**The Seattle Housing Levy: the Little Campaign that Could**

*By Tera Bianchi*

At 8:10 pm on Election Night 2009 the Seattle Housing Levy campaign staff and workgroup were crammed into a small office at the Sole Repair Shop on Capitol Hill, hovered over a laptop computer. Our hope was that the Housing Levy renewal would secure a narrow victory with 52% of voters’ support. Refreshing the King County Elections website as fast as the internet would allow, the results finally arrived. The initial numbers showed that 63% of Seattle’s voters supported the levy.

Planning for the 2009 Seattle Housing Levy campaign began on April 29 when Mayor Nickels announced his proposal to renew the Housing Levy. In May, leaders in Seattle City Government and the housing community came together to review the Mayor’s proposal and discuss different options to replace the expiring levy. Three different levy packages were proposed, with funding at $107 million, $145 million, and $167 million. Housing advocates pushed for the $167 million package, which would bring the city closer to meeting Seattle’s need for increased affordable housing for our most vulnerable. Others, sensitive to tax weariness during the most difficult recession in Washington’s history, advocated the smaller $107 million package.

In the end, the groups compromised and the City Council settled on a package which would provide $145 million, keeping the new levy at essentially the same level of production as the expiring levy. In order to go into effect, the proposal had to be approved by a majority of Seattle’s voters in the November 2009 election.

The campaign to pass the levy started in earnest in July with the appointment of a volunteer chair, Randy Robinson of Key Bank, the formation of a weekly work group, and the establishment of a steering committee made up of more than 50 members from labor, business and non-profit communities. By the end of July the workgroup had recruited 250 volunteers, held a kickoff party, established a fundraising committee and hired a campaign manager, Tera Bianchi. Priscilla Min, the full time field coordinator joined the team on September 1st. The campaign began by focusing outreach efforts on neighborhood farmer’s markets, securing key endorsements and meeting with the media. The campaign

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Legislation & Investor Support for Tax Credits Needed

By Joshua Okrent

On September 3, members of the Affordable Rental Housing A.C.T.I.O.N. (A Call To Invest in Our Neighborhoods) Campaign met with Capitol Hill staff members to discuss proposals included in a letter recently sent to urge Congress to enact changes to the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) in upcoming tax legislation. The proposals—put forth by a broad cross section of stakeholders in the field of affordable rental housing and LIHTC investment—would stimulate affordable rental housing production while creating and saving tens of thousands of jobs.

According to a study commissioned by Enterprise Community Partners, Inc. (Enterprise) and the Local Initiatives Support Corp. (LISC) and released in early November, institutional investors are ready to finance an additional $5 billion in affordable rental housing through the LIHTC program if Congress enacts legislation that addresses ongoing market dislocation. The LIHTC revolutionized affordable rental housing finance and has become the nation's largest and most effective affordable rental housing production program. Since 1986, it has helped finance more than two million units of affordable rental housing and until recently about 120,000 apartments annually. Investors have received a solid return on their investment for providing the capital to finance much-needed housing. Most importantly, the LIHTC program has given more than two million low-income families a safe, decent and affordable place to call home.

With the weakened economy and investors cutting back their demand for tax credits, however, as many as 60,000 fewer units could be constructed or preserved annually. This comes at a time when the current foreclosure crisis is creating an even greater need for affordable rental housing. The A.C.T.I.O.N. Campaign is a grassroots effort focused on stimulating investment in affordable rental housing led by a national coalition of cross-industry organizations. The goal of the Campaign is to restore the amount of affordable rental housing built, rehabbed and preserved annually in communities across the country.

The composition of LIHTC investors has changed over time from individuals in the earliest years of the program, to institutional investors across a range of industries and finally to the current investor base of large financial corporations. However, this narrowed investor base left the market for LIHTCs susceptible to the credit crunch affecting financial institutions beginning in 2008. LISC and Enterprise commissioned a report to help better understand the current market in the wake of a steep decline in available equity for affordable housing investments. LIHTC investment levels fell dramatically from about $9 billion in 2007 to approximately $5.5 billion in 2008. Since most affordable rental housing development depends on capital raised from the LIHTC, many state-approved developments have been stalled or abandoned as a result.

