Lengthy State Legislative Session Comes to a Close

By Joshua Okrent

On April 13, the Washington House and Senate finally concluded the work of the 2010 Congress, with an 11th hour vote on a new revenue agreement. Lawmakers had struggled for more than 3 months over a $2.8 billion budget shortfall. In the end, the House and Senate both narrowly agreed to a funding package that would both cut state services and increase taxes.

Most importantly for affordable housing advocates, the final capital budget included $30 million for housing. $5 million will be used for two projects serving homeless mentally ill people receiving GA-U benefits. $25 million is allocated for the newly created Washington Works housing program. The operating budget also included $1 million for the Washington Families Fund to help end family homelessness and $2.6 million for operating support to ensure that homes are affordable to people at the lowest income levels.

This funding is a far cry from the $100 million that advocates originally called for, but it does demonstrate a continued commitment to housing by the legislature, particularly vital during this challenging moment.

Housing Washington extends thanks to Representatives Tina Orwall (D-33), Sharon Nelson (D-34), Hans Dunshee (D-44) and Speaker Frank Chopp (D-43) and Senator Frank McDermott (D-34), each of whom fought for crucial funding until the very end of this lengthy session. We also salute the Washington Low Income Housing Alliance who played a vital role during this session, especially in leading the fight against a Senate proposal which would have rescinded previously allocated Housing Trust Fund dollars.

Summary of State Legislation

In addition to the substantially revamped state budget, several important bills were signed into law over the course of this session. Despite an extremely challenging economic situation, the Governor signed bills saving General Assistance for the Unemployable (GA-U) and giving a 12 month authorization for Working Connections, though she vetoed several provisions in the bill that were related to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

The GA-U program will be transformed into the “Disability Lifeline” under HB 2782. HB 2782 also reforms and strengthens GA-U by providing expert assistance to GA-U recipients who apply for Social Security benefits, limiting the time individuals will have to stay on GA-U and ensuring they receive benefits for which...
HUD Selects Tacoma Housing Authority for New Rental Assistance Program

By Joshua Okrent

On January 29, HUD announced that the Tacoma Housing Authority will be one of three public housing agencies nationwide that will participate in HUD’s new Moving To Work Program (MTW). MTW allows housing agencies to design and test innovative housing strategies that assist lower income families living in public housing or who are assisted through HUD’s Housing Choice Voucher Program.

Public housing authorities in Champaign County, Illinois and Orlando, Florida were also chosen from among eight agencies that applied for MTW designation late last year and will reap the benefits of this designation until 2018.

The MTW program was created in 1996 as a demonstration or “test project” to give housing authorities the opportunity to design and test innovative, locally developed housing and self-sufficiency strategies for low-income families participating in HUD’s public housing and Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) programs. HUD exempts these agencies from certain rules and permits them to combine their multiple sources of HUD funding into a single agency-wide funding source. MTW agencies also get considerable flexibility in determining how to use their HUD funding. These agencies are, however, required to serve substantially the same number and type of households as they would without MTW designation. The program aims to accomplish three goals:

- Reduce costs and achieve greater cost effectiveness in federal expenditures;
- Give incentives to families with children where the head of household is working, is seeking work, or is preparing for work by participating in job training, educational programs, or programs that help people to obtain employment and become economically self-sufficient; and
- Increase housing choices for low-income families.

As part of HUD’s 2009 budget appropriation, Congress directed HUD to add three agencies that met certain criteria to the program. In August 2009, HUD invited eligible public housing agencies to apply for admission to the MTW program. The agencies had to: be high performing under HUD’s Public Housing Assessment System (PHAS); be a recipient of a HUD HOPE VI Revitalization grant; and operate no more than 5,000 aggregate housing vouchers and public housing units. HUD identified 17 potential applicants and received applications from eight housing authorities. The agencies selected received the highest scores from a ranking and rating system.

The Tacoma Housing Authority (THA) and its related tax-credit partnerships own 1,225 public housing units and have 3,500 Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV), serving approximately 12,000 residents. THA has eight strategic objectives designed to achieve the three MTW statutory objectives. These include: housing and real estate development; building strong communities; managing properties in a safe and efficient manner; providing high quality housing and supportive services; becoming a more self-sustaining agency; developing and managing properties in an environmentally responsible manner; providing quality information about housing authority activities and residents served and housing and community development; and creating and maintaining excellent administrative systems with highly qualified staff for effective customer service.

