Congress to pass a long-negotiated, multibillion dollar capital package. Congress also ignored the state Supreme Court’s order to boost K-12 education funding, garnering only $58 million in new money. Gov. Jay Inslee had asked for $200 million in January, and the McCleary decision mandates billions more by 2018.

Additionally, legislators adjourned the 60-day session shortly before midnight without agreeing on changes to the teacher evaluation program considered necessary to retain a federal education waiver and reconciling laws regulating the medical and recreational marijuana markets.

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At Least 3,123 People in King County Had No Shelter in January

by Nicole Macri

The One Night Count of homeless people in King County took place early on the morning of January 24th. 3,123 men, women and children had no shelter in King County on that night, an increase of 14% over those found without shelter last year. During the 2013 Count, volunteers found 2,736 people surviving outside without shelter.

Teams of volunteers with trained leaders were dispatched from ten locations throughout the county to count every person they saw outside during a single night in January. Approximately 800 volunteers counted people trying to survive in cars, tents, by riding all night buses, waiting in hospital emergency rooms, or curling up in blankets under bridges or in doorways.

The Seattle/King County Coalition on Homelessness, an independent coalition of organizations and individuals that works on homelessness issues in our region, organizes the count, now in its 34th year.

“This year’s Count is an unmistakable call to action,” said Coalition Executive Director Alison Eisinger. “As teams handed us their tally sheets, they described the people behind the numbers: a teenager sleeping in a doorway with a suitcase, a family-size tent under the roadway with a stroller parked outside, a man who proudly showed off the garden he made around his campsite. We ask everyone to call their state lawmakers and urge them to fund housing, shelter, and services. There is no overstating the urgent need in our own backyards.”

The primary purpose of the One Night Count is to document how many people lack basic shelter; it does not include those who are staying in shelters and transitional housing, who are counted separately. Many communities across the country participate in such “point-in-time” counts. The data inform elected officials and planners at all levels of government about the extent of homelessness in their community.

“It’s heartening to see over 800 people take to the streets to count and raise awareness of their neighbors who have nowhere to sleep at night but a makeshift shelter, a bus, a frosty car,” said Mark Putnam, Director of the Committee to End Homelessness in King County, a regional collaborative of homelessness providers, advocates, and funders. “Tonight is an indicator of both the needs of the homeless in our community but also the compassion of our community. We serve more than 9,000 households a year in our shelter and transitional housing programs, and we need to do more to meet the needs of those still living outside.”

Nicole Macri is Director of Administration at DESC and a volunteer with the One Night Count. For more information visit www.homelessinfo.org.
One Night Count of an Every Day Crisis

By Glory Okon

As I woke up to the sound of my alarm in the wee hours of Friday, January 28th, I began to reflect on what possessed me to make such a commitment. It was 1 a.m. and I had only an hour to get dressed, chug coffee, and hurry downtown for the team check-in. I missed every single bus heading downtown that would allow me to arrive even remotely on time. Down on my luck and freezing beyond belief, I began to walk down James Street towards Pioneer Square. Even in the early hours of the morning, it was hard to miss just how many people live on the street. I passed men wandering the streets with large packs saddled to their backs, and various individuals curled up in entryways with a thin tarp covering their presumably cold bodies. Needless to say my rumblings about how early it was and having to walk downtown ceased.

I arrived to the One Night Count Headquarters shortly after 2 a.m., and scanned the tight room, full of volunteers, for my Low Income Housing Institute teammates (LIHI). Huddled in the center of the room I found our small group consisting of employees, interns, volunteers and affiliates of LIHI. I listened closely as the team leads listed the protocol for counting homeless folks: do not wake anybody up or lift up tarps to see if there is more than one person; cars, campers and tents only count as two, even if there is an entire family in there, and so forth. I nodded, trying to retain as much information as possible! After a quick speech of welcome and thanks from the director, we headed on our way. Sure enough, right as we left the building, huddled in the corner was a young gentleman trying to get some sleep, a small affirmation of why this count is so incredibly important.

As my group arrived at our designated sliver of Ballard, by Swedish Hospital, we ventured through the streets, armed with flashlights and clipboards, to record our tallies. We encountered a camper and it was clear that there was more than one person residing in the camper, but no way to tell just how many, so just two tally marks for them. A gentleman aimlessly walking down the street, and parked cars with steamy windows indicated how serious homelessness is in our community. We wandered down the streets and alley ways in our section with a heightened awareness of where homeless populations are forced to seek shelter. A Seattle University student and I began a conversation on homelessness, gentrification and social justice. No longer were these the issues we once discussed in the classroom. The circumstances surrounding our exchange brought a cold clarity to the issues.

After surveying the last street in our section, double checking the map to ensure we had covered our entire designated area, we headed to our cars. Despite my relief to be soon crawling back into my bed, I knew there was still work to done. With the count over, the final tally came in at 3,123, women, men and children living on the streets in the coldest and earliest hours of the morning.

Although we are currently in year nine of the ten-year plan to end homelessness, there are still an increasing number of people without shelter in King County. The One Night Count, hosted by the Seattle/King County Coalition on Homelessness (SKCCH) is integral in providing an accurate depiction of just how much work needs to be done to ensure that no one is without a home. In order to complete a thorough and accurate count, over 800 volunteers are divided into groups and are responsible for counting designated areas in King County in the early morning of the coldest time of the year.

