

**ANNUAL MESSAGE for the
FAIRFAX COUNTY BOARD OF
SUPERVISORS**

Fairfax County, Virginia

March 26, 2007

Community Council on Homelessness

Linda D. Wimpey, Chair

Pamela L. Michell, Vice Chair

ANNUAL MESSAGE

for the
Fairfax County Board of Supervisors

Good morning: Chairman Connolly, members of the Board of Supervisors, and County Executive Griffin. Thank you for the opportunity to present our third annual message on the state of homelessness in the Fairfax-Falls Church community.

2007 is already a very significant year in the history of this community's efforts to address the needs of our homeless neighbors. One month ago, you endorsed The Strategic Directions for the Plan to End Homelessness in the Fairfax-Falls Church Community. This is an ambitious undertaking. We want to express our appreciation for your vision in adopting this Plan and your future actions in implementing the strategies within the Plan to end this terrible deprivation experienced by families and individuals in our community.

Beginning in 2007, the annual Point in Time count will report on those who are living on the street, in shelters, or in transitional housing, who do not have a permanent, stable place to stay – those who are literally homeless. This will provide a more meaningful baseline to assess progress in ending homelessness. Those who become formerly homeless, but need ongoing housing and support to prevent a return to homelessness, will be reported separately. The 2007 Point in Time Survey revealed 1,813 literally homeless persons. Of those, 1,083 people were in families with 674 children; 730 single adults were counted.

Thank you also for dedicating one penny of the real estate tax to preserve affordable housing before it is lost through conversion and rent increases. We believe that nonprofits, businesses, faith communities, and others are ready to partner with the county and work to identify resources to devote to preserving and expanding affordable housing opportunities for our most vulnerable citizens. Only with this community-wide commitment can we assure that all of our lowest income neighbors have the opportunity to live in safe, appropriate, and affordable permanent housing – and thereby end homelessness.

The Council applauds the Board for establishing the mobile medical program and for continuing the successful medical respite program for homeless persons.

We will soon open our long-awaited – and final – homeless shelter: the Katherine (Kate) Hanley Shelter for families. Our community can celebrate what this needed resource will mean in reducing waiting lists for access to emergency shelter. We cannot turn parents away when in desperation they seek our help to keep their children safe and housed.

For the family shelters to be effective, efficient, and successful, our community must have permanent affordable housing, adequately funded, that reaches people with the very lowest incomes. The families who will be helped by the Hanley Shelter and those in our other shelters need affordable housing opportunities which do not exist today. It will, of course, take time to develop new affordable housing; nevertheless, there are steps that can be taken now to more quickly re-house families in need of emergency shelter and reduce reliance on expensive temporary housing. We need permanent solutions NOW.

We are not going to ask you this morning for new money — just wait; we will be back! However, we are going to ask you in a couple of minutes to take two small steps to begin to end homelessness. The “housing first” philosophy is a cornerstone of the strategic directions which you endorsed last month. We ask you to begin today to make this philosophy a real strategy to better serve homeless families and individuals.

“Housing first” means that families and single adults do not have to “become ready” for housing before it is available to them. Instead, they are put in housing and THEN assisted with support services that help them maintain that housing. This practice depends on building strong relationships with homeless persons. “Housing first” has proven to be a cost-effective means of ending chronic homelessness experienced by individuals.

In Fairfax County, the annual cost of an emergency shelter bed is about \$13,500. This does not include costs for case management, program services, or the cost of volunteer services to support homeless persons. The average housing subsidy cost through the Housing Choice Voucher program for efficiency and one-bedroom units in 2006 was \$7,400: more than \$6,000 less than the cost of housing a single person in an emergency

shelter bed. We can do a better job of assisting our neighbors in need, and save money. This is what moving from merely managing homelessness to ending it can mean for Fairfax. Let's get started!

RECOMMENDATION ONE: IMPLEMENT THE "HOUSING FIRST" STRATEGY FOR LOW-INCOME FAMILIES SHELTERED AT COUNTY EXPENSE.

We ask that the Board direct staff to begin implementation of the new "housing first" strategy outlined in the Plan to End Homelessness.

We can and should begin using a "housing first" philosophy in our services to families this spring – by establishing a priority to use units preserved through use of the one penny affordable housing funds, other governmental funds, and units available through County housing waiting lists for our low-income families with the greatest needs: those who reside in the Hanley Shelter and in other shelters, transitional housing, and temporary programs. This would be a change from our current system of getting families "ready to be housed". Instead, families would be rapidly re-housed into these units and the services provided at existing temporary programs would be offered in permanent housing.

Implementing the "housing first" philosophy for families is important, cost effective, and can be done now – with your leadership.

RECOMMENDATION TWO: BEGIN IMPLEMENTATION OF THE "HOUSING FIRST" STRATEGY FOR HOMELESS SINGLES BY DRAFTING AN IMPLEMENTATION PLAN FOR DEVELOPMENT OF AT LEAST FOUR SRO PROJECTS.

While we are addressing family homelessness through "housing first," we can also begin to address chronic homelessness experienced by single adults through a "housing first" approach using a new housing type – SROs.

