By Joshua Okrent

U.S. House Representative Jim McDermott of Washington state (D-7) introduced H.R. 3145 which would amend Section 42 of the Internal Revenue Code as it relates to homeless youth and veterans. Currently the rules governing the Low Income Housing Tax Credit do not allow full-time students to qualify as eligible tenants.

The original intent was to prevent LIHTC from being used to construct dormitories and to prohibit college students with temporary low incomes from benefiting from a resource meant for individuals and families with more critical housing needs. However, an unintended consequence of this provision is that homeless veterans or youth that wish to pursue full time education are unable to live in LIHTC housing.

“Education remains the best hope for homeless youth to escape poverty as adults,”

McDermott said in a statement. “Today, our homeless youth must choose between being homeless or pursuing a full-time education. That is wrong, and this simple fix would have a significant impact in ensuring these youth can reach their educational goals.”

The need for affordable housing has never been greater. Roughly 7 million people in America—including veterans, seniors, disabled people and working families with children—currently rely on federally subsidized housing. Another 20 million families can’t access these subsidies and are spending more than half of their income on rent, leaving them one paycheck away from losing their home.

Signed into law by President Reagan as part of the last comprehensive tax reform in 1986, the low income housing credit is America’s main tool for building and preserving affordable homes, having created 2.6 million units to date.
A controversial lawsuit over the application of the Fair Housing Act, which had been set to reach the Supreme Court this session, was settled out of court in November. Following the rulings this summer on voting rights and affirmative action, the United States Supreme Court had faced another landmark civil rights case that would have made it tougher for minorities to prove housing discrimination. The settlement came too late to save New Jersey’s Mount Holly Gardens, but it spared the Fair Housing Act, for now.

At stake in this and other similar cases is the Fair Housing Act, a law enacted one week after Martin Luther King’s assassination in April 1968 during the race riots that followed. For now, the settlement will leave open a question some of the justices seem eager to decide: whether claims under the Fair Housing Act require proof of intentional discrimination. Civil rights groups, already weary from the recent battles that resulted in the Supreme Court invalidating Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act, are expecting yet another fight in the future in which the justices will be asked to weaken the law as interpreted by the Obama administration and lower courts.

The case in question began when the town of Mount Holly in New Jersey made plans to tear down and rebuild a blighted housing complex, the Mount Holly Gardens. The city had helped to relocate many of the low income residents in the complex that was set to be torn down but about 70 families remained.

“We have wanted to settle this case from day one,” says Olga Pomar of South Jersey Legal Services, which is representing the residents. “We think that continuing this litigation is not in anyone’s interest.” A similar case in St. Paul, Minn., was settled last year, just two weeks before the Supreme Court was to hear oral arguments.

James Maley, the attorney representing the town, says Mount Holly was never out to reverse decades of settled housing discrimination law, in much the same way Shelby County, Ala., brought the case that struck down a key section of the Voting Rights Act.

The town’s brief was filed in the first week of September, marking the first legal step since the justices agreed in June to hear its appeal of an appellate court ruling. At issue was whether the Fair Housing Act requires blacks and other minorities to prove intentional racial discrimination in sales, rentals, zoning or lending practices, or whether a policy’s “disparate impact” is enough to make it illegal.

That difference between intent and impact is at the root of many civil rights laws, from education and employment to disability and voting rights. In most cases, showing that minorities are disproportionately affected is enough; that is how lower courts and HUD have enforced the Fair Housing Act.

But opponents—including developers, bankers, insurers and conservative groups—have challenged that interpretation, noting that the law does not refer to disparate impact. And the high court’s decision to hear the case without a split among federal appeals courts has led civil rights groups to worry that its conservative majority is ready to rule against them.

“It would really cut the legs out of fair housing enforcement,” said Joseph Rich, director of the fair housing project at the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. Proving intentional racial bias is more difficult, he says, because “discrimination is pretty subtle these days.”

Since 2002, Mount Holly officials have sought to demolish the homes and replace them with 520 mostly market-priced apartments and townhomes; 56 would be reserved for Gardens residents.

While about 260 families have moved out, many with relocation assistance from the town, about
Olympia Church Creates Permanent Village for Homeless People

By Donald E. Skinner

In a world where homeless people are often treated as pariahs, the folks at Olympia Unitarian Universalist Congregation (OUUC) have taken a different approach. They have led the way in building the homeless their own village, complete with tiny houses and a community center.

Their story starts in 2007 when the city of Olympia was about to roust a group of homeless people from their tent city on city property. The OUUC governing board decided on the spur of the moment to host the homeless on church property.

Since then the tent city, called Camp Quixote II (the original site was Camp Quixote), has moved among several congregations of different faiths, staying for three months at a time. That was a workable solution, but almost from the beginning some members of the camp—and some homeless advocates—expressed a longing for a permanent home. Advocates formed a nonprofit called Panza, in honor of Don Quixote’s sidekick, to support the camp. It included representatives from OUUC and other congregations, as well as the homeless community.

Panza went to work on a more permanent solution. A year ago it approached the city and won permission to create a permanent community for the homeless on an industrial site. This summer 30 tiny one-room “cottages,” which will have electricity and heat, but no running water, began going up, along with a community center which will have bathrooms, showers, laundry facilities, a kitchen, and meeting rooms. By Christmas 2013, if everything goes off schedule, all of the homeless in Camp Quixote II will have permanently folded their tents and moved in to what is being called Quixote Village.