As my group arrived at our designated sliver of Ballard, by Swedish Hospital, we ventured through the streets, armed with flashlights and clipboards, to record our tallies. We encountered a camper and it was clear that there was more than one person residing in the camper, but no way to tell just how many, so just two tally marks for them. A gentleman aimlessly walking down the street, and parked cars with steamy windows indicated how serious homelessness is in our community. We wandered down the streets and alley ways in our section with a heightened awareness of where homeless populations are forced to seek shelter. A Seattle University student and I began a conversation on homelessness, gentrification and social justice. No longer were these the issues we once discussed in the classroom. The circumstances surrounding our exchange brought a cold clarity to the issues.

After surveying the last street in our section, double checking the map to ensure we had covered our entire designated area, we headed to our cars. Despite my relief to be soon crawling back into my bed, I knew there was still work to done. With the count over, the final tally came in at 3,123, women, men and children living on the streets in the coldest and earliest hours of the morning. Though this count of one night is over for this year, homelessness an every single day and night reality for the counted. The One Night Count demonstrates that advocacy to end homelessness needs widespread support and action year-round. We all need to take part in helping our community and ensuring that basic needs are met.

Glory Okon served as a MLK VISTA Volunteer at the Low Income Housing Institute.
King County Housing Authority Leads Effort to Preserve Subsidized Apartments

By Rhonda Rosenberg

When a portfolio of nine privately owned Section 8-assisted housing complexes located in five counties across Washington state was offered for sale last spring, the King County Housing Authority spearheaded a collaborative effort to purchase it. The housing authorities of Grays Harbor County, Yakima, and Chelan County and the City of Wenatchee participated in assuring the preservation of a total of 337 homes within the various communities.

The unusual collective strategy—which represents the most wide-ranging state initiative to date to preserve existing subsidized housing—was necessary because the seller wanted to dispose of the portfolio as a single sale. Failure to acquire even one of the nine properties would have resulted in failure to preserve any of the properties. The current owner, who was also the initial developer and long-term owner of the properties, worked with the housing authority to try to assure long-term preservation of these apartments as affordable housing.

“Preserving existing subsidized housing is the most cost-effective way to maintain the supply of affordable rental apartments,” said Stephen Norman, executive director of the King County Housing Authority. “Working with the state Department of Commerce, King County government and housing authorities across the state, we have been able to protect 337 low-income households, the vast majority of them senior citizens, from being forced from their homes—and at the same time, have preserved for the long-term, crucial local housing resources.”

All of the properties are senior housing communities with the exception of two smaller family properties in King County. Four of the complexes are located in King County, one property is in Hoquiam, one is in Yakima, one is in Bremerton, and two are located in Wenatchee. On Dec. 2, the acquisition of the four King County properties was completed. The non-King County buildings will close in separate transactions by the end of March 2014.

The four properties acquired by KCHA are: Bellevue Manor in Bellevue, Patricia Harris Manor in Redmond, Northwood Square in Auburn, and Vashon Terrace in Vashon Island. Together they are home to 107 seniors, more than 80 percent of whom are aged 70 or older, and 40 families with children.

KCHA is acting as lead purchaser on behalf of the other local housing authorities for the five properties situated outside of King County. The combined purchase price for all nine developments is $28.7 million. At closing, KCHA’s interest in these purchase agreements will be assigned to the appropriate respective local housing authority.

The preservation of these complexes is important because of the populations they serve, their highly desirable locations, and the federal funding they leverage. The average annual income of residents in the seven senior communities is approximately $10,000. The average annual income of residents in the two family communities is around $14,000. Statewide, the demand for housing affordable to low-income households greatly surpasses the supply and the need is growing, especially for seniors.

Each of the complexes is well-sited, located within walking distance of transportation, shopping and other amenities. The Bellevue site is one-half block off Old Main Street.

The Section 8 contracts that will be preserved through these acquisitions provide about $2.3 million in annual rent subsidies for these units, keeping them affordable.

Between 1965 and 1990, the federal government subsidized private developers to build and operate rental housing for low-income families and disabled and elderly households living on fixed incomes. These developers executed long-term rental subsidy agreements under the Section 8 program. The initial contracts on each of the nine properties in this portfolio have already expired; subsequent
Seattle Architect Leaves Lavish Practice to Help the Homeless

By Joshua Okrent

As the principal of his own architecture form, Seattle architect Rex Hohlbein had been designing luxurious homes for wealthy clients for more than two decades when his life began to shift. Hohlbein decided recently to give up his architecture practice in order to work full-time with people who live on the street. His life may never have taken this unexpected detour had he not met a man named Chiaka.

On a morning about three years ago, Hohlbein was biking to his office in north Seattle when he saw a man sleeping outside. Something compelled him to stop. Hohlbein tapped the man’s shoulder and told him that after he woke up, he should come by his Fremont office to have a cup of coffee and use the bathroom. The man did, and introduced himself as Chiaka.

“He asked me if he could read me a children’s book story that he was writing. And he pulled out 20 pages of crumpled up 8½-by-11 [piece of paper] and I thought, ‘Oh my God, I’ve got to listen to 20 pages,’” Hohlbein said. “But about three-quarters of the way through, I teared up. It was so beautiful, and in that moment I was just so taken by his story and his power of storytelling.”