We recommend that the Board act today to direct the County Executive to have his staff develop a plan for site-specific SRO developments in each of the four human services regions of Fairfax County, with the following basic elements:

1. These initial four projects need to be primarily targeted for very low-income persons — employed, elderly, disabled, or simply neighbors

in need — and within each project incorporate the “housing first” philosophy to move adults from shelters and the streets.

2. We further ask that the Board direct staff to report back with this SRO development plan by the beginning of July this year.
3. We ask that the plan identify what resources and county actions may be needed to ensure that development of at least one of the SRO projects be under way by the end of 2008.

Many of you have seen first hand the efforts by the faith community to keep our homeless neighbors safe from hypothermia this winter. The faith community’s response is a heartfelt, wonderful demonstration of the compassion that exists in our caring community. Hypothermia services are essential to keep our homeless singles alive, but this very important program, of course, is only a stop gap measure and does not address their need for permanent housing.

We cannot ask the faith community to operate hypothermia services as a long-term response to lack of access to appropriate housing.

Moreover, despite our community’s best efforts, not every homeless person survived the winter. We must continue to improve our outreach to persons in need as we develop permanent solutions to life-threatening lack of housing.

It is easy to forget that the lack of access to housing in seasons other than winter can be life-threatening for people with chronic and serious medical conditions. Let’s plan to move beyond “managing” the extreme wintertime need for basic shelter to “solving” all-season chronic homelessness of our adult citizens.

We can save scarce taxpayer resources and serve our homeless adults much better by developing SRO housing that includes units made available to homeless singles through a “housing first” philosophy.

Yes, this is ambitious; but, we are not going to win this effort to solve chronic homelessness by proposing timid measures. With determination and leadership of the Board, we — not just the county, but the business and faith communities and nonprofits — all can do this: end homelessness in our community.

Thank you.

FACTS

- The number of literally homeless persons continues to be high:

Year 2007	730 individuals	1,083 people in families	Total: 1,813
Year 2006	667 individuals	1,099 people in families	Total: 1,766
Year 2005	564 individuals	1,111 people in families	Total: 1,675
Year 2004	615 individuals	1,085 people in families	Total: 1,700

- A point-in-time survey was conducted on January 25, 2007, of all known homeless county residents. Beginning in 2007, this count reports on homeless persons living on the street, in shelters, or in transitional housing, who do not have a permanent, stable place to stay – they are literally homeless. The count does not include families and individuals who are at risk of becoming homeless, or who live in doubled- or tripled-up housing situations.
 - The count identified 1,083 persons in 307 homeless families, including 409 adults with 674 children under age 18. Average family size was 3.53.
 - The count identified 730 literally homeless single individuals, an increase of 9.4% over 2006, from 667 to 730 persons.

- An additional 242 individuals, and 31 people in families, who were accounted for in the survey, are considered “formerly homeless”, since they have permanent housing with supports. These persons are tracked in the survey because without the housing and supports most would become homeless again. Maintaining people in this housing prevents them from returning to homelessness.

- Housing challenges for working singles and persons with disabilities have increased with rising rents and limited subsidies for single persons. In September 2006, the HUD fair market rent for an efficiency apartment increased by nearly 5% to \$995 per month, and the one-bedroom fair market rent rose by 5% to \$1,134 per month.

- The fair market rent cost for two bedroom and larger units also rose by 5%. In September 2006, the fair market rent for a two-bedroom unit was \$1,286, for a three-bedroom unit it rose to \$1,659 per month, and for a four-bedroom unit it was \$2,171 per month.

- The waiting list for the family shelters has increased to 80 or more families, but these shelters can only accommodate about 35 families at one time. It can take three to four months to get into a family shelter. The new Katherine K. Hanley family shelter will help to address this need, and the “housing first” philosophy is a strategy for minimizing the need for people to even go to a shelter.

- Income data was obtained for 80% of the single and family households. Of these, 73% of families and 92% of singles have income below 30% of the area median, with over half of the families and more than 80% of singles below poverty. The availability of affordable housing – through production, preservation, or subsidy – is essential to ending homelessness and preserving housing stability for these households.

COMMUNITY COUNCIL ON HOMELESSNESS

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Mr. Louis Edwards, Citizen

Ms. Diane Engster, Community Services Board

Ms. Donna Foster, Citizen

Rev. Clevester Hawkins, Faith in Action, The First Baptist Church of Vienna

Ms. Carol Hawn, Federation of Citizen's Association

Mr. Verdia L. Haywood, Deputy County Executive

Mr. Dean Klein, Freddie Mac Foundation

Ms. Sheri Link, VCH Board & North Star Network

Ms. Kae Rivers Livsey, City of Fairfax

Ms. Pam Michell, New Hope Housing, *Vice Chair*

Mr. G. Bud Pope, VOA-Bailey's Community Shelter

Ms. Lynn Thomas, Christian Relief Services

Ms. Sarah White, FACETS

Mr. Peyton Whiteley, Legal Services of Northern Virginia

Ms. Gerry Williams, Citizen

Ms. Linda Wimpey, Citizen, *Chair*