Tim Ransom, an OUUC and Panza member noted: “Half of the cottages are framed. We’re working on the interior of the community center. We’re happy to be this far along.” He said the tenants will comprise a range of people: “Some may stay for a long time. Others will pass through and eventually find transitional housing and then permanent housing of their own. All of these folks are among the chronically homeless. They have a high incidence of mental illness and addictions.” Ransom estimated that of the 30 residents, about half will move out within a year’s time and others will take their place. The occupants will have a residents’ council to govern the village. No drugs will be permitted. Alcohol will be restricted to the cottages. Background checks will be performed on all applicants.

The construction of the village is being supported by grants from a range of entities. Washington state contributed $1.5 million for the project. Thurston County sponsored a federal Community Development Block Grant application for $604,000. Two Native American tribes and other private donors have contributed more than $150,000.

Ransom said OUUC contributes several thousand dollars annually to the village. “Over time Camp Quixote has become one of our social justice ministries.”

The residents already have the services of a half-time resident advocate from Catholic Community Services who helps them set goals and gain access to medical, mental health, employment, disability, and housing services. The village will also have a full-time program manager. There are plans for a vegetable garden and fruit trees and to start one or more micro-enterprises that could bring in income to support the village and its residents.

Ransom said the most challenging part of the project initially was convincing governmental jurisdictions to allow local congregations to host the homeless camp on their properties. “Currently our biggest effort is fundraising—figuring out how to sustain this for the future.”

Homeless advocates have had to work to change attitudes throughout the process, Ransom said. “There’s been a not-in-my-backyard response
President Obama Shares Housing Agenda

By Joshua Okrent

In August President Obama shared his plan for fostering a housing recovery that supports stronger neighborhoods and communities throughout the country.

President Obama included housing as a key component of his plan to protect and strengthen the middle class. Amongst other initiatives, the President stated the intention of his administration to:

- Preserve the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit, the country’s primary tool for developing and preserving affordable rental housing, and the New Markets Tax Credit, a critical tool for spurring economic investment in distressed and underserved communities.
- Pass a bipartisan budget that invests in decent and affordable rental housing and builds our transportation infrastructure.
- Rebuild distressed neighborhoods, including the $15 billion Project Rebuild initiative and the use of Hardest Hit Funds to clear blight and revitalize communities.
- Establish a new system of housing finance in the United States that puts more private capital at risk, protects taxpayers from unnecessary losses, promotes sustainable homeownership and ensures the availability of decent, affordable rental housing options, especially for low-income families. The centerpiece of this new system is an explicit and limited government guarantee on certain kinds of single-family and multifamily mortgages.
- Strengthen the Federal Housing Administration so that it can continue to play a crucial role in the housing market, both by helping first-time buyers achieve homeownership and promoting affordable rental housing.

When President Obama took office, the national housing market was in free-fall, leaving many families feeling trapped and anxious about their mortgages. The President took immediate action to stabilize the housing market and protect the middle class. These steps helped millions of middle class families stay in their homes, save money on their mortgages, and turn their communities around.

Today, the housing market is coming back. Home values are rising, foreclosures are at the lowest levels since 2006, home sales have increased at double digit rates, and American families are on pace to purchase over 5 million homes this year. In part because of President Obama’s tough regulations that cracked down on the most reckless practices from the housing crisis, responsible Americans can feel more confident and secure when they borrow money to purchase their own home. But the job is not done, and restoring security to homeownership is one of the President’s top economic priorities.

In his speech introducing his agenda, the President laid out his ideas to help more responsible homeowners refinance, to cut red tape, to increase home values by fixing our broken immigration system, to help the hardest hit communities rebuild, and to ensure those who rent have decent and affordable options. The President also made it clear that going back to the same bubble-and-bust housing system that caused the financial crisis is not acceptable.

He called for a solid foundation for financing homeownership with a bigger role for the private sector, where taxpayers aren’t on the hook for the irresponsible behavior or bad decisions of financial institutions. The President stated that “These bipartisan solutions will help build on the progress we’ve made over the last four years, and together we can make owning a home a symbol of responsibility and a source of security for generations to come.”

President Obama’s full economic plan is available at www.whitehouse.gov.
Housing Affordability Still Out of Reach for Many

By Joshua Okrent

A new study from the Harvard Joint Center on Housing Studies in conjunction with the McArthur Foundation looks at the growing importance of rental housing in the U.S. as households reverse their long upward trend in homeownership and increasingly turn to renting. The renter share of households climbed from 31 percent in 2003 to 35 percent in 2013 or 43 million households.

The study, “America’s Rental Housing: Evolving Markets and Needs,” looks at the factors contributing to the growing reliance on rentals, how likely the trend is to continue and the human and policy impacts of the trend. Of particular importance, the study concludes, is the crisis presented to the country by the growing burden housing is placing on low and very low income households.

The trend toward renting has been driven by several factors. The ‘Great Recession’ brought high levels of sustained unemployment and a flood of foreclosures while highlighting some of the risks of homeownership and the benefits of renting: greater ease of moving, the ability to better budget for housing, and freedom from maintenance responsibilities.

Mirroring overall population growth, minorities will contribute virtually all of the net increase in renters over the coming decade, with Hispanics alone accounting for more than half of the total. Significant shares of the younger renter households will be married couples with children and single-parent families, which together will account for another 30 percent of new renters. The rapid increase in the senior population will lead to their higher numbers of renters require some level of adaptive housing to accommodate them as well as assisted living.