“Jump starting the LIHTC market is critical for a whole host of reasons,” commented Michael Rubinger, LISC president and CEO. “It drives job creation in places hard-hit by the recession. It ensures that families stung by job loss and foreclosures will be able to find quality affordable homes in which to raise their children.

And it is vital to the health of low- and moderate-income communities — where affordable housing so often anchors more comprehensive revitalization. It is important for the long-term viability of the many community based organizations that have long been the redevelopment infrastructure in struggling neighborhoods, but today find themselves sitting on stalled projects with no financing available to move forward.”

Information for this article came from A.C.T.I.O.N. For more information about A.C.T.I.O.N., including a full list of sponsors and the letter to congress, visit www.rentalhousingaction.org.
Voters Renew Commitment to Housing, Services, Civil Liberties

by Joshua Okrent

On November 3, voters across Washington state supported a broad range of important progressive proposals, initiatives and candidates. Voters overwhelmingly approved Proposition 1 renewing the Seattle Housing Levy (see story on page 1); rejected initiative 1033 which would have institutionalized recession-level spending for state and local governments; and passed Referendum 71 which expanded the rights of same-sex couples.

Washington state’s Initiative Measure 1033 proposed to cut “state revenues, limit growth of certain state, county and city revenue to annual inflation and population growth, not including voter-approved revenue increases. Revenue collected above the limit would reduce property tax levies.” According to the Washington Secretary of State, 1033 was estimated to reduce general state revenues by approximately $6 billion by 2015, which would have dramatically reduced funds for housing, education, social, health, and general government services. The measure was defeated by 10 percentage points (55.4 to 44.6) by voters. Significantly, the initiative was soundly defeated in Eastern Washington, where it was rejected by a margin of 54 to 46 percent.

Washington voters accomplished a national first by ratifying R-71 which makes state registered domestic partnerships fully parallel to civil marriage. Nicknamed “Everything But Marriage,” referendum 71 asked voters to reconfirm the state legislature’s recent expansion of domestic partnership rights, signed by Governor Gregoire last spring. The bill recognizes the rights of domestic partners “to be equivalent to those of married spouses.” The referendum was approved by 52.6% to 47.4%.

In King County, Dow Constantine handily beat Susan Hutchison for the job of King County Executive. Though the County Executive position is officially nonpartisan, loud political overtones echoed through the campaign. Constantine — currently the County Council chairman — characterized himself as an accomplished legislator with local wisdom. He said Hutchison’s conservative ties are out of touch with liberal King County. Constantine on the other hand is a long-time elected Democrat who campaigned as someone who fights for liberal causes.

Marilyn Strickland was elected as the next Mayor of Tacoma, the first woman of color elected to head a large city in the state. Strickland replaced Mayor Bill Baarsma, and her campaign agenda included seeking new ways to bring more public education dollars to Tacoma and improve student achievement in the classroom. She was elected to the Tacoma City Council in 2007 and served as vice chairwoman of the council’s Public Safety, Human Services, and Education Committee.

Well known progressive leader Julie Anderson, a member of the Tacoma City Council, beat conservative Jan Shabro, a former state legislator, for the critical office of Pierce County Auditor. The auditor oversees the elections in the 2nd most populous county of the state, and the position is generally seen as a stepping stone to higher political office.

Follow Washington state election results at www.progressivemajority.org.

Marilyn Strickland (center) was elected Mayor of Tacoma, the first woman of color elected to head a large city in the state. She is flanked by former Tacoma Mayors Bill Baarsma and Harold Moss. Photo courtesy stricklandformayor.com

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New HUD Administration Supports Rental Housing and Rewards Innovation

By Ron Sims
This is an edited version of remarks prepared for the Housing Washington Conference 2009 in Spokane on September 30.

It’s an honor for me to be back in my hometown of Spokane to share with Washington how HUD is not only providing much-needed assistance to Washington’s struggling families and neighborhoods, but laying the sustain-

able, inclusive foundation that our communities and our country need to thrive and prosper.