Chiaka, Hohlbein learned, was also an artist. Hohlbein offered to store his art and let him sleep in the shed next to his office. He then started a Facebook page to highlight Chiaka’s artwork.

“[Chiaka] had been living on the streets of Seattle for 10 years, according to Hohlbein, and his family had finally found him. Chiaka’s family flew him back to Pittsburgh. Hohlbein dropped him off at Sea-Tac Airport and had a good cry. Soon he realized he wanted to reach out to other people on the street, and created another Facebook page called Homeless in Seattle.

Hohlbein takes and shares beautiful black-and-white portraits of the homeless people he meets and shares their stories in little snippets. When he first began reaching out to the homeless, Hohlbein decided he wanted to use his camera to show the full dimensions of people living on the margins.

“There was this beginning thought that I wanted to somehow represent people that were living on the street, show their beauty—their physical beauty but also their beauty of person,” Hohlbein said. And if they need something he posts their needs as well. Nowadays, donations come streaming into Hohlbein’s office, and he shares equally striking photos of the donors along with their stories.

Over time, Hohlbein’s office has morphed into a refuge. These days, Hohlbein’s office is crammed with things you’d probably never find in another architecture office. Stacked from floor to ceiling in one corner are brand-new REI sleeping bags. There are also hand warmers, boxes of granola bars, travel-sized bottles of shampoo, boxes heaped with jackets, socks and boots. And all day long, people knock on his door, or just walk in.

Hohlbein recently teamed up with WSU architecture students to design backyard transitional homes. Called Welcoming Individuals with Transitional Homes, or WITH, the graduate-level course centers around designing transitional homes, a makeshift mother-in-law type of structure, to be built in the backyards of two Seattle-area homes.

The plan is to eventually build the structures in partnership with the community group Homeless in Seattle and allow the homeowners to rent them out to people in transition. But the project isn’t just about the few who’ll gain housing as a result.

“You would think [this] is about people that are homeless. But in fact, the whole push is about people that are not homeless, people that are living in homes,” said Hohlbein. “Really, the big push here is to change the hearts and thoughts of people that are living in our communities, living in houses.”

“If you are giving love to somebody, you are only doing good,” Hohlbein said. “And the reason is because if someone feels loved, they have a much greater chance of moving their life forward.”

Hohlbein is in the process of launching a nonprofit group called Facing Homelessness to keep his own efforts moving forward. He’s currently trying to raise funds for the group. But he says his biggest mission is to get people to just say hello to those they see on the street.

Rex Hohlbein is founder of Homeless in Seattle. See his work at www.quirksee.org.
Homeless Youth Need a Continuum of Care

By Judy Lightfoot

What does a homeless child or teenager need, not just to sleep in safety but to become a self-sufficient adult? Studies recommend building a research-based continuum of housing and services, and federal funding is now channeled to regions that unite providers into such systems. In King County, the Homeless Youth and Young Adult (YYA) Initiative has joined efforts by the Committee to End Homelessness to turn fragmented homeless programs into well-targeted, economical continuums of care.

The YYA Initiative’s Comprehensive Plan has begun by promoting agency coordination, fostering program improvements, collecting relevant data and, of course, marshaling and directing the funds necessary to drive change. Treating youth homelessness separately, rather than lumping youngsters in with homeless people of all ages, is aimed at meeting the distinctive needs of young people.

The goal isn’t just managing youth homelessness, as if it’s OK for kids to live on the streets as long as not too many minors get frostbite. The goal is reducing the causes of YYA homelessness. The most common are domestic crises in which parents give up on their kids or vice-versa; juvenile justice and foster care systems that abandon youth who serve their time or “age out”; and poor medical care for kids with addictions or psychiatric disorders. Related factors are barriers to finishing school, unemployment and a chronic scarcity of shelters and housing.

A 2020 deadline focuses stakeholders on working with strategic efficiency. “Some kids will always run away from home,” says Megan Gibbard, project manager for the new Initiative. But when they do, “there will be a response system so that they will not have to spend one night on the streets.”

According to the federal plan focused on youth and young adult homelessness, young adults need a constellation of services adding up to something like what other kids get from their church, school, team, after-school or summer job, and, of course, their family. They need education, employment training, health care and practice in the adolescent-stage skills and behavior necessary for functioning in society.

In short, most homeless kids don’t need a safety net. They need paths they can take to maturity.

Many programs in our region already combine some essential services for homeless youngsters, such as shelter or housing with pathways to high school degrees or employment. For example, Friends of Youth (FOY) in Kirkland is building new YYA housing. Simultaneously YouthBuild teaches FOY kids construction skills, and a subcontractor working on the new facility gives them hands-on experience.

A year-old Shelter to Housing partnership between ROOTS Young Adult Shelter and the YMCA combines housing with employment assistance. The program moves a number of homeless 18-26-year-olds who bed down at ROOTS into apartments scattered throughout the city. They receive rent subsidies in return for following a YMCA regimen of job training, monthly meetings with their case manager and compliance with mental health or addiction programs if they need them. The rent subsidies shrink as their incomes rise. Now, 47 of the 51 young adults accepted into the program are housed and 38 are employed, says YMCA housing director Kristen Brennan.