To encourage self-sufficiency, THA plans to replace the mandatory earned income disallowance with flexible enrollment in the Family Self-Sufficiency Program, redefine adjusted income and expenses, use agency resources to fund resident training programs, extend allowable tenant absence from units, and create a special rental assistance program with McCarver Elementary School and Tacoma Public Schools. Activities planned to increase housing choices include a local project-based voucher program and allowing transfers between

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Hundreds Voice Concerns to Lawmakers on Housing and Homelessness Advocacy Day

By Aaron Long

On a rainy but warm February 12th, over 400 residents of Washington state came to Olympia to rally in support of affordable housing on the annual Housing and Homelessness Advocacy Day. Housing advocates, housing professionals, homeless people, and concerned citizens gathered at the United Churches in Olympia to hear from community members about being in the trenches of the fight to find affordable housing, to hear from community and elected leaders about pending housing legislation, and to learn how best to advocate with their state representatives.

For the second year running, a panel talk was held featuring speakers who had directly benefited from Affordable Housing and Homelessness programs.

Bette Reed, a senior living in low-income housing and an advocate for low-income housing for seniors, detailed the plight many seniors face in searching for housing: one quarter of the homeless in Washington state are seniors; currently there 6,700 seniors in the state on waiting lists for a space in affordable housing; a senior whose only income is Social Security would on average have to pay 80% of their income to rent a market rate apartment. Bette explained why we must advocate strongly for full funding of the Housing Trust Fund: the 30% of income that seniors pay in subsidized housing covers just that: 30% of the cost of maintaining and operating the buildings in which they live. The other 70% must come from somewhere and the Housing Trust Fund is a crucial source of that funding.

Anitra Freeman, who suffers from bi-polar disorder, shared her story of having been homeless and the struggles she went through to get in place the 4 elements crucial to stability for anyone: a regular source of income (which for her began with GA-U), affordable housing, medication, and community. She said she has now lived in the same affordable apartment for 16 years, which has allowed her to stay employed, and allowed her to afford medication, all of which has inspired her to become involved in the Share/Wheel and Real Change communities. She stressed how important it was to advocate for funding GA-U and affordable housing programs so that others could have the opportunities she has had to establish a stable life.

Jessica Vogelsang-Riley, a formerly homeless mother with 3 kids, lost her job and then her apartment when she needed to stay home with a sick child. She detailed how advocacy on a city government level, just like the advocacy that would happen today on a state level, had saved Snohomish County’s transitional housing program that had allowed her to get her life back together.

Ua Ha, president of the Benson East Tenant Association, told the story of how the tenants at Benson East banded together preserve their building as affordable housing when it went up for sale in 2002. They were able to do so in part thanks to the help of federal, local, and state funding, including funding from the Housing Trust Fund. They depend on continued government funding to preserve their building. He said that their tenant association had come to Olympia to advocate for full funding of the Housing Trust Fund so that projects like theirs can continue to thrive and similar projects can get off the ground.

Representative Tina Orwall (D-33) then spoke and described the tough fight legislators have been engaged in to try to preserve the social safety nets of housing, healthcare, and education in the face of severe revenue shortfalls and thanked the assembled for their help.

Lobbyists Nick Federici and Seth Dawson gave an overview of housing bills currently before the legislature,
President’s FY 2011 Housing Budget Proposal

On February 1, President Obama unveiled his Fiscal Year 2011 budget request. The budget has significant provisions that address the needs of people struggling to maintain housing and stability in an uncertain economic climate.

Overall, the president proposed a ten percent increase to homeless assistance programs at HUD. Compared with last year, the agency’s budget increases rental assistance for low- and extremely low-income families by $2.1 billion through housing vouchers and project-based rental assistance. It also provides $2.1 billion for homelessness assistance grants to help transition families off the streets and into safe housing, a $200 million increase from the previous year.

At the same time, the proposal calls for dramatically cutting housing for the elderly, by $551 million, from 2010 spending of $824 million. It also calls for cutting funds for housing for people with disabilities by $210 million, from $300 million in this year.