Just think about where we were only a few short months ago. Uncertainty was rampant. The economy was in a nosedive. Credit was frozen solid. Foreclosures were at record levels. People were talking about the coming of a second Great Depression.

That was the situation we faced. Then President Obama was inaugurated—and we hit the ground running. We stabilized the financial sector. We passed the Recovery Act to give new life to our economy. And we unveiled a historic effort to keep people from losing their homes called Making Homes Affordable.

We still have a lot more to do for Washington’s families. But since March, over 360,000 loan modifications have gotten underway. We’ve mobilized our vast network of counselors and asked for a 50% budget increase for housing counseling. And we’ve put pressure on our service providers to ramp up their efforts. All taken together, we believe we’ve reached a turning point.

Ensuring these efforts are successful over the long haul is where the Recovery Act comes in. In February, HUD started investing nearly $14 billion in our communities: creating jobs where they are needed most, making homes more energy efficient and strengthening neighborhoods.

Pumping nearly $7 billion in Washington communities, including $168 million from HUD, the Recovery Act is expected to create or preserve 75,000 jobs statewide.

We’re helping communities purchase and convert foreclosed and abandoned properties into new affordable housing through the Neighborhood Stabilization Program.

We’re laying the foundation for sustainable growth, encouraging state and local governments to develop new and innovative ways to improve affordable housing, rebuild communities, and increase energy efficiency. Indeed, nearly 1/3 of HUD’s Recovery Act funds can be used for “greening” America’s public and assisted housing stock.

Of the $4 billion that we’ve invested through the Recovery Act in public housing, we set aside $1 billion for the Capital Fund competitive grant program so public housing and its residents can play a key role in creating sustainable communities. Over $61 million has been awarded to housing authorities in Washington state, including $28 million to the Seattle Housing Authority and $16 million to the King County Housing Authority.

Of course, all of these initiatives are predicated on a bedrock commitment to building and preserving affordable housing nationwide. Because we all know that long before there was a foreclosure crisis, there was an affordable rental housing crisis. We’ve committed to full 12 month funding of Section 8 contracts and we’ve increased funding for the Housing Choice Voucher program by $1.8 billion. We must re dedicate ourselves to ensuring that every American family has the opportunity to build a better healthier future for themselves and their children. That’s what these funds—and the Family Unification Program—are all about.

We’ve also invested $2.25 billion in the Tax Credit Assistance Program to stabilize affordable housing developments stuck in the pipeline by the recession.

Finally, our budget includes $1 billion to capitalize the National Housing Trust Fund. Put simply, the Federal government is getting back into the business of affordable rental housing.

Too often in the past government has been a barrier to local innovation. But at HUD, and across the Administration, that is starting to change. We call our budget proposal the “Roadmap to Transformation” because it makes sustainability the very focus of everything we do. We’re proposing to create an Office of Sustainable Housing and Communities to oversee all this work, which Secretary Donovan has asked me to lead—having developed one of the most cutting edge green building and smart growth programs in the country here in Washington.

We see this office at the center point of all of HUD’s sustainability initiatives: helping manage our relationships with departments of Transportation, Energy, and EPA at the federal level and allowing us to work directly on your most exciting innovations.

This holistic approach to community development—recognizing
By Caroline Bombar-Kaplan

The Washington State Housing Finance Commission presented five awards to two individuals and three organizations at the 2009 Friend of Housing awards ceremony that took place during Housing Washington, the annual statewide conference on affordable housing. More than 350 people attended the awards celebration at the DoubleTree Hotel Spokane City Center in Spokane.

This year’s honorees were selected for their leadership and exceptional contribution to creating or supporting affordable housing, implementing housing-related programs, creating innovative financing mechanisms for housing, supporting homebuyer education or technical training efforts within the housing community and helping to solve housing problems. The Commission received nominations for the Friend of Housing awards from people working in the public, private and independent sectors of the affordable housing industry.

Friend of Housing Individual Achievement Awards went to Sheila King, Executive Director of Multifamily Affordable Properties, a nonprofit organization based in Tacoma; and Renee Rooker, Executive Director of the Walla Walla Housing Authority.