An innovative jobs program, launched last fall as a pilot, invites young people at the ROOTS shelter to work in the Clean Alley Project (CAP), funded by the city’s department of neighborhoods. Working in small groups supervised by Street Youth Ministries (SYM) and paid a minimum wage, they clean up U District alleys twice a week for three months. They also learn how to write resumes, manage time and navigate conflicts with bosses. Participants who prove job-ready get an interview with PCC Natural Markets.

“The best-kept secret is that housing isn’t the Number One motivator [for homeless youngsters],” says ROOTS director Kristine Cunningham. Their first priority “is employment, to show they have a place

Youthcare’s Orion Center in Downtown Seattle is part of a continuum of care for homeless youth and young adults.

continued on next page
in the world and people who recognize their worth.” A service program, she
continues, should “attract them with work, and while they do that, provide housing” so they can be ready for the workplace each morning.

These programs have proven effective, as far as they go. However, King County still has a serious, ongoing shortage of both emergency shelter and transitional homes for youth. The need for housing and shelter could overwhelm the YYA Initiative if its other strategies fail to significantly reduce the size of the homeless youth population.

One Comprehensive Plan priority is adding YYA shelters in South Seattle and South King County, where it’s almost impossible for providers to find emergency services for teens. A new six-bed shelter at Auburn Youth Resources fills up instantly, according to program manager Joe Woolley, who says that about 20 Auburn-area kids under 18 are still sleeping rough every night, and that 25 young adults currently live on the riverbanks.

Stable housing for homeless young people is also in very short supply. The county’s new strategy for doling out scarce placements is being overseen by Youth Housing Connection, launched six months ago. YHC’s intake process, called Coordinated Engagement, is familiar in homeless family systems but new to homeless youth programs. Young adults can go to any one of nine different homeless youth organizations for an intake interview and get their names on a list for housing. YHC gives priority to the most vulnerable kids, like those in grave danger from untreated health problems. YHC housing comes with supports such as mental health or addictions counseling and other medical care.

One bright spot in the housing picture is that unlike homeless adults, youth don’t require long-term homes unless they’re disabled. Most youth housing opens up as kids mature and move on with their lives. “If they can get the right services, they should be OK living [for a while] in a crummy studio with roommates, the way we did,” says United Way’s impact manager Courtney Noble. Housing programs for youngsters “can be more creative and flexible than ones for adults.”

Coordination has further advantages, like lessening unintentional service duplication and filling gaps by diversifying offerings. Diversity in programming is important given that a one-size-fits-all approach doesn’t work for homeless youngsters. Fully 80-85 percent return to their families within a week, while fewer than 10 percent remain disconnected for as long as two months and only 5-10 percent become homeless long-term.

Improving data collection and coordinating services also helps to assure that funds are prudently spent. Studies show that programs which house homeless youngsters and guide them toward social and financial self-sufficiency reduce costly long-term demands they would otherwise make on our corrections and health care systems as adults.

“The time to jump in and try to solve the problem is while people’s brains and social skills are forming,” says Kristine Cunningham at ROOTS. She adds that 50 percent of chronically inebriated homeless people in downtown Seattle say they experienced homelessness before their 25th birthday.

All the support services in the world won’t be effective if kids don’t use them. The secret to engaging adolescents is developing personal relationships with them and putting them in charge of their own progress. It’s not always easy. “Normal development puts adolescents and young adults in instantaneous opposition to what they are asked to do,” says YouthCare director Melinda Giovengo. That tendency, she adds, is exacerbated in homeless youngsters by the trust violations they’ve suffered.

So “we need to personalize the system stuff,” says Katie Hong, leader of the youth homelessness strategy at the Raikes Foundation. Personalizing begins when program staffers engage with kids one-on-one and start walking alongside as each tries to grow up. Outreach workers at YouthCare and other nonprofits discover where the youngsters hang out, and then keep going back to them no matter what.

After repeated contacts, kids start talking to staffers about what they want
Tent City Finds Interim Home in State Park

By Joshua Okrent

On January 18th Tent City 4, which for 10 years has housed between 30 and 60 people at various church properties on Seattle’s Eastside, temporarily moved into Lake Sammamish State Park. This is the first time in the history of the nomadic tent city that they have set up camp in a State park. The Tent City organization is paying $2 per person per night to use the Hans Jensen group campground until the encampment’s organizers can find another place to stay. Virginia Painter, spokesperson for Washington State Parks, said the campers are welcome. “Our group camps are available to any and all,” Painter said. “We don’t discriminate.”

The state park is just south of Sammamish, where the Good Samaritan Episcopal Church had recently invited the tent city to move onto its property. However, the Sammamish City Council then approved a six-month moratorium on homeless-encampment permits. After another church in Sammamish pulled its invitation to host the encampment right before the City Council meeting, Tent City’s 4 leadership was hard-pressed to find another place to stay.

Camp members didn’t know where they were going to next until about 3 p.m. Friday, when it was confirmed they’d be able to stay at Lake Sammamish State Park for 20 days if they paid $2 a head. Ms. Painter said Tent City 4’s stay at Lake Sammamish State Park is just like any other group’s. Members and advocates of the encampment said they’re hoping the stay can extend beyond the 20-day limit at the site, which usually is not busy this time of year. Painter said groups have to be gone from the site for three days before they can return.

A donation of more than $6,500 from Woodinville’s Blessed Teresa of Calcutta Catholic Church will help the Tent City cover the cost until it can legally stay in Bellevue in June at Temple B’nai Torah.