“We had to make difficult choices in this budget and we are proposing, this year, long-term fundamental reforms to many of our programs,” HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan said during an afternoon conference call following the budget’s release.

Other reductions include a roughly 17% cut in funding to Native American Housing Block Grants.

The new budget provides $3.99 billion for local and state community development block grants, but as part of reforming such programs, it has proposed allocating an additional $150 million to the new Catalytic Investment Competition Grants program that expands the size of proven economic development projects.

Among the budget items is a $190 million (10 percent) increase in McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants, to $2.055 billion. Included in this figure is $200 million for the Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG).

President Obama’s proposal would also combine HUD housing vouchers with funding from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) mainstream programs to serve approximately 10,000 homeless or at-risk households. Forty percent of these vouchers would be allocated for Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers to serve chronically homeless individuals who are enrolled in certain Medicaid programs. The remaining 6,000 vouchers would target homeless families. Applicants for this assistance would have to demonstrate how they are coordinating the vouchers with state TANF assistance. To best target these families, the Department of Education would help identify at-risk families through its network of homeless liaisons.

Notable among the budget items is a proposed $85 million collaborative housing and services initiative at HUD. The initiative requires HUD, the US Department of Health and Human Service (HHS), and the US Department of Education (DOE) to work together, breaking down the divisions between government agencies and creating incentives for them to pool their resources to meet the needs of homeless families and individuals. The collaboration of these agencies will ensure that vulnerable Americans will have access to a wide breadth of programs that address income, housing, disability, and education – providing a comprehensive panel of assistance that can prevent homelessness before it happens.

Also noteworthy among the budget priorities is a reiteration of the Administration’s intention to end homelessness among veterans. The president has proposed a 50 percent increase for the VA’s homeless assistance programs and the VA has publicly announced a goal of reducing the number of homeless veterans from 131,000 to 59,000 by July 2012.

The Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) emergency fund was extended for another year. The emergency fund, which was created under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) provides short-term emergency assistance services for families at-risk of homelessness.

Other homeless-related programs at HHS, DOE, and the Department of Labor were level-funded or received small increases. Additionally, there were no new programs to address the issue of homelessness among youth – an underserved but growing population.

Also noteworthy is a substantial increase in funding for programs serving homeless veterans, rising by $265 million (50 percent) from $534 million to $799 million. The budget also extends supplemental funding for the TANF emergency Contingency fund for an additional year, giving States up to $2.5 billion for short-term emergency assistance.

Despite the good news for many homeless programs, much work remains to be done to provide solutions to those who have been homeless over time, as well as those made newly homeless by the poor economy. The proposal will move next to Congress where the House and Senate must approve the final budget.

The full FY 2011 HUD budget is available online at www.whitehouse.gov/omb. The National Low Income Housing Coalition has published a Budget Proposal Chart which provides additional details on many of these programs. See this information at www.nlihc.org.
By Neil J. Donovan

At a recent Veterans Affairs national conference, Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki announced: “President Obama and I are personally committed to ending homelessness among veterans within the next five years. Those who have served this nation as veterans should never find themselves on the streets, living without care and without hope.”

In 2010, the VA will spend $3.2 billion to prevent and reduce homelessness among veterans, with as much as $500 million going to homeless programs and $2.5 billion to medical services. This commitment represents a 23 percent increase over last year’s funding and a six times greater increase for residential care. The VA also is attempting to strengthen its ability to prevent veteran homelessness by offering grants to organizations providing supportive services for low-income veterans and their families.

The administration’s commitment to zero tolerance for homeless veterans is admirable and necessary. The VA’s commitment of resources is considerable and unprecedented. But if this commitment is to truly be a final and lasting solution to veterans’ homelessness, it must be increased to meet the scale and breadth of tomorrow’s problem.

The daily count of homeless veterans is approximately 150,000. But the demographics communicate an equally important message: Homeless veterans tend to be middle-aged. So today’s homeless veterans don’t include most of the 36,000 recent soldiers wounded in action and the countless thousands who carry the psychological impacts of war.