While renting is more common among young adults, more than a third of renters are aged 35 to 54. Even at stages when homeownership is greatest people still move in and out of the rental market. Against stereotype, families with children account for as many renters as single persons. Renters’ incomes are disproportionately low. Nearly a quarter have annual incomes under $15,000 while only 13 percent of all households fall into that category.

The situation for renters who were cost burdened before the recession worsened during and after it. After 2007 the share of renters paying more than 30 percent of their income for housing rose from 38 to 50 percent. Most of the increase was felt by those severely burdened, i.e. paying more than 50 percent of their income for housing by 2010.

Housing cost burdens are nearly ubiquitous among the lowest-income renters. An astounding 83 percent of renters with incomes of less than $15,000 were housing cost burdened in 2011, including a dismal 71 percent with severe burdens. The consequences for those unable to find affordable housing the Center says is dire. They spend about $130 less on food, 40 percent less than those living in housing they can afford. Thus housing is clearly linked to hunger in the U.S. They also spend significantly less on health care and retirement savings.

A family with a $15,000 in annual income would have to find housing that costs no more than $375 a month to stay under the 30 percent level. By comparison, the 2011 median monthly cost for housing built within the previous four years was more than $1,000. Less than 34 percent of these new units rented under $800, and only 5 percent for less than $400.

Thus the gap between the demand for and the supply of affordable units continues to grow. In 2011, 11.8 million renters with extremely low income competed for just 6.9 million rentals affordable at that income level. Making matters worse, 2.6 million of these affordable rentals were occupied by higher-income households. The study also evaluates energy costs and concludes that these costs also fall disproportionately on low income renters, either directly or as pass-throughs from landlords.

Housing that is affordable to low income renters tends to be older and more likely to be in poor condition and so at greatest risk of being demolished or otherwise lost from the housing stock. Over the 10 years ending in 2011, 5.6 percent of all units available for rent were removed from the inventory as were 12.8 percent of those renting for less than $400.

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By Margret Graham

In October the Washington State Housing Finance Commission honored five professionals as “Friends of Housing” for their work to create, support and advocate for affordable housing statewide. The 20th annual Friend of Housing awards were presented October 8 in a ceremony at the annual Housing Washington conference in Spokane.

Friend of Housing awards are presented each year to individuals or organizations who have made exceptional contributions to creating or supporting affordable housing in ways such as helping to solve housing problems, creating innovative financing mechanisms, or drafting legislation or policy that addresses the state’s housing needs.

“These five individuals exemplify the outstanding work and commitment that the Friend of Housing awards are meant to honor,” said Karen Miller, chair of the Housing Finance Commission.

The 2013 Friend of Housing awardees are:

- **Christina Pegg**, executive director of the highly effective Longview Housing Authority;
- **Leah Greenwood**, who led Affordable Community Environments in Vancouver, Wash., to merge with REACH Community Development;
- **Sue Cary**, who retired from Seattle’s Capitol Hill Housing in 2012 after a long career of creating and maintaining affordable housing with multiple organizations;
- **The Opportunity Council of Bellingham**, which organized its community to successfully pass a housing levy that will raise $21 million for local housing over the next seven years;
- **Helen Stevenson**, who for more than 20 years has helped to develop and preserve affordable housing in Spokane and eastern Washington;

In addition, former **Governor Mike Lowry** was honored with the Margaret M. Sevy Affordable Housing Lifetime Achievement Award for his work on behalf of homeownership for farmworkers.

Throughout his career in politics—as a member of the King County Council, a Congressman for the 7th District, and Washington state governor, Gov. Mike Lowry fought for environmental protection, civil rights, adequate funding for social services, and policies that protect and lift up those who are struggling in our communities. In 2003, he launched Washington Agricultural Family Assistance (WAFA) to help open a path for farmworkers to achieve homeownership. As a result of his in-the-trenches work to find land, organize volunteers and secure funding, WAFA has built 73 safe, high-quality homes for farmworkers in eastern Washington—homes now owned by families who once faced enormous barriers to buying a home.


**LIHTC Bill Amendment Proposed continued from page 1**

It is also a critical catalyst for economic development, making a profound impact on local economies by creating 95,000 jobs—many in small businesses—across the country each year, boosting consumer spending and providing much-needed tax revenue to states and municipalities. It does so in a way that harnesses the capital and entrepreneurial spirit of the private sector through true public-private partnerships, generating more than $100 billion in private investment since its inception.

H.R. 3145 would revise Section 42 to qualify homeless veterans and formerly homeless youth who are students for LIHTC eligibility requirements. The Joint Committee on Taxation estimates the bill will cost taxpayers less than $1 million over 10 years. Representatives Keith Ellison (D-MN) and Erik Paulsen (R-MN) are original cosponsors of the bill. The measure has been referred to the House Committee on Financial Services.

The full text of H.R. 3145 is available at: http://1.usa.gov/1dPqn1G
Should Washington Create Special Family Courts?

By Judy Lightfoot

Our legal system ensures that bankruptcy, maritime and copyright cases are heard by presiding judges who have special legal expertise in those respective domains. Why not do the same for cases involving family law?

That was the question before a panel of community leaders in downtown Seattle in mid-December. Panelists included Joel Benoliel, emeritus officer at Costco and former vice chair of the Washington Council for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect; State Supreme Court justice (ret.) Bobbe Bridge, founding president and CEO of the Center for Children & Youth Justice; Representative Ruth Kagi (D-32nd District), chair of the House Early Learning and Human Services Committee; and Jennifer Strus, DSHS Children’s Administration assistant secretary.