There are currently two homeless encampments on the Eastside. In 2012, a number of Tent City 4 residents left to start a second group, Camp Unity, in response to a disagreement over weekly background checks that a host church required. Since that time it has become ever more difficult for the two competing tent cities to find hospitable space. State law allows churches to host encampments, but cities can set some limitations. Encampments usually have to acquire city permits to take up residence in the city, and some cities have enacted laws allowing only one encampment to stay in the city per calendar year.

The competition has forced Tent City 4 to start looking for space farther afield. Until October 2013, Sammamish had never hosted a homeless camp. The suburban city of 50,000 people had no regulations in its code to allow tent encampments, so city officials drafted a 100-page, temporary-use permit to allow the encampment to stay at Mary, Queen of Peace for 60 days beginning Oct. 18. When that time was up, the city allowed the camp to extend its stay another 30 days.

Tent City 4 residents learned they would not be able to stay in the city about a week before the end of their stay at Mary, Queen of Peace. They found refuge in the northeast corner of the 500-acre state park, in an area designed for car campers that provides toilets, camping stoves and a covered picnic area.

After their temporary stay in Lake Sammamish State Park Tent City 4 was accepted by the congregation at Faith United Methodist Church in the Klahanie area. The Tent City have extended their thanks to the State of Washington for letting the encampment reside on state land while they searched for a new host.

Suing to Make Seattle Less Affordable

A coalition of several developers filed a lawsuit in King County Superior Court on January 15 that would make Seattle, already booming with construction cranes, more friendly for developers. They are asking a judge to make it cheaper and easier to build the tallest buildings allowed downtown by invalidating the fees that developers currently must pay to create affordable housing.

Since 2006, the City of Seattle has worked with developers in the downtown core to create affordable housing. In exchange for setting aside a portion of affordable units in each new development or paying fees toward a city housing fund, developers are granted the right to build taller buildings. For example, developers are allowed build a 400-foot tower in an area otherwise limited to under 300 feet. The Seattle City Council raised those fees by about one-third in December 2013. In their lawsuit, which cites three Supreme Court decisions, the developers claim that fee hike is “an out-and-out extortion.”

“This just shows developers are not willing to do their fair share,” says Rebecca Saldaña of Puget Sound Sage, an affordable-housing advocacy group. She says Seattle’s taxpayers fund a housing levy, and politicians have eased other development requirements. This latest uptick in fees, Saldaña says, is “really just asking developers to come up to speed.”

A victory by developers could change the landscape of who can live in Seattle, according to lawmakers at city hall. This program is intended to incentivize housing for people who make around 80 percent of the area’s median income, or about $49,000 a year. Lose this tool, says city council land-use chair Mike O’Brien, and you could see a dramatic shift. While other programs fund low-income housing and the market continues to produce high-rent units, the workforce in the middle could get squeezed out, “creating a city of really low-income and wealthy folks,” says O’Brien.

When this goes to court, the judge will be considering a law passed last December. After the city council dramatically raised heights in South Lake Union with new affordable-housing regulations, the council extended those rules downtown. Now developers can build extra-tall towers if they build a few affordable units or pay into the city’s housing fund. But in the hopes of making it more appealing to developers to include affordable units in their own buildings, the council raised the incentive fees for downtown residential towers from $15.15 fee per square foot of the extra floors to $21.68.

This group of unnamed downtown developers, calling themselves the “Koontz Coalition,” says in their lawsuit that the city is charging them an unnecessary fee to exercise their constitutional right to develop their land. They claim that excessive fees for affordable housing are not directly related to housing demands that their projects create.

LIHI to build affordable housing at current Nickelsville site on Jackson Street

The Low Income Housing Institute (LIHI), which develops, owns and operates affordable housing for the benefit of low-income people in Washington state, recently announced it was awarded $5.5 million from the Seattle Office of Housing. The award will enable LIHI to build 60 affordable units for families and individuals on LIHI property at 2020 S. Jackson Street. This is the current location of one of two Nickelsville homeless encampments in the Central District.

LIHI plans to house its offices on the first floor of the building. Above that, the building will have 15 studios, 20 one-bedroom, and 25 two-bedroom apartments. LIHI will rent the apartments at or below 60% of the King County Area Median Income (AMI)—that’s an income of about $36,000 – $52,000, depending on the size of the household.

According to Sharon Lee, LIHI Executive Director, “this is the site that currently houses Nickelsville on Jackson. They will be looking for a new site later in 2014 to provide shelter for up to 35 men, women and children. LIHI, Nickelsville, and the Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church would like to thank the many neighbors who have donated food, warm clothing, toys and gift cards. They are in need of firewood, gift cards to purchase construction materials and food, and donations to pay for the honey buckets and utilities.”


Seattle Activist Vera Ing Dies

Vera Ing was an urban planner by training and a community activist by choice, who left her mark on projects throughout Seattle’s Chinatown International District. Ing died on Jan. 18. She was 73.

Friends and family describe a woman driven by her diverse interests, who dedicated much of her life to improving conditions in Chinatown ID, where she grew up. “Vera straddled two worlds—one as a fun-loving socialite when she and her husband stepped out dressed in tux and gown,” said Bob Santos, a longtime friend and civil rights activist.