If this administration and this country are to remain committed to zero tolerance for homeless veterans, we must face the difficult reality that prioritizing one group of homeless over another is an unsuccessful strategy. If today’s housed soldiers are to remain tomorrow’s housed veterans, we must end all homelessness.

We, as a nation, can achieve the goal of ending homelessness in our lifetime by focusing attention and resources on all those who need and lack affordable housing and living-wage jobs. This goal will have its challenges, not the least of which will be to resist a tendency to divide the homeless into competing sub-populations: young vs. old, individual vs. family, chronic vs. episodic, mental illness vs. substance abuse, veteran vs. non-veteran and on and on.

The theory behind subdividing the homeless rests upon the assumption that finite resources can only work to cure a limited social ill. This divide-and-conquer mindset of the 1990s led us to eight years of directing new resources toward the chronically homeless, in part to the exclusion of others experiencing homelessness.

Our time waiting for soldiers to return from war will be well spent if we are diligent about the shared goal of protecting and defending those least fortunate among us.

Neil J. Donovan is the executive director of the National Coalition for the Homeless and part of Change.org’s Changemakers network. This article was adapted from an article on change.org.
they are eligible. The legislation also expands the food stamp employment and training program in community colleges around the state, and transfers the initial medical evaluation required by the program to a managed care provider facilitating faster treatment.

HB 2753, the “Washington Works” workforce housing program makes it more viable for workers to find homes for their families at prices they can afford. The law increases opportunities for nonprofit organizations and public agencies to purchase, build, and own property used for affordable housing. After the buildings are paid off, they must become permanently affordable—building long-term affordable housing and short term workforce housing.

HB 2752 modifies and improves provisions relating to providing shelter to a minor. The law extends the maximum period of time an organization serving homeless or runaway youth may wait to report a minor who is away from a lawfully prescribed residence or home without parental permission to 72 hours. This legislation increases the amount of time that a shelter has to establish and maintain open communication and trust.

ESHB 1956 allows churches broad authority to provide shelter or housing for homeless people. The legislation preempts a city from enacting rules that unreasonably interfere with the decisions or actions of a church regarding using their property as housing or shelter.

E2SHB 3141 approves a significant change for families receiving child care through Head Start, Early Head Start and ECEAP. Families using these programs will be authorized to receive child care for 12 continuous months rather than the current up to six months. This change will reduce disruptions in care which are detrimental to children’s growth, academic achievement and stability.

More information on this new legislation and much more at www.washingtonvotes.org.

Stimulus Grant Helps Cowlitz County Streamline Homeless Services

By Joshua Okrent

Equipped with $1.5 billion of the nearly $800 billion stimulus funding for HUD, the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP) will help an estimated 600,000 Americans avoid homelessness. The program helps people pay security deposits, utility bills, moving bills and rent checks to either avoid eviction or move from transitional housing into their own apartments. The assistance lasts from three to 18 months. People on the verge of homelessness did not qualify for federal assistance previously, says Housing and Urban Development spokesman Brian Sullivan. “Now we are in the prevention game in a way we have never been before,” says Nan Roman, executive director of the National Alliance to End Homelessness. “The focus is on people who can get right back in the workforce.”

Many groups have used funding from HPRP to create centralized point of access for services to people experiencing homelessness. One such example comes from Cowlitz County. Several Cowlitz County social service groups hope to use $410,000 in federal stimulus dollars to create a one-stop shop for the homeless or people in danger of losing their homes. In February, Cowlitz County commissioners approved applications for the money. The applications still must be reviewed, but officials expect to receive the full amount, said Melissa Taylor, a senior planner with the Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments who oversees homeless issues.

The money would come in over three years. The Emergency Support Shelter would be the lead agency to administer the grant, and the Lower Columbia Community Action Program (CAP) would run the one-stop center. Other agencies working on the plan include the Community House, Kelso Veterans of Foreign Wars, Drug Abuse Prevention Center, Lower Columbia Mental Health, Family Health Center, WorkSource, the Red Cross, and the Salvation Army.

On account of the struggling economy, making services easily accessible is particularly important in Cowlitz County where many people seeking assistance through HPRP don’t know how to navigate the social services system because they have never needed government assistance before.

Anyone homeless or at risk of losing their homes would be referred to the Lower Columbia Community Action Program. There they’ll be screened to