Friend of Housing Organizational Achievement Awards were awarded to: The Housing Authority of Chelan County and the City of Wenatchee; Phyllis Davis, Executive Vice President and Chief Credit Officer, and Carrie Brooks, Loan Officer, of Islanders Bank of Friday Harbor, San Juan Island; and Pioneer Human Services.

Additional information on each award recipient is available at www.wshfc.org or through Bombar Public Relations at caroline@bombar.com.
Riverwalk Point II

By Margaret Hall

In February 2009 Riverwalk Point II opened its doors to 50 low-income households living in the Spokane area. Riverwalk Point II is the second phase of the Riverwalk Point community, a large project sponsored by SNAP (Spokane Neighborhood Action Partners), which provides safe and affordable housing to households living at or below 50% of the Area Median Income as well as onsite access to social, recreational, and educational resources that create positive opportunities for all ages and help to build community.

The project provides set-asides for large families, households affected by disability, and those formerly homeless. The project’s 51 units (including one for management) are located in 5 buildings of flats and townhouses that vary from one to three stories and from 3 to 19 units. The units include 18 one-bedroom units, 22 two-bedroom units, and 10 three-bedroom units. Rents range from $290 to $725 and include heat and hot water.

The project features a community building that provides shared space for the 300 residents living at Riverwalk Point I and II. The community building’s first floor has four property management and social services offices, one maintenance office, a computer center, maintenance bay, public kitchen and storage area, public bathrooms, and a large multi-purpose room. There are three living units on the second-floor. The community building allows SNAP to bring key programs to the site including case management and life skills classes like financial basics, microenterprise development, conservation education and “living green” classes. In addition, local partners provide regular on-site programming such as the School District 81 Summer Meals Program, the Intercollegiate College of Nursing Site Visit Program, and programs for young residents from the Girl Scouts and Boys and Girls Club.

Riverwalk Point II helps to meet a critical need for affordable housing and environmentally responsible development in the Spokane area. As far back as 2000, when the Pomegranate Center facilitated the project’s original design charrette, the fundamental goal for the development of Riverwalk Point I and II was to create “An Affordable Sustainable Community of Choice.” This goal guided the development of the project and is reflected in the use of such features as durable materials, energy and water saving features, and low VOC paints and adhesives.

Probably the most unique project feature is the use of straw bale construction in the Community Building. Straw is appealing as a building material for several reasons. First, straw is a locally produced agri-byproduct. Also, using straw bales helps to limit pollution by creating markets for the material, hence reducing the pressure to field burn, which produces significant air pollution. In 1997 SNAP built a single-family straw bale house and found that the straw bales were very good in terms of maintenance and long term care, and that the insulating properties of straw bales kept heating costs low. The insulation value of straw bales has been calculated to have an R-value of up to R-35, compared to a standard wall insulation value of R-21. Strawbale walls are considered to function better than a stud frame wall with a similar R-value because of the thermal mass on the interior. Interestingly, the straw bales, once they are stuccoed, have a 2-hour commercial fire rating, greater than many other commercial products. The tight packing keeps the available oxygen needed for combustion very limited. Also, the high silica content in straw is said to impede fire. SNAP was very interested in incorporating straw bale technology into a larger project.

Kelly Lerner of One World Design was the straw bale consultant. She assisted in integrating straw bale with more conventional construction, and conducted a one-day workshop on straw bale construction. This was one of the first uses of straw bale construction in a low-income housing project.

Further, the building is solar hot water and photo voltaic-ready. Because of these efforts, Washington State University awarded the project its first Energy Star Multi-Family Certification and Enterprise awarded Green Communities Certification. Enterprise also provided sustainability training which will be an ongoing education program.
for onsite staff and residents – both children & adults - on the green features and equipment included in the project.

The project’s total cost is approximately $8.9 million, with actual construction cost around $109/sq.ft. Sustainable features added just under 3% to the construction budget but will help to lower operating costs by lowering energy and water costs and allowing the purchase of durable materials with extended lifespans.

Funding for Riverwalk Point II came from both public and private sources. Development financing came from Spokane County and Impact Capital. Spokane County and the Washington State Housing Trust Fund provided long-term financing. The Washington State Housing Finance Commission awarded Low-Income Housing Tax Credits and the equity investor is NEF.