Separate, specialty courts or divisions would mean that families would appear before one judge throughout the sometimes extended process of resolving their entire case. Alternatively, a single case management team would coordinate the process for each family.

Courtroom proceedings involving children and families are unlike those that play out in traditional adversarial settings. “You need to go beyond the adversarial system and ask more questions of the kind we don’t, or can’t, in an ordinary courtroom.”

Courtroom proceedings involving children and families are unlike those that play out in traditional adversarial settings. “You need to go beyond the adversarial system and ask more questions of the kind we don’t, or can’t, in an ordinary courtroom.”

Grants that courts could apply for and use to improve their juvenile divisions. Among other requirements, judges would commit to rotations lasting two years or more and receive training in areas such as brain development, attachment issues, and child abuse. Setting minimum standards like these for judges in child welfare cases is essential for developing a stable, well-trained bench, Kagi said. “Over 40 percent of court cases are family law, but there certainly aren’t 40 percent of judges with backgrounds in family law.” Thirteen courts in Washington state chose to participate in the grant program, and statistics showed significant improvement in them, according to Kagi.

Bridge noted a North Carolina study indicating the benefits of separate family courts. Longitudinal research at Duke Law School showed that when foster children’s cases are heard in a specialized family court, they fare better. Foster kids in North Carolina counties with family courts spent less time in foster care, were more often reunited with parents and did better in school than their counterparts in counties without such courts.

This story first appeared in Crosscut.com. Contact Judy Lightfoot at judy.lightfoot@crosscut.com.
Mixing Age Groups in Portland
Affordable Housing

By Will Macht

Age segregation is a silent and growing problem in the United States of the 21st century. At the same time that age discrimination has been proscribed in the workplace, age segregation is formally permitted in the form of age 55-plus communities.

The large baby boom generation is aging into the portion of the housing market that is most segregated by age. Daycare, elder care, seniors’ housing, congregate care, assisted living, memory care, skilled nursing, and continuing care are not only terms codified into land use planning, legislation, finance, and regulation; they also represent new institutions that have been developed, segregated, and isolated from other types of housing. Each day for the next 16 years, more than 10,000 American baby boomers will turn 65. Stricken by the Great Recession, many of them cannot afford to pay market rents for independent housing or institutional care, and some prefer to live in age-diverse communities.

In Portland, Oregon, a nonprofit organization has built an urban solution that addresses the problem of age segregation while brightening the prospects of families who adopt children out of the foster care system. These families face many of the same obstacles in finding appropriate housing as do members of the baby boom generation.

The Needs of Adoptive Families

Today, more than 400,000 children are in foster care in the United States; in Oregon alone there are over 9,000, with more than one-quarter awaiting adoption. Adoptions of children in foster care have increased to almost 60,000 per year in the United States since passage of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997. But families with multiple adopted children also face age-segregated housing markets. Few homes in urban areas contain four bedrooms; often such units are only found on large lots located in neighborhoods surrounded by similarly large homes and devoid of older residents, who do not need such a large residence. Moreover, such homes are frequently unaffordable to large adoptive families.

Portland nonprofit Bridge Meadows has built one urban solution that addresses the needs of both groups.

On the two-acre site of the former John Ball Elementary School in the Portsmouth neighborhood of north Portland, Bridge Meadows has built a housing complex bearing its name that includes nine four-bedroom houses for families who adopt at least three foster children. The houses are integrated with 27 one- and two-bedroom apartment units for people age 55 or older who meet the income requirements for housing financed with low-income housing tax credits. And, through a novel requirement, seniors at Bridge Meadows act as surrogate grandparents and mentors to the children and families who live there.

The effort to form a public/private partnership, raise funds, and assemble support from the business community and civic leaders began in 2004. By 2007, the necessary 501(c)(3) corporation had been established, an executive director had been hired, and Bridge Meadows had leveraged enough private donations to begin forming a team consisting of development/property management company Guardian Real Estate Services (GRES), local architecture team Carleton Hart Architecture, and local contractor Walsh Construction.

Bridge Meadows requires seniors living in the community to volunteer at least seven hours per week doing such things as teaching arts and crafts, giving music lessons, leading story hours, and taking the kids to the park. Both the three-children-in-five-years adoption requirement and the seven-hour-per-week volunteer time condition are written into lease addendums to the two classes of housing. Because all applicants for each class of tenancy are subject to the same restrictions, the requirements do not violate the nondiscriminatory fair housing statutes, according to Bridge Meadows Executive Director Derenda Schubert.

Adoptive parents referred to Bridge Meadows by the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) usually have already started the process of adoption or legal guardianship. For them, income is not restricted. However, their rent is below market rate, based

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on a percentage (currently 26.5 percent) of their gross income. Whereas market rent for comparable housing is about $1,400 per month, according to Schubert, the rent for a family home at Bridge Meadows averages $850 per month.

This rent assistance helps offset the current ODHS policy that unintentionally creates an economic disincentive to adopt foster children. Foster parents now receive a base allowance ranging from $575 to $741 per child per month, based on the child’s age, as reimbursement for basic expenses related to providing food, shelter, and clothing. Additional assistance is provided if there are special needs. But if a foster parent adopts the child, the parent loses most of the reimbursement. Limited adoption assistance is available for limited periods, but at a significantly reduced rate. This policy is based on the notion that the state should not pay parents, adoptive or otherwise, to raise their children.

