Meeting notes from the District 4-Community Meeting
10-Tear Strategy to End Homelessness
City of Long Beach

Date: Saturday October 15, 2005
Time: 1-3 PM
Location: Long Beach Health & Human Services Dept.
2525 Grand Ave. City of Long Beach, 3rd District (Patrick O'Donnell, Council Member)

Opening Remarks

Joe Colletti, Consultant from the Institute for Urban Research and Development (IURD), made the opening remarks and explained the purpose of the meeting. It was explained that several jurisdictions throughout the country have been putting together strategies to reduce homelessness in cities. Part of their success has been due to their ability to obtain feedback from all segments of cities unlike ever before. The meeting was called in order to gather comments from the general public in the 3rd District of the City of Long Beach concerning homelessness to inform a Working Group and ultimately a Steering Committee established by the Mayor to make recommendations to the City of Long Beach 10-Year Strategy to End Homelessness. Attendees were encouraged to fill out a Volunteer Survey if they wished to become part of the Working Group that will advise the Steering Committee on homelessness issues. Attendees were also encouraged to take a Public Comment sheet for future comments.

The following items were passed out to encourage further input:

a. Volunteer Survey
b. Public Comment Sheet
c. Explanation of the 10 year strategy

Mr. Colletti explained the agenda and process for the meeting. First, individuals were encouraged to take a card to speak publicly. Second, there would be time for focused discussion. Rules of order were explained to the participants. No individual spoke for more than 5 min.

Summary of Public Comments:

Josh Butler - Resident: Stated that large amount of homeless end up in the small motels in Long Beach and end up paying anywhere from $40-$60 a night. Long Beach receives about $600,000 a year from these clients but none of this money is returned to help these people. Long Beach has to be committed from beginning to end if this process is to work. Also what is being done for those who have no skills or the means to move? Many times the answer is they choose to live in crowded situations in order to make it. Need an attitude change for the process to work

Jolivette Antwine – Homeless Resident: He stated he became homeless due to a bad divorce. His ex demanded more money than he could afford to pay. By the time he got

done paying what she demanded he had about $7 to live off of. He was forced to quit his job and ended up on the streets. He went around doing odd jobs to make money. His desire is to one day meet Congress and tell them his story in hopes to change the way LA treats the homeless.

Annette La Barca - Homeless Advocate: Stated that the Council meeting members voted on a "Housing Fund" which was to take 80% of a trust fund and put it towards the "workforce" housing for people that earn $66k/yr and 20% for those with a lower income. However her feeling is that "affordable housing" has to go deeper than a tent from WalMart. What do we need to change to make affordable housing happen? We cannot keep thinking as we are.

Maggie – Homeless Resident: Stated that she has been homeless off & on since about 2001. Physical and mental health issues kept her from being able to work full time. In attempt to get SSI she did not qualify for many other programs. She does not like the "shelter" atmosphere due to all the drug and alcohol issues she feels are there. Her issues are not drug & alcohol and feels there is not enough understanding of the mental health people. More than drug users are homeless.

Gary Shelton - HSAC: Stated that he is very interested in early prevention. At times the issues seem so big we get overwhelmed and start looking at the future and how we can do better tomorrow. An example he used was the smoking problem, it then was decided to deal with it in early childhood and teach them about the affects of smoking. The city wants to take large buildings and make them into condos to create more housing. But the bottom line is we need to look outside the box. This plan seems it will be good in 75-100 years. What about right now? We can't push this to the future. We have to do something today.

Summary of Focused Discussion
Joe explained that around 200 jurisdictions are close to completing this 10 yr plan. 10%-15% are done already. We want to use some of their experiences of course but more new ideas as well. There are things we really need to focus on such as Homeless Prevention. Many problems stem from low income going into families. Many are on the edge of Homelessness. They are able to utilize resources such as rental assistance, childcare assistance, transportation assistance etc.to try and keep them from becoming homeless.

Nadize: Stated that she is a Vocational Rehab Consultant and she feels there needs to be more training of these people. Training in more skills other than just the job they have. Some are one paycheck away from having to leave their homes. If they get sick or disabled they are pretty much immediately forced to leave their homes due to no paycheck. We need more long-term projects, something that will carry them for 5-10 years.

Annette: stated that she is concerned with the young people who have to leave foster home and have no training or home to go to. We need to send them to school to get

training in preparation for leaving their foster or group homes.

Nadize: explained that there is a need to have some kind of contract with the homeless so when they get the training then find placement they can in some way repay some of the assistance they received so it's not a total hand out.

Maggie: stated that she is very concerned about the kids who are coming out of these homes are already victims of abuse of some sort.

Joe: explained discharge planning - in these places foster homes, group homes or Vet placements are supposed to be doing a discharge plan which includes placement when they leave. We know that it is out there but also know it is not always being completed the way it should be completed.

Josh: People don't usually end up on the streets after missing one paycheck. But over a period of time after spending most of their check on rent, food and health care they have nothing left to live off of. 60% of Long Beach are renters. Therefore 60% of Long Beach are at risk of becoming homeless. The landlords are able to raise rent so high that many are not able to continue with all the raises. Landlords need to be held responsible for the skyrocketing rent they are requiring renters to pay.