Major private funding was received from the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Enterprise Community Partners, and the Washington State Department of Commerce Building Communities Fund (BCF). Both the Gates Foundation and BCF were major supporters of the Community Building. Enterprise supported green building efforts through their Green Communities program, and the Allen Foundation provided funding for the project as a whole. Over 15 other entities also provided critical funding, many helping to cover the costs of the indoor and outdoor community spaces and amenities.

Additional funding targeted the project’s green design and features, including Avista Utilities’ Incentive and Rebate Programs. Enterprise has approved the purchase of the project’s carbon offsets, equivalent to a 494-ton reduction over the next 10 years.

The development consultant for the project was Beacon Development Group; the architect is Zeck Butler Architects; the general contractor is Mark Lundgren, Inc. Riverwalk Point I, the community’s first development phase, was completed in 2003.

Margaret Hall is a green community development consultant working with SNAP. For more information about SNAP or about the Riverwalk Point II project, please visit www.snapwa.org

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organized a speaker’s bureau that gave talks at local Legislative District meetings, churches, and at community meetings.

On September 15th the results from a commissioned poll came in. City-wide polling showed that only 51% of voters supported the levy. The victory that everyone was sure was within reach was now in question. The workgroup was faced with some difficult questions: how did the polling change the campaign and would releasing the results help or hurt the campaign?

The committee also questioned whether they should release the results of the poll in the hope of drumming up some media coverage. Up to this point, meetings with press had proved fruitless. Without any organized opposition the levy was labeled “uncontroversial” by the local media and few reporters were eager to cover the topic. Would the release of the pessimistic results be enough to interest the press? In the end, the workgroup decided not to release the results with the rationale that no media is better than bad media. The campaign would have to find another way to get the word out.

In addition to gauging the level of support, the September poll also indicated that two particular pieces of information increased voter support. First, that the Seattle Housing Levy was a renewal. And second, that it cost the typical home owner only $65.00 per year. The workgroup decided to directly contact the voters. We put out a call to action to leaders in the housing field asking for volunteers to invest 3 hours a week to make 25,000 phone calls to likely voters. The housing community rose to the challenge.

From late September until November 3rd the campaign staffed phone banks 4 to 5 nights a week, with up to 4 phone banks on any given night, and door-to-door canvassing on Saturdays. The phone banks had as few as 3 and as many as 30 volunteers each night. A wide range of organizations hosted the phone banks including HDC, DESC, GGLO, HRG, HomeSite, Homestead Community Land Trust, LIHI, Beacon Development Group, Building Changes, Intercommunity Mercy Housing, Plymouth Housing Group, SKCCH, The Compass Center, and Habitat for Humanity.

In the end the ad-hoc group made over 40,000 phone calls to voters, mailed 323,496 direct mail pieces to targeted households, canvassed over 4,000 households in targeted neighborhoods, received over 480 contributions from individuals and organizations, sent countless emails, and posted over 1000 “YES for HOMES” signs!

On Election Night, November 3rd, the Yes for Homes campaign was dubbed The Little Campaign that Could. With the help of a massive and aggressive education campaign, Seattle voters once again showed they that were compassionate and caring. By the end of the week the Seattle Housing Levy won with an unprecedented 65.8% of the vote, proving that even in hard times Seattle still invests in our most vulnerable neighbors.

Many thanks to the Housing Development Consortium and Office of Housing for pre-campaign policy development and ongoing leadership.

Tera Bianchi was the campaign manager of the “Yes for Homes” campaign. For more information about the Seattle Housing Levy contact Anna Markee at the Housing Development Consortium, Anna@housingconsortium.org.
Snohomish County Advocacy Project

By Joshua Okrent with Emily Alvarado

Since 2002, the Housing Consortium of Everett and Snohomish County has worked to provide strategic leadership in crafting policy and program solutions to affordable housing challenges. In August 2009 the Consortium received a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to create a new program, the Advocacy Project, which provides opportunities for homeless and formerly homeless individuals, residents of affordable housing, and board members of housing service providers to share their personal stories with elected officials.