All the units border a large courtyard designed for intergenerational interaction. The 36-unit community consists of three triplex one- and two-story group mentor/seniors’ houses, four two-story duplex family houses, and one two-story single-family house. The traditional residential scale of the site was used to give foster children—who have experienced living in multiple places, many of them institutional—a greater sense of permanency, providing smaller houses that have both a front porch and a backyard feeling, says Brian Carleton of Carleton Hart Architecture.

Carleton designed the courtyard with a variety of landscaped and paved areas to accommodate different activities, as well as stormwater treatment facilities. A prime feature of the landscape is a boardwalk bridging a stormwater garden and swale. Covered and open sitting areas are built into the courtyard. Exposed wooden glulam beams and wooden window trim, mixed with finished exposed concrete, lend a Northwest design sensibility to the project.

**Structuring the Financing**

The low rents at Bridge Meadows are a function of the way the project was financed. The Bridge Meadows leadership and board of directors of the 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization retained GRES to develop and manage the project, which cost $11.4 million, or $316,255 per unit, including all the public spaces and offices of Bridge Meadows, says Ross Cornelius, GRES vice president for development.

GRES, the largest manager of tax-credit housing in Portland, recognized that the operating income from the 36 units at below-market rents would not cover debt service on a mortgage, so it put together a package that would cover costs through all-equity deal structures for both the family and seniors’ housing components. It arranged with the Portland office of the National Equity Fund (NEF), an affiliate of the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), to purchase the equity of the seniors’ portion of the project for $5.3 million.

Other funding was a mix of public and private funds. The family and seniors’ elements were structured independently, both with separate Portland Development Commission and Portland Housing Bureau resources. Additional funding came from the State Housing Trust Fund, from the Low Income Weatherization Program, and from the city of Portland land lease. The land and the school were purchased by the city of Portland from the Portland Public Schools and have been leased to Portland Bridge Meadows for 99 years at $1 per year. The city also waived systems development charges. Business energy tax credits and Energy Trust of Oregon grants were provided to the project, which allowed solar hot-water panels to be installed on many unit rooftops.

Bridge Meadows raised equity for the adoptive family homes from more than two dozen foundations in the Portland metro area and from more than two dozen banks, corporations, law firms, and real estate developers and brokers. One successful fundraising effort was to organize an adopt-a-house strategy to help raise private equity to build the family houses.

The mixture of ages has proved beneficial to all three generations living in the community. Senior residents report benefits from living in a community with a common purpose, sharing their talents and life experiences with a new generation, and building new relationships though the bonds formed by living in an intergenerational community. Foster and adoptive children enjoy the stability of having surrogate grandparents. And parents benefit from the assistance raising children in an environment that supports them economically and socially.

Will Macht is a professor of urban planning and development at the Center for Real Estate at Portland State University in Oregon and a development consultant. This story is adapted from a larger article at http://urbanland.uli.org.
Tacoma Housing Authority Helps Remove Barriers to Education

By Joshua Okrent

The homeless student population at Tacoma Community College, along with those students struggling to find affordable housing will be able to access substantial help through a new pilot program being created with the Tacoma Housing Authority (THA). As of this September the college began taking applications for the “Tacoma Community College Housing Project.” Application and disbursal dates are yet to be determined, but the current goal is to begin housing voucher distribution in January 2014.

“We wondered what happens to low-income folks once out of high school,” said Michael Power, manager of educational programs at the Tacoma Housing Authority. “A scholarship isn’t enough. We realized housing was one of the barriers.”

Power, through THA, had monitored a program aimed at helping elementary school children. The five-year pilot program at Tacoma’s McCarver Elementary, universally hailed as a success, has helped 47 homeless families to date to stay in school and maintain stable housing. School suspensions declined, parent participation increased, and students out-performed the Tacoma Public Schools average on tests. School districts across the nation have visited to see the results.

“The most important thing is that kids are stable in school, not bouncing around,” Power said. “There were requirements—families had to keep their kids enrolled at McCarver Elementary School through fifth grade. And each year they paid another 20 percent of their rent.”

Following the model established at the McCarver School, the Tacoma Housing Authority is now funding a new program with Tacoma Community College that will help 25-30 college students with their rent—as long as they stay in school full time. The program is supported by multi-year grants from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Sequoia Foundation.

“TCC completes the continuum to the other end of the cycle,” said Michael Mirra, the Executive Director of the Tacoma Housing Authority. “We’re eager to see the results. If this project is effective, its strategies will be instructive for thousands of public housing authorities and school districts and their community partners.”

Most students who attempt to attend college after periods of homelessness have financial issues that go well beyond books and tuition. The program at TCC will begin with a $150,000 budget and provide for students based on income and the number of people being housed. The $150,000 one-year grant will help but won’t begin to cover the need. Broken down over 12 months, with 30 students per month, the average voucher would be for just more than $415 a month.

Shema Hanebutte, Dean of Counseling and Advising, is leading the launch. “Eligibility will be based on Housing and Urban Development (HUD) rules and TCC’s satisfactory academic progress standards,” said Hanebutte. “TCC will do the triage, application vetting, and we will run workshops with the Metropolitan Development Council—they will provide the Mandatory Financial Literacy workshops with staff they already have located on our campus.”

The partnership plans to make these Financial Literacy workshops available via podcast for the entire student body.