“She really cared about the Asian community and preserving the heritage of the Chinese American community,” former governor Gary Locke said. “Everywhere you went you could expect to see Vera there, pitching in,
Obama Speech Calls for U.S. Housing System Overhaul

By Joshua Okrent

During President Barack Obama’s State of the Union address on January 28 he renewed his call to Congress to wind down mortgage-finance giants Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac and revamp the housing finance system to include a more limited government backstop. Obama urged Congress to pass legislation that rebuilds the mortgage market to rely more on private capital but that also maintains support for creditworthy borrowers.

“Send me legislation that protects taxpayers from footing the bill for a housing crisis ever again, and keeps the dream of homeownership alive,” Obama said. “The most important investment many families make is their home.”

Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, the two government-run companies that own or guarantee 60 percent of all U.S. home loans, play a huge role in keeping borrowing costs low for homeowners.

Reducing the government’s footprint in the housing system would likely increase the cost of taking out a mortgage. The White House said the government must still play a role to preserve easy access to 30-year, fixed-rate mortgages that support the market and benefit middle-class consumers.

A new system, details of which Obama did not spell out, would replace Fannie and Freddie, which drew $187.5 billion in aid from the U.S. Treasury since the U.S. financial crisis as a growing number of loans they backed went sour. Since their 2008 bailout, they have returned to profitability and paid about $185.2 billion in dividends to the government thanks to a surge in the U.S. housing market.

“It is time to turn the page on an era of reckless lending and taxpayer bailouts, and build a new housing finance system that will provide secure homeownership for responsible middle class families and those striving to join them,” according to details of the president’s proposals provided by the White House.

Obama first endorsed a plan to reform the U.S. housing system during a speech last August. The legislative process and implementation of an overhaul will likely take years.

His approach coincides with bipartisan efforts in the U.S. Senate to reform the housing finance system. Senate Banking Committee Chairman Tim Johnson and Senator Mike Crapo, the panel’s top Republican, started work on a bill last year.

Ten senators had already co-sponsored a bipartisan bill that has served as a starting point. The measure would provide for government reinsurance that would kick in only after private creditors shouldered large losses.

The Republican-led U.S. House of Representatives has also drafted a bill that would get rid of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, but would involve a more limited government replacement. No Democrats support that proposal.

Obama wants to make it clear that “recklessness” on the part of lenders and borrowers that fueled the housing bubble and bust is over, the White House said.

Housing is expected to contribute to economic growth going forward through residential investment and rising home prices that have boosted the net worth of households, allowing for greater discretionary spending.

The White House also said it would support efforts that ensure housing is affordable for first-time buyers and renters. The housing goals are in line with the theme of Obama’s broader message in the State of the Union address, which promotes measures to help boost economic growth.

More about President Obama’s housing policies at www.whitehouse.gov.
El Centro de la Raza Begins Building Plaza Roberto Maestas

By Joshua Okrent

El Centro de la Raza in Seattle plans to start construction in early 2015 on a 112-unit low-income apartment complex just south of its headquarters in the Beacon Hill neighborhood of Seattle, and near the Beacon Hill light-rail station. The project is named “Plaza Roberto Maestas” in honor of El Centro de la Raza’s late founder and executive director who died in 2010.

El Centro de la Raza has provided services and advocacy for Seattle’s Latino community for more than 40 years. They have developed an array of bilingual and multicultural services, including bilingual childcare, afterschool mentoring and tutoring, emergency services and bilingual education and skill building programs.

“El Centro de la Raza has been working with the community for 40 years, and this project allows us to continue moving forward in realizing our dream of a physical manifestation of the ‘Beloved Community,’” stated Estela Ortega, El Centro de la Raza executive director.

The plaza will have 114 units of affordable housing, townhomes and residential outdoor spaces; 3,200 square feet of office space; a 10,000 square foot expansion of El Centro de la Raza’s child care center; and a multi-cultural community center.

“Plaza Roberto Maestas’s open spaces will foster small business opportunities, community gatherings and pedestrian streets. The project will honor the organization and the community’s rich history of community activism and multi-racial unity through its design and various cultural components. As a community-inspired transit oriented development, PRM will serve as an immediate opportunity to promote a transit-oriented development project that had strong community roots and support,” said. “It will serve as a living example of what can be done to provide a rich mix of affordable housing, as well as retail and community uses that contribute to the surrounding neighborhood.”

For more information visit www.elcentrodelaraza.org.

Plaza Roberto Maestas’s open spaces will foster small business opportunities, community gatherings and pedestrian streets. The project will honor the organization and the community’s rich history of community activism. Image courtesy of El Centro de la Raza
Quixote Village

Sharon Lee and Joshua Okrent

On December 24 of last year, 21 men and seven women moved into tiny houses in an industrial park at 3350 Mottman Road, Olympia. They had all been members of a homeless community called Camp Quixote, a floating tent city that moved more than 20 times since its founding in 2007.

The nonprofit developer Community Frameworks led a $3.05 million real estate development on a 2.1-acre site that Thurston County gave to Camp Quixote on a 41-year lease at $1 a year. A planning committee, collaborating with an architect, created the new village’s site layout and living model. Later, the plans were presented and approved by an all-camp assembly.

Quixote Village, as it is now called, has quickly become a national model for building small affordable cottages for homeless men and women. The development, which practices self-governance, with elected leadership and membership rules, is becoming a template for homeless housing projects across the country. The community has already hosted delegations from Santa Cruz, Calif.; Portland, Ore.; and Seattle; and fielded inquiries from homeless advocates in Ann Arbor, Mich.; Salt Lake City; and Prince George’s County, Md.