An essential part of the Advocacy Project is simply training people who are unaccustomed to speaking about their experiences. Once advocates are identified, they will be trained to speak and to write statements and letters advocating for their needs. The advocates will then learn how the legislative process works. The Housing Consortium will arrange meetings at which new advocates can speak to local legislatures, city councils and community groups. Eventually, the advocates will be brought to Olympia to speak at legislative hearings which will impact public policies statewide. Concurrently, the Advocacy Project will be collecting written and oral stories of advocates to post on websites and use as promotional materials. Throughout this work, the Housing Consortium will provide the advocates with a stipend to cover the costs of transportation, child care or lost wages for time spent in training or advocating.

The voices of real citizens who have experienced homelessness are needed to generate broad community engagement and connection to the issues of affordable housing in Snohomish County and across the state. Many Americans, including most elected officials, rarely interact with people who are or have been homeless. Through the lens of their personal experiences, the advocates will help educate policy-makers about homelessness and ignite involvement in the struggle to end homelessness on a local level. By connecting individual lives and stories with broader systemic and structural factors, policy-makers are better able to understand the urgent need for change. The Advocacy Project will educate local leaders and mobilize citizens’ power in an effort to bring housing within reach.

Emily Alvarado is the Advocacy Project Coordinator for the Housing Consortium of Everett and Snohomish County. For more information or to be part of the Advocacy Project contact her at 425-339-1015 or Emily@housingsnohomish.org.
Snohomish County Passes Mobile Home Zoning Changes

By Joshua Okrent

On October 14, the Snohomish County Council passed two zoning measures aimed at protecting mobile home parks from redevelopment. The ordinances are designed to preserve more than two dozen mobile home parks in urban parts of unincorporated Snohomish County. Mobile homes are an important form of affordable home ownership in Snohomish County that has experienced significant losses in recent years. The ordinances only affect manufactured housing communities located within unincorporated urban growth areas. Proponents say the legislation should help as many as 2,000 people stay in their homes.

The measure was signed into law by Snohomish County Executive Aaron Reardon at the end of October. The signing took place at Carriage Club Estates, a 55-and-over mobile home park in south Everett.

Reardon and the County Council worked together to draft the law. While designed to help park tenants protect their homes, which often cannot be moved, it also gives park owners some options to develop their land. The new laws are the result of Reardon’s Housing & Homelessness Policy Oversight Committee which convened in January 2008. The ordinances were created during a special subcommittee chaired by Council Chairman Mike Cooper and Councilman Brian Sullivan. The subcommittee included homeowners, park owners, Executive Office staff and PDS staff who worked together for nearly two years on strategies that would provide homeowners some protection from displacement due to redevelopment.

“This is exactly the type of beneficial legislation I knew could result from the work of the oversight committee when it began meeting,” Reardon said. “Together, we have found a way to protect residents of manufactured home parks while also looking after property owners’ rights.”

Council-member Dave Gossett said, “what we are discussing today is competing property rights: the people who own the dirt versus the people who own the units.”

While Gossett said the new law wasn’t without problems, he decided to vote for it because most of the current property rights laws favor park owners over tenants.

County ordinance 09-095 amends Snohomish County’s Growth Management Comprehensive Plan to strengthen land use and housing policies related to manufactured home parks. It also adds policy direction for rezoning manufactured home parks.

Ordinance 09-096 rezones all existing manufactured home parks located within unincorporated urban residential neighborhoods to the county’s Mobile Home Park zone. It enacts development regulations, which provide an expanded list of permitted uses designed to complement an existing park rather than compete for land area.

Finally, the regulations provide a mechanism for a park owner to request a rezone of the park should they wish to pursue other uses that are consistent with the policies contained in the GMA Comprehensive Plan.

The park owners group Manufactured Housing Communities of Washington has said it might challenge Snohomish County in court, citing violations of its Constitutional property rights. John Woodring, an attorney for a group of park owners, strongly objected to the law, saying it shifts the burden for affordable housing to one class of land owners. The group has filed a federal lawsuit challenging a similar mobile home park zone in Tumwater.