The eligibility requirements are still being negotiated, but students must show financial need, be enrolled in school full time, and have no felony convictions. Each student will be assigned an advisor or dedicated counselor, and there will be monthly check-ins.

“We want to be able to help them stay in school, and if that means helping them find transportation or food, we can put them in touch with those who can assist them,” Power said.

“We have learned just providing stable housing without a human point of contact who can help with small things, isn’t enough,” Power said. “These students need support. When struggling day to day, one of first things you do is stop going to class. That’s the last thing we want.”

Hanebutte said there will be no trouble finding enough applicants. “We have a lot of students on campus having trouble with housing,” she said. “We’ll advertise on the college website, and we’ll have a far greater need than we can fill.”

“This is our first step working with students after high school,” Power said. “We want our clients to succeed in school and beyond. That was the goal at McCarver; it’s the goal at Tacoma Community College.”

For additional information, please contact Rachel Payne, Communications Consultant at Tacoma Community College, at rpayne@tacomacc.edu.
By Joshua Okrent

According to a new report commissioned by the National Association of Real Estate Brokers (NAREB), African Americans have lost over half of their wealth since the beginning of the recession through falling homeownership rates and loss of jobs. Further, African American homeownership peaked in 2004, indicating that the housing crisis hit this community earlier than the nation as a whole.

The report, authored by James Carr with Katrin Anacker and Ines Hernandez, illustrates for the first time in one place, how government policies, manipulation of mortgage lending practices, and extended high unemployment, now reported to be more than 13 percent for African Americans continue to retard economic recovery in communities of color.

The report, titled “The State of Housing in Black America” explores recent housing trends in the African American community, including high rates of foreclosures and falling rates of homeownership, the impacts of these trends for current and future generations, and concludes by advocating for improved policies to address the needs of housing in Black America.

Since 2007, nearly 8% of African Americans and Latinos have lost their homes to foreclosure compared to 4.5% of non-Hispanic whites at similar income levels. The disparity ratio shows that African Americans are more than 70% more likely to have been foreclosed upon than non-Hispanic whites.

While several indicators point to an improving housing market, there are several challenges on the road to recovery, especially for low income people of color. Attaining mortgage credit outside of the FHA remains difficult for many households, including African Americans and other borrowers of color as well as first-time borrowers. An African American family with the median income would need to save for 31 years for a 10% down payment for a house priced at the median. Homeownership rates have continued to fall for African Americans and there are projections that rates will drop to 40% in the near future, down from a high of 50% in 2004.

As new families form and seek housing, and as baby boomers downsize their homes and younger generations are faced with tight mortgage credit markets, the demand for rental housing is growing. Further, demographic shifts such as higher birth rates and immigration among African Americans and Latinos, are adding even more demand on the already tightening rental housing market.

NAREB suggests a broader response to rebuilding the housing finance system. They recommend focusing on borrowers as opposed to focusing entirely on institutions, ensuring adequate credit for rental housing development, and establishing a housing and community infrastructure bank. African Americans have been greatly affected by the housing crisis and the community’s wealth-building potential is at risk.

Nevertheless, the African American community continues to grow both in population and purchasing power, highlighting the need for housing policies that will benefit a diverse America.

NAREB President Donnell Spivey said, “It’s unconscionable to think that African American homeownership gains from a 20-year high in 2004 of 49 percent have eroded to just above 43 percent today.” NAREB’s mission is “democracy in housing,” he said, and their initiatives are aimed at getting fair housing and lending practices for African Americans as the nation’s economy rebounds.

The full State of Housing in Black America report can be downloaded at www.nareb.com.
Bill Block Named HUD Northwest Regional Administrator

By Joshua Okrent

In November, U.S. Housing and Urban Development Secretary Shaun Donovan announced that President Barack Obama appointed Bill Block of Seattle as HUD Regional Administrator for Region X, which includes the states of Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Washington state. He succeeds Mary McBride of Olympia whom Secretary Donovan recently named HUD’s Assistant Deputy Secretary for Field Policy and Management. Mr. Block assumed his new duties on Monday, November 18th.

Mr. Block is an attorney whose private practice has focused on complex real estate transactions on behalf of both private and public entities. In 2005, then-King County Executive Ron Sims asked him to serve as Director of the Committee to End Homelessness. In this capacity he coordinated the efforts of some 70 local government, non-profit and for-profit entities, faith-based communities, philanthropies and formerly homeless people in implementing the 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness in Seattle/King County. During his tenure some 5,000 housing units were funded for homeless and at-risk individuals and families in the County.

Block also oversaw the expansion of King County’s “211” service by which all the services of 70 agencies and 160 programs can be reached by dialing three numbers, directing families to services they need. Block said that he’s most proud of the coordination among funding groups and the service providers. The effort was named one of the top 25 innovations in government by the Ash Center at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government.

When Block took the job at the Committee to End Homelessness, he said he would stay for four or five years, then look for something else to do. He stayed for seven years, and ended his term with this advice for his successor: “It’s a team effort. Listen to those around you. I got credit for a lot of work that others have done.”

Mr. Block also has served as Chair of the Seattle Housing Authority Board of Commissioners, President of AIDS Housing of Washington (now Building Changes), Chair of the Seattle Center Advisory Commission and board member of the Downtown Emergency Service Center and the Workforce Development Council of Seattle/King County.