The residents occupy 30 cottages, with each cottage limited to one occupant. The village has a drug-free policy. The staff at Quixote Village includes Raul Salazar, Program Manager, who works full-time and is responsible for housing management duties including leasing, rent collection, enforcement of lease and house rules, and working with the democratically elected executive committee comprised of five residents. Julie Montgomery, Resident Advocate, works part-time to help residents access income support, health and mental health care, education and training resources, and other services.

Residents pay 30 percent of their income for rent and are expected to complete volunteer work hours and daily chores, estimated at 8 hours per week. Residents sign 30-day leases which are renewed from month to month. Adults as young as 19 to seniors in their 60’s live at Quixote Village. Sex offenders, people with open warrants or recent violent offenses are screened out. Operating and services costs are about $220,000 per year. The first year of support includes State Operating and Maintenance funds, document recording fee revenue, tenant rents, City of Olympia funds and private fundraising.

The photos on these pages were taken by Sharon Lee, the Executive Director of the Low Income Housing Institute, during a recent visit to Quixote Village.

More information about Quixote Village at www.quixotevillage.com
In better news, lawmakers did agree to a four-year extension of a $40 real estate document recording fee that funds homeless assistance programs. The fee was to be phased out beginning July 1, 2015.

Democrats fought to make the fee permanent but the Republican-dominated Senate Majority Coalition Caucus resisted. On the last day of the session the GOP agreed to the extension in exchange for a change that will ensure some of the money goes directly to private landlords rather than funneled to them through a nonprofit or government entity.

The bill to renew the fee that funds most of the state’s homeless programs became very contentious this session when Sen. Jan Angel (R-26) abruptly and inexplicably shut down the Senate Financial Institutions Committee, which she co-chairs, blocking members from voting on a bill to renew the real estate recording fee.

Many Senators, including some of the majority caucus’s most conservative members, joined a bipartisan group of senators criticizing Angel and urging passage of the bill. The State’s Homeless and Housing advocates mobilized quickly and were extremely vocal in urging restoration of the fee. However, advocates in the real estate industry have long opposed the fee, and these voices seemed to carry more weight in the Republican-controlled Senate.

Fortunately, the House and Senate leadership came to their senses over the weekend and agreed to exempt the measure from Friday’s cutoff for bills not necessary to pass the budget.

In total, this was a session without a victory for the Housing community. In that regard we may at least take some comfort that it was over so quickly.

short-term contract renewals are due to expire soon. A number of these sites, if bought by private developers, could quickly be demolished or redeveloped as condominiums or high-end rentals.

KCHA purchased the four King County properties using a tax-exempt loan. These properties will continue to be managed by Westwood Management, the current property manager of the complexes.

King County provided $1 million for high priority safety and structural repairs for the four King County properties. These improvements began in early December.

“This is an important opportunity to preserve 147 units of federally subsidized low-income housing in King County,” said Joe McDermott, chair of the King County Council’s budget and fiscal management committee. “The purchase of these properties will provide a long-term source of affordable housing for low-income seniors and families with children, for which there is a dire need.”

The state legislature provided a $4.5 million housing preservation grant from the Housing Trust Fund to assist with the acquisition of the five non-King County properties. “This will help seniors live with dignity,” said state Rep. Hans Dunshee, chair of the House capital budget committee. “If they lost their housing because it got too expensive, they couldn’t take a second job to pencil it out. Now they can sleep at night in a safe, stable place to live, which is what anybody would want for their mom or dad, grandma or grandpa.”

Rhonda Rosenberg is Director of Communications at the King County Housing Authority. More information at www.kcha.org.

KCHA Preserves Apartments

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or need – a high school degree, a job. In Seattle at the YMCA, “kids come to us,” says Brooke Knight, who directs young adult services. They drop in to use Facebook or hang out with their friends, and when they do, the staff is subtly working to build relationships with them. Over time, says Cacey Hanauer, director of foster care transitions, Y staffers trained in Motivational Interviewing help kids decide what they want to do and identify strengths they’ve used in the past that can shape their future efforts. Then housing, education and employment “don’t seem like such a long shot,” she says.

Staff support for homeless youth is unconditional. Aggression or rudeness may drive other people away, “but we don’t buy into that,” Hanauer continues. “If we say we’ll be there at such-and-such a time, we’re there. If they disengage, we call and leave messages. The more we can just show up and let them know we’ll be there regardless, the more the kids become willing, over time, to learn the skills they need.

So at the system level, King County is betting that a combination of coordination, smart data collection and management, best program practices and a human touch will, if not end homelessness, then at least protect our homeless youth while they’re launched on lives of mature independence. Understanding and respecting the impressionable, volatile psyche of a homeless teen or young adult will be key to the success of the county’s YYA Initiative.

This means understanding and respecting the truth that “risk for these kids is not sleeping on the streets, taking drugs or prostitution,” as YouthCare’s Melinda Giovengo puts it. “Risk is taking a chance to be successful, not knowing you will be.”

This story first appeared in Crosscut.com. Contact Judy Lightfoot at judy.lightfoot@crosscut.com.

Homeless Youth and Young Adults

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helping out, always cheering you on.”