Diane Navicky, who lives at Carriage Club Estates, said that she is very happy about the decision. There are 13 people in her community who are 90 or older and they continually tell her they can’t sleep at night for fear of being forced to move.

“I think the decision is wonderful,” she said. “This is going to buy us some time.”

Information for this article came from the Seattle Times and the Everett Star-Herald.
The Governor Gregoire Proposes Extreme Budget Cuts

On December 9 Gov. Christine Gregoire proposed a supplemental budget that closes a $2.6 billion shortfall primarily through steep cuts in spending. But she also said she would propose a second budget within a few weeks that would include new revenue such as tax increases to restore some of those programs.

The budget would scrap numerous social service programs. It would cut the Basic Health Plan, which now provides health care coverage to 65,000 people who make 200 percent of the federal poverty level; Apple Health, which covers 16,000 low-income children; and the General Assistance Unemployable program (GA-U), which provides cash and medical services to disabled people who cannot work but do not qualify for federal disability programs. No additional funding was proposed for the Housing Trust Fund unless the Legislature adds program funds. Other cuts include health insurance coverage for 16,000 lower income children; benefits for Medicaid clients including vision, podiatry, dental, and maternity support; funding to send more than 1,500 3-year-olds to preschool; state support for kindergarten in high-poverty areas.

Gregoire is legally required to submit a budget that is balanced without new revenue, but both she and Democratic legislative leadership have been saying for weeks that an all-cuts budget would be too harmful to Washington state’s poorest and most vulnerable.

More information about the Governor’s proposed budget can be found at povertyaction.org.

Homebuyer Tax Credit Program Extended

On November 6, the President signed the extension of the successful first-time homebuyer tax credit program. The extension, included in the Unemployment Compensation Extension Act (H.R. 3548), passed the House by a vote of 403-12, and the Senate by a vote of 98-0. Without an extension, the tax credit was due to expire on November 30th. HR 3548 was sponsored by Congressman Jim McDermott (D, WA-7) and supported unanimously by Washington’s Congressional delegation.

The first-time home buyer tax credit was first created as part of the Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008. It was subsequently changed and extended under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. The new legislation extends the program into 2010 and opens the tax credit to a greater number of Americans.

The cost to the federal government is estimated to be $11 billion.

County Wins Prize for Fighting Homelessness

For the second straight year, a Clark County anti-homelessness program has brought home a national award. On Oct. 3, the Clark Homeless Engagement Collaboration project got an “Award of Excellence” from the National Association for County Community and Economic Development, an organization of county social service agencies.

The CHEC project offers housing to people who have been living on the streets, in camps, in hospitals or in jail. It’s part of a national trend toward “housing first” programs, which put homeless people in stable housing before attempting to offer them other services.

Last year, the regional “Bridges to Housing” program, which Clark County shares with Multnomah, Washington and Clackamas counties in Oregon, won the same prize.

City of Monroe Wins Award for Zoning Incentive Program

On November 17th the Monroe City Council passed an affordable housing ordinance that offers significant incentives for the development of affordable housing in Monroe, including density bonuses, fee waivers, tax abatement and parking reductions. The Housing Consortium of Everett and Snohomish County presented the Monroe City Council with a Housing Halo award for their leadership in affordable housing policy.

Advocates Call for a ‘Safe Park’ for the Homeless in Every Kitsap City

Every city in Kitsap County needs a “safe park,” where homeless families can sleep in their cars, according to a summit on homelessness held in Bremerton on November 17. Currently there is one such park in Kitsap County, offering families living in their cars a secure place to park overnight, shower and connect with caseworkers until they get something more permanent.

It’s been up and going for more than a year and has been heralded as a success by politicians, police, social-service workers and homeless people. At the summit, advocates urged spreading the concept around to other cities and towns, and vowed to push safe parks at city council meetings.

Bremerton Police Capt. Tom Wolfe said that he encounters many fewer people in “creative” living situations now compared to 20 years ago.

“I know we have a long way to go, but, wow, we’ve come a long ways,” he said.

Some of the improvements in providing for the homeless include the safe park, Benedict House in Bremerton for homeless men, a larger emergency shelter at St. Vincent’s for women and children now being built, and new severe-weather shelters.