In 2012, the Washington State Housing Finance Commission honored Mr. Block with the Margaret M. Sevy Affordable Housing Lifetime Achievement Award. “Thousands of people over the years will probably never know Bill Block,” The Seattle Times editorial board observed upon his retirement from the Commission in the summer of 2012, “but they will be recipients of housing care for their children, counseling, and other benefits because of him. In short, they will have a better life because of Bill Block.”

As HUD’s Northwest Regional Administrator, Mr. Block will help manage and coordinate the delivery of HUD programmatic and financial support in housing, community and economic development to 56 housing authorities, 227 Federally-recognized tribes and Alaskan native villages, 59 state, county and local governments and more than 400 projects serving the homeless in Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Washington state and the provision of subsidized housing to more than low-income 180,000 households in Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Washington state.

For more information visit www.HUD.gov.
Federal SNAP Cuts Cause for Concern at Local Food Banks

The beginning of November marked the end of $5 billion in emergency food stamp funding implemented in 2009 to ease the burden of food security for Americans slammed by the financial crisis. Local food banks say the cuts will likely put severe pressure on their clients.

An estimated 47 million people nationwide will see their Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits shrink this month as a result of the cut. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, in Washington state this means $114 million fewer dollars that will directly impact 1,113,000 residents. At the individual level, this means $11 less for an individual, $20 less for a household of two, $29 less for three and $36 less for a family of four.

November and December are traditionally high volume donation months for food banks, as those more fortunate get into the spirit of giving.


State Housing Trust Fund Supports 21 New Projects

In December, the Washington State Department of Commerce awarded $35.1 million in loans and grants from the Housing Trust Fund for 21 affordable housing projects in 23 counties across the state. Projects funded will provide a total of 499 units of affordable housing for low-income households, as well as 312 beds for migrant seasonal farmworkers, 20 beds for homeless youth, and 45 beds in group homes for individuals with developmental disabilities, chronic mental illness or traumatic brain injury. Of the funds awarded, $1.6 million will be used to provide homeownership down payment assistance to 48 families with a developmentally disabled member.

90% of the units provided by these projects will serve households at 50% of area median income or lower. Projects will serve a variety of vulnerable populations, but are primarily targeted to serve farmworkers, homeless veterans, people with developmental disabilities, and people suffering from chronic mental illness. All units must remain affordable to the target population for 40 years.

Funds for the awards were made available through capital appropriations in the 2013-15 Biennial Budget passed by the Legislature in July 2013. The state’s investment will leverage $346 million from other sources—about $4.57 for every dollar from the Housing Trust Fund—including funds from Low Income Housing Tax Credits, private investors, and other public sources.

A list detailing specific projects and awards is available at www.commerce.wa.gov.

Center for Housing Policy Releases Report on Housing Affordability and Public Opinion

The Center for Housing Policy recently released a new literature review covering research into public opinions on housing affordability issues and how best to communicate them. The review, conducted by Janet Viveiros and Rebecca Cohen, found that clarifying language needs to be used for complicated issues. “Building Support for Affordable Homeownership and Rental Choices: A Summary of Research Findings on Public Opinion and Messaging on Affordable Housing” focuses on public opinion research combined with language and messaging.

The research adds to the understanding of how respondents feel about affordable housing and the people who live in it and the proper messaging to describe how respondents react to specific terms and ideas. Among its findings are that personal familiarity with housing challenges has increased and that effective messages focus on specific beneficiaries and core values such as hard work, balance, fairness and opportunity.

The full review can be found at www.nhc.org.
Mount Holly Settlement
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70 remain, including about 30 that are parties to the lawsuit. They have charged that any redevelopment of the neighborhood would affect blacks and Hispanics more than whites and is therefore discriminatory.

The town argued that the charge is not true. The Fair Housing Act “prohibits intentional discrimination alone; it does not require local officials to use race as a criterion in determining how best to allocate limited resources in the context of redeveloping an entire section of a community,” it says.

The Obama administration and its civil rights allies were never eager to fight this battle in a court with a 5-4 conservative majority. The Department of Justice intervened in the last case to get St. Paul officials to drop their appeal and settle with landlords, who had alleged that the city’s aggressive enforcement policies reduced the amount of affordable housing for minorities.

The settlement was approved at an evening meeting of the Mount Holly Township Council. It will increase the number of homes to be built and set some of them aside for current residents. Others will receive relocation allowances. The balance of the development project will proceed.

“Our goal was to ensure that Mount Holly Gardens would remain a viable community, not just a redevelopment parcel,” a township lawyer, George Saponaro, said in a statement.

A lawyer for the plaintiffs, Olga Pomar, said in a statement that the settlement “offers our clients the opportunity they have always wanted—to be able to remain in Mount Holly and participate in the revitalization of their community if they so choose, rather than being uprooted from the homes they have lived in for many years, separated from their neighbors, friends and families.”

More about the many ramifications of this case at www.propublica.org.

Permanent Homeless Village
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all the way along. We had a significant reaction from adjacent landowners. It’s been a long struggle to get to this point just by convincing one set of players at a time.”

He added that the project was successful in overcoming attitudes, in part, “because the right people were in the right place at the right time. We have had some incredibly smart and dedicated people leading the fight, including some elected officials and staff. But the pressure of a growing and increasingly visible homeless population here has definitely also played a part. Olympia, and to some degree Thurston County, have shown themselves to be ready to provide services and opportunities to turn things around for this population.”

This is not the congregation’s only homeless project. In the 90’s it began, and still supports, Out of the Woods, a transitional housing program in a house next to the church. Out of the Woods hosts one or two families with children for up to three months, giving them time to save up money to move into a home of their own.