Mrs. Ing served as chairperson of the International District Improvement Association (InterIm), a community organization that promotes development in that neighborhood.

Under her leadership in the late 1970s and early 1980s, InterIm helped build the International Community Health Clinic, wrote the charter for the

Seattle Chinatown-International District Preservation and Development Authority, built the Danny Woo Community Garden, and saw to the development of low-income housing for seniors.

She also led or served numerous local organizations, including the State Liquor Control Board, the Bumbershoot Advisory Committee and hosted the ceremonies for the American/China exhibit at the world’s fair in Spokane in 1974. She accompanied state and local officials on several trade missions to Asia, including twice with Gary Locke when he was governor.

“Vera loved being in the role of an advocate,” said Santos. “We took a lot of innovative approaches to preserving the ID. She was quite an effective leader in that sense.”

Vera Ing’s Legacy

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Vera Ing was an urban planner by training and a community activist by choice, who left her mark on projects throughout Seattle’s Chinatown International District. She died on Jan. 18.

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Homeless and Low Income Advocates Rally for Homes in Olympia

By Beth Williams

Over 600 individuals attended the Washington Low Income Housing Alliance’s 2014 Housing and Homelessness Advocacy Day (HHAD) on January 28th. Advocates arrived in Olympia from 41 different legislative districts and in the span of just seven hours met with 108 legislators. Residents, employees, volunteers, and board members of organizations from all over Washington State were present, including the Low Income Housing Institute, Seattle Housing Authority’s Resident Action Council, and Real Change. HHAD participants were so diverse this year that three different language translators provided their services to include as many attendees in the event as possible.

The purpose of this advocacy day was for individual citizens to come together and tell their legislators about the importance of supporting programs that help with housing and work on ending homelessness.

HHAD attendees kept very busy with events throughout the day, from 8 a.m. until 4 p.m. In the morning all of the advocates gathered at the United Churches of Olympia for a call to action. Afterwards, two rounds of workshops were offered on topics such as advocacy, an interfaith perspective on housing and homelessness, and how best to use social media for advocacy. Nick Federici, lobbyist for the Washington Low Income Housing Alliance (WLIHA), gave an update on the state of the budget and the critical housing bills to support. After the morning workshops, individuals broke off into groups based on their legislative districts and began to meet with their legislators. Each group conducted up to three legislative meetings with their district’s two representatives and one senator (or their staff).

Within these legislative district groups were representatives from many different organizations coming together to advocate for policies and legislation they believed in. When the groups met with their legislators, individuals shared stories about how their lives had been improved by affordable housing, and the impacts of other policies on low income tenants and individuals experiencing homelessness. The legislators listened intently to personal accounts of the effects their funding and policy decisions have on their constituents. Each HHAD team was also tasked with communicating the housing and homelessness advocates’ legislative priorities that they wanted their representatives to act on.

These priorities included investing in the Washington State Housing Trust Fund, protecting and strengthening the Housing and Essential Needs (HEN) and Aged, Blind and Disabled (ABD) Programs, enacting part 3 of the Fair Tenant Screening Act, preventing the sunsetting of the state’s Document Recording Fees, leveraging Medicaid expansion to end homelessness and improve health, and enacting revenue to avoid cuts to services and programs.

At noon, everyone headed to the front steps of the Legislative Building for lunch and a Rally for Homes. The rally included speeches from Senator David Frockt and Rep. June Robinson, along with passionate cheers from the large crowd.

After lunch, participants returned to meeting with their legislators. Many also stopped by the photo booth provided by Firesteel to have their picture taken holding signs stating why they support housing. After a long and productive day in Olympia, everyone headed home—if they had one.

In preparation for this year’s Housing and Homelessness Advocacy Day many advocates spent time

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2014 NLIHC Annual Housing Policy Conference

The 2014 National Low Income Housing Coalition conference takes place from Sunday, April 27 through Wednesday, April 30 to discuss the latest developments in affordable housing. The 2014 conference will be held at the Wardman Park Marriott. 2014 will be the 40th anniversary of the founding of the National Low Income Housing Coalition. Plans are underway to celebrate that occasion at the conference, so mark your calendars now and watch your mailboxes and inboxes for registration, speaker, and workshop information.

More information and registration at www.nlihc.org/conference.

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Homeless and Housing Advocacy Day

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preparing the testimonies they would share with their legislators. They recalled their experiences of homelessness and challenges accessing housing and condensed them into short presentations for their legislators describing how they were personally impacted by housing policies or government subsidized housing.

Both first time and experienced participants of Housing and Homelessness Advocacy Day reported that they enjoyed getting to spend the day in Olympia meeting with their legislators and sharing why housing and ending homelessness is important to them. They also deepened their knowledge about specific pieces of legislation and gained new skills during the morning trainings. “I’ve never talked to a legislator before—that was really exciting! I learned a lot, I feel more aware. What I got out of the day is that something is happening, that more homeless people can get off the streets & get their lives back together,” shared one first-time advocate at the end of the day. Just as important, participants got to network with other individuals and organizations from all over the state who are passionate about one cause. Many thanks to the Washington Low Income Housing Alliance for putting this large event together and giving their individual members an opportunity to join their voices and advocate together to ensure every Washingtonian has the opportunity to live in a safe, healthy, affordable home.

Beth Williams is a Public Policy and Advocacy Intern at the Low Income Housing Institute and a senior at Seattle University.