Homeless advocate Sally Santana invites people interested in helping with new initiatives to e-mail her at sally.santana@wavecable.com.
Enterprise Promises $4 billion to Build Green Low-Income Housing

By Joshua Okrent

In early October Enterprise Community Partners announced that they planned to raise $4 billion over the next five years to help “green” low-income homes.

The Maryland-based nonprofit, which focuses on affordable housing and community development, will direct the money toward creating, preserving and retrofitting 75,000 residential, community and commercial buildings across the country and making them energy efficient. The funding commitment is part of Enterprise’s ongoing Green Communities initiative.

Enterprise’s private investment branch will also make retrofit loans to owners of multi-family buildings for energy- and water-reduction efforts and to make living environments more healthful.

Making buildings greener by addressing sustainability, air quality and the toxicity of building materials has health and economic benefits, executives say. The group called for all new and existing housing to be green by 2020. The fundraising effort already has been bolstered by several donations, including a $1.5-million grant from the Home Depot Foundation and $1-million grants from the Kresge Foundation and the Kendeda Fund.

Along with its funding announcement, Enterprise also released a study about the cost-effectiveness of making affordable housing energy efficient. The report “Incremental Cost, Measurable Savings” claims that the average $4,524 per-unit upfront cost of complying with the 2005 version of the Enterprise Green Communities Criteria, a standard of 38 mandatory points and 13 optional ones, is quickly made worthwhile by the $4,851 in utility bill savings.

“This is the right direction,” said Dana Bourland, vice president of Enterprise’s green initiative. “Not only are there financial savings, but there are health benefits and lower carbon emissions. ... We just can’t afford not to make sure everything we do is green.”

The criteria include regulations on energy and water conservation and points out how to improve internal air quality by directly venting stoves and bathrooms outdoors. The standard also recommends that homes be built near public transit and away from wetlands while using healthier materials, such as paints and adhesives with low levels of volatile organic compounds (VOCs).

The average cost of incorporating the energy and water criteria was $1,917, but resulted in lifetime utility savings of $4,851, according to the data.

The study looked at 27 housing projects with a total of 1,640 single and multi-family homes. Overall, roughly 16,000 dwellings in 360 housing developments are thought to have complied with the criteria.

Building on its own commitment, Enterprise also issued a national call to action to the public, private and nonprofit sectors to make all affordable housing – new and existing – green by 2020. The next generation of Enterprise Green Communities will be the catalyst for unprecedented health, economic and environmental benefits to hundreds of thousands of families in neighborhoods across America.

“We want everything Enterprise touches to be green by 2013,” said Charles R. Werhane, president and CEO, Enterprise Community Investment, Inc. “We now have the proof that it works and we are poised to take the initiative to the next level. By bringing more innovative and responsive financing tools to our partners, we are pushing forward systemic change in our industry. The next generation of Enterprise Green Communities is our commitment to expand our efforts nationwide.”

For more information on the next generation of Enterprise Green Communities visit www.enterprisenextgen.org.
Housing and Homelessness Advocacy Day

Manufactured Housing Advocacy Day

Manufactured Housing Advocacy Day will be held on January 14th in Olympia. Gather with over 300 manufactured homeowners from across the state to make our voices heard in the state capitol. Legislators need to know that manufactured homeowners are striving to be as secure as possible for our families and those to follow us. For more information visit the Association of Manufactured Home Owners website, www.wamho.org.

NCRC 2009 National Conference in Washington

The National Community Reinvestment Coalition 2010 annual meeting will take place March 10-13 at the Washington Court Hotel in Washington, D.C. Topics covered by the 2010 conference will include the creation and sustaining of affordable housing, job development, and vibrant communities for America’s working families in a time of economic crisis. For more information and registration, visit www.ncrc.org.

People’s Summit & March on the Capitol

The Statewide Poverty Action Network is holding their annual Martin Luther King Day rally in Olympia on January 18, 2010. The day will include a policy briefing, a march and rally, meetings with lawmakers, and skill-building workshops. Childcare and meals provided. Transportation and Spanish interpretation are available. Visit www.povertyaction.org for more information and registration.