Ransom said around 20 people from UUUC are currently involved with the Quixote Village project, but since 2007 probably 200 have contributed in some way. “Our theme is it takes a village to build the Village,” he said.

He added, “Anyone who has had anything to do with the process, and in particular folks who have worked as hosts and other volunteers through the years, have been blown away by learning what the world of homelessness is all about. It’s been eye-opening for all of us to understand their issues.”

Donald E. Skinner is contributing editor of Unitarian Universalist World and editor of InterConnections newsletter for church leaders. He is a member of the Shawnee Mission Unitarian Universalist Church in Lenexa, Kansas.

Housing Affordability
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Rental subsidies are also reaching fewer very low income households. Between 2007 and 2011 the number of such renters increased by 3.3 million while the number able to receive subsidies expanded by only 225,000 and the share of eligible households receiving assistance shrank from 27.4 percent to 23.8 percent. The number of renters with worse case needs receiving no assistance jumped by 2.6 million to 8.5 million.

Even where funding for assistance increased, rising rents and falling incomes raised cost and limited the reach to more households. About $26 million in capital investments for public housing remains unfunded and privately owned housing is rapidly aging and assistance contracts are expiring. Mandatory budget cuts under sequestration could reduce vouchers by 125,000 this year.

So far, the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program has been spared from sequestration but its subsidies are inadequate to make units affordable for extremely low-income tenants, so it is often combined with other forms of assistance. The program may be endangered when debate about tax reform begins in earnest.

The study concludes that, despite the magnitude of the affordability crisis and the clear need for new thinking about assistance, active debate on rental housing policy has just begun. There are promising approaches from both government and advocates, but as the country faces difficult choices and an aging population and rising health care costs strain the federal budget, it would be all too easy for rental housing concerns to get lost in the debate.

Some information for this article came from Mortgage News Daily. The full study of housing affordability can be found at www.jchs.harvard.edu/americas-rental-housing.
Mercy Housing Northwest recently opened Emerald City Commons, a new four-story mixed-use community featuring 61 affordable apartments in Seattle’s Rainier Beach neighborhood. Many of the residential units are designed to accommodate families with children, and a large common room at the main residential entry opens into outdoor areas designed specifically for outdoor play.

On the ground floor, the new Rainier Health and Fitness facility will provide affordable fitness programs for neighbors and residents. The new space features a separate 1,700-square-foot group classroom that can be separated with a movable wall, to provide a women-only exercise space for Muslim and other women with a need for privacy.

The cost of rental housing rising is rapidly in Seattle. While there is currently a boom in apartment construction, economically challenged neighborhoods like Southeast Seattle are often overlooked in urban revitalization efforts. Lots become overgrown with weeds and become havens for criminal activity.

Mercy Housing Northwest is aiming to address that gap with Emerald City Commons by providing affordable apartments to low and moderate income residents in a neighborhood where they are badly needed.

“If applications are any gauge to the supply and demand equation, I think it is interesting to note that we had over 850 applications for the 61 available apartments,” said Paul Chiocco, Vice President of Philanthropy with Mercy Housing Northwest.

Mercy Housing Northwest is aiming to address that gap with Emerald City Commons by providing affordable apartments to low and moderate income residents in a neighborhood where they are badly needed.

Mercy Housing developed Emerald City Commons with partner Urban Impact, a local Rainier Valley nonprofit that sought for years to find a way to make a lasting impact in their neighborhood. They purchased an abandoned lot and opened a gym in a portable trailer. Their dream of expanding the gym and building desperately needed affordable housing languished—until they partnered with Mercy Housing Northwest. Within a year, the team had secured adequate financing and broke ground on the new community. Mercy Housing and Urban Impact will have dedicated staff at Emerald City Commons to support youth tutoring, health education, adult literacy, employment assistance, and other programming for residents.

The apartment building at 7700 Rainier Ave S. will be fully occupied by December 2013. The property was financed with a Low Income Housing Tax Credit investment provided by Union Bank, and funding from the Washington State Housing Trust Fund, the City of Seattle, the Rainier Valley Community Development Fund, as well as private donors.

More about Mercy Housing Northwest and the Emerald City Commons project at www.mercyhousing.org.
Housing and Homelessness Advocacy Day January 28

Housing and Homelessness Advocacy Day is a chance for you to unite with others to end homelessness in our state. If you are ready to take fighting homelessness to the next level, then please join the Housing Alliance on January 28 in Olympia for the annual Housing and Homelessness Advocacy Day!

The day includes:
- Inside information and timely updates on affordable housing and homelessness legislation.
- Workshops on how to talk to your elected officials and be the most effective advocate possible.
- Meetings with your lawmakers for which you’ll be armed with key messages, supporting documents and facts to help share your story.
- And an opportunity to feel the power of a strong and growing movement for affordable housing and an end to homelessness.

More information and online registration at www.wliha.org

2014 NLIHC Annual Housing Policy Conference in D.C.

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.

Housing First Partners Conference in Chicago

The 2nd HFPC, Housing First and Systems Change, will be held March 12-14 2014. Over 100 experts from the U.S., Canada and beyond will present workshops focused on enhancing clients’ recovery and quality of life and the need for systems-level changes in the following areas: Putting Housing into Housing First; Clinical Aspects of Housing First; Clients’ Voices in Housing First; Forging New Partnerships; Conducting and Disseminating Research. More info at http://www.hfpartnersconference.com/