overlook Room of Orlando City Hall, 400 S. Orange Avenue, Orlando, FL 32802.

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