Joe: Disability is a great cause of homelessness. Permanent or not their SSI or SSDI has to be totally used to pay rent and utilities. If someone is disabled for 6 months they will never make their bills on the disability they receive. "Just Cause Evictions" are supposed to build a plan to keep landlords accountable for their evictions. They cannot evict for no good reason.

Gary: Homeless Services Advisory Board is learning where the greatest needs are. For example several years ago the Vet's were the greatest need. Then the Villages came up with several homes to house them. Now it seems that the victims of domestic violence and men with children are a great need. Are we able to target these groups for special services?

Joe: Homeless prevention is more cost effective than trying to find housing for clients after they are already homeless.

Mary: Are there any stats out there tracking how many of the homeless who have mental issues and just need to be reunited with their families?

Corinne: It is part of the intake, trying to find out if there are family members who are able or willing to help them however remember many have already burnt their bridges with their families.

Mary: Are services used to reunite or how do you decide who to help first?

Corinne: We do not have that as a first priority. We help the ones who need it the most

first. But many options available they do not wish to utilize.

Maggie: Mental health client's families really need education. They do not know how to respond to their family members with mental issues. Same goes for the city and county workers. The police have had me in handcuffs like a criminal. I'm not like the drug addict or drunk they are dealing with. Mental health people have much different needs.

Josh: I feel there needs to be given more time for those who are going to be evicted. 30 days is not enough time to find another place, save first and last as well as the costs for the move itself.

Gary: Once the clock of eviction starts ticking people tend to panic. Are there markers out here that they can run to once they find themselves in this situation?

Joe: There are some markers out there but not always attainable. There is much room for improvement with the DPSS. But they are limited with their resources as well. The city has made progress but a long ways to go still.

Jack Smith: It seems to me that the clients aren't always being allowed to make up their own minds. The people behind the desk seems to at times think they need to push on them what they think that the client should do. I think we need to lay out the options and allow them to come up with their own decision from there.

Josh: Many times at the Social Services we do not always have the flexibility we want. We cannot give them the options we would like.

Ibtisan: Stated that there are many categories of homelessness. Many are not aware they are falling into this. I'm suggesting that all professionals who work with people be aware of what is out there for homeless clients. Example if I go to my Dr. And complain of domestic violence he knows who to tell me to call and what I should do.

Jack Smith: Stated that funding is a problem.
Joe: Stated 85%-90% of the homeless are not still homeless in 6 months to a year later. That's the good news...the bad news is that they are quickly replaced by others.

Annette: explained that she feels we waste so much time on resources that "criminalize" the homeless. All the time and money it takes for the police to write a ticket, they go to court to respond...all the people who are being paid in the courts etc.when the money used to pay them could be used by the city to help the problem. We are wasting resources on all of these people who are harassing the homeless.

Joe: Stated back in 1980 when homelessness increased we thought it would be helpful to give out food and clothing. We were labeled as the "Decade of Compassion" because we thought we were doing such a good thing in giving out all these things and providing showers. But it didn't fix the problem, which is why I feel now it is much worse, but we didn't know then what we know now. We have to look outside the box and look deeper

than the surface issues.

Annette: stated that it is her opinion that those of you who have been doing this for years should have more answers. Maybe we need new people with new ideas because it's obviously not working whatever you've been doing.

Gary: asked is there even housing available?

Josh: explained with 60% of Long Beach owned by landlords it's a landlords market out there. Building more housing has to be something we think about but there is great resistance to this idea. I feel we need to accelerate the process to housing model.

Gary: explained one of the resistances is that creating housing will increase density. If we can create housing we will decrease density.

Joe: stated the idea had to be affordable. We have to address "Preservation, Rehabilitation, Construction". Housing is first but then we have to help them maintain...hopefully avoid "shelters:

Jack: explained one of the problems is zoning. Zoning may not permit these buildings. They may need to be rewritten.

Gary: stated the ordinances need to be re-evaluated...SRO's are not allowed right now.

Annette: stated that we can keep talking about all this and go through with it but if the City & County resources continue to harass the homeless we are still wasting money there.

Josh: stated no one sees it as a waste and it's not a priority either. Past mistakes have messed us up here. Some have said "I own a home by the side of the road so I don't care"

Gary: explained that public private partnerships are a way to create. We have to get the cooperation of county and Corporations to work together.

Ibtisan: stated we need to start empowering clients to do for themselves. Teach life skills and self-esteem. Teach them how to budget and avoid wasting money on drugs and alcohol. This will help sustain stability.

Antoine: explained some of us have burnt our bridges with our families and have been told we are going to cause them bankruptcy. I'm choosing to not expect from my family anymore but rather to work with my own hands and be prosperous.

Joe: Explained that we didn't get to talk about chronic homelessness but that is when someone is homeless for a yr or more and they have a disability. What some cities have started doing is focusing their plans to deal with them. They have developed teams to

bring services to those on the streets instead of waiting for them to come in for services.

Maggie: stated that she thinks a coordinated effort with county medical services to help get the information people need to get services started quicker is very important. We shouldn't have to fight with the Dr. all the time to get the information to the SSI office in order to get our services started. I became homeless because I couldn't physically maintain my job. Then I was forced to have min. wage jobs and was not able to come close to paying for rent and other bills.

Jack: stated he feels that the plans need to support the coordination of Faith based agencies and the community. Faith based can do things that the city cannot always do. But if they are willing to work together then they may accomplish more.

Joe ended the meeting and invited everyone to the next meeting on the 19th.