

HOMELESS OVERSIGHT

COMMITTEE

ANNUAL MESSAGE TO THE

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Fairfax County, Virginia

March 10, 2003

Sharon Kelso, Peyton Whiteley, Carla Taylor

Co-Chairs

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ANNUAL MESSAGE TO THE FAIRFAX COUNTY
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

MARCH 10, 2003

Good morning, Chairman Hanley, members of the board, County Executive Griffin. My name is Carla Taylor, with me are Sharon Kelso and Peyton Whitely, co-chairs of the Homeless Oversight Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to present the Committee's Annual Message.

Last year, we advised you about action needed for the two highest priorities identified by the community for homeless services: opening an additional family shelter; and addressing the special needs of domestic violence victims. We are pleased to be able to report that, thanks to the leadership and efforts of this Board, the County Executive, the Deputy County Executive, members of County staff and others, meaningful progress has been made (even during this fiscally challenging time).

The progress on each of these priorities began with the support and direction of the members of the Board of Supervisors. On behalf of the County's families and children, we thank and commend each of you, and the County Executive, for your decisive leadership in developing plans for a family shelter for western Fairfax. Since our message to you in March of 2002, a site was identified, an initial concept-plan developed, community informational meetings held, and substantial funding committed for the project. By this time next year, we are hopeful that the new shelter will be in operation and all of you will have had an opportunity to visit a facility that may be a model for other communities to study and replicate. We are particularly pleased to note that even members of the public who expressed reservations about whether the identified site was the best possible one, expressed support for the County's efforts to address the needs of the homeless. It should also be noted that the quality of the facilities and services for homeless families in other locations provided credible reassurance to the neighbors of the new facility.

We also commend the recent formation of a Domestic Violence Policy and Coordinating Council, and believe it will prove to be an extremely effective tool in tackling this insidious threat to public safety and community resilience. Because the safety of victims is fundamental to any such community response, the HOC urges the Board of Supervisors to persevere in its efforts to expand the number of emergency beds for domestic violence victims and achieve its original target of 36 additional beds.

In our last two messages, we also spoke briefly about the needs of homeless adults and children, with special medical needs that cannot be adequately addressed in the current shelter system. To date, there has been discussion among service providers about strategies for addressing this problem, but more comprehensive dialogue and planning is needed. The Homeless Oversight Committee recommends that the Board of Supervisors facilitate this process by establishing an appropriately representative planning and advisory committee, inclusive of the health care community, in order to further explore the issue and develop a plan for the best and most cost-effective means of providing services to this population.

As we have just laid out, there is much our community can be grateful for. However, the challenges we face are also great: I don't know how many of you have seen the movie, but, Mario Morino of Venture Philanthropy Partners recently characterized the current environment for community-based non-profits as "The Perfect Storm". Let's consider that scenario for a moment. Everyone on that ship was talented. They knew their business. They also recognized the danger and took every precaution they could to respond to it. But as you know, at the end of the movie, all were lost and never heard from again. Likewise, the resilience of this community faces a very real and serious threat by the convergence of a variety of forces in the environment. The possibility of war; upheaval in the post-911 economy; the redirection of federal funding away from human services; the state's current budget crisis; the proposed cuts in the county's FY04 budget; and drastic reductions in charitable giving certainly create the picture of a "storm" moving in, that threatens to undermine the viability of the county's principle partner in the delivery of human services: the non-profit community. This is especially so for our Continuum of Care for the homeless, whose interdependence means that reductions in any one organization effects the others. Recent changes in HUD funding decisions further exacerbate the problem. Already, one local non-profit failed to receive renewal funding from HUD for a significant transitional housing program for homeless families. The prospect of future

federal funding cuts to the county's inventory of transitional housing beds for homeless individuals and families is of grave concern for the entire continuum.

Given this scenario, it is more critical than ever that the County step up its efforts to increase the supply of permanent affordable housing — through any means at our disposal. As the attached fact sheet demonstrates, there are still substantial numbers of homeless individuals and families. The point-in time survey can only record those homeless that we can see and touch, and who meet the HUD criteria. It does NOT include those who are doubled up with friends and relatives; nor does it count those who had not yet come to the attention of one of the involved agencies. Unfortunately, we can take little comfort in the slight reduction in overall numbers, as they are partially driven by the size of families being served. (This year's enumeration showed smaller families being served in some programs on the date of the survey.) And while a 100% lease-up of housing choice vouchers (Section 8) demonstrates effective strategies undertaken this year, it also means that many families in transitional housing units have no place to go. And if they don't move on, then the families in shelters have no place to go. And if they don't move on, then the families in motels have no place to go...and so on.

If this wonderful community is to sustain its vibrant economy, we must find a way to provide an adequate supply of affordable housing. Creative strategies, public-private partnerships, regulatory relief and other inducements must be more aggressively utilized to develop opportunities for the service workers and support staff who represent the greatest numbers of new employees, but whose incomes don't come close to affording private market housing. Many of these workers are graduates of our homeless continuum of care, or recipients of other county services, who must contend daily for the goal of self-sufficiency.

Therefore, the Homeless Oversight Committee wishes to issue what we call the **Ten for Ten Community Challenge**. This challenge calls upon the Board of Supervisors to undertake individually, and collectively, an active leadership role, in partnership with community representatives from each magisterial district, in order to achieve the development or preservation of at least ten units of affordable housing in each magisterial district in the County within the next fiscal year. We are looking to you to use the power of your office to measurably increase or preserve the affordable housing stock for the people we've described, beginning in fiscal year 2004, with a renewed annual commitment each year. Should you choose to accept this challenge, the members of the Homeless Oversight Committee stand ready to assist you in any way possible.

Thank you.

FACTS

- Homelessness has remained consistently high during the past six years:

Year	1998	1,658 total homeless
Year	1999	1,789 total homeless
Year	2000	2,013 total homeless
Year	2001	1,935 total homeless
Year	2002	2,067 total homeless
Year	2003	1,944 total homeless

- A survey conducted on January 22, 2003, of all known homeless county residents identified a homeless population of 1,944: 769 single individuals, and 417 adults with 758 children in 335 homeless families. These numbers do not account for families and individuals at risk of homelessness who are temporarily housed in doubled or tripled housing situations.
- The waiting list for the family shelters has continued at around 60 families during the past year, but these shelters can only accommodate about 35 families at one time. It still takes an average of three months to get into a family shelter.
- The County has continued to house a limited number of families in motels. This is an expensive and undesirable alternative to shelter, but may be the only option available in a crisis.
- The cost of market housing in rental complexes continues to rise. The average two-bedroom rent was \$1,219 in January 2002 (a 3.2% increase since January 2001) and the vacancy rate was 5.5%. Although the availability of units has improved slightly overall, most of these are newer units with rent at the high end. There continues to be a tight market for more affordable units.
- There is good news and not so good news in the County's Housing Choice Voucher Program. The program was 100% under lease in October 2002, and the landlord outreach effort has been successful. But the lack of additional vouchers means that homeless families in shelters and transitional housing are not able to move to permanent stable housing. And proposed changes in federal housing programs could *reduce* the funds available to provide housing assistance.
- The need for housing counseling, homeless prevention services, and emergency assistance has continued to increase. The number of requests for emergency financial assistance for rent/mortgage and utilities increased by 30% between calendar years 2000 and 2001, and by an additional 9% between calendar years 2001 and 2002. It is becoming increasingly difficult to meet these needs with declining resources for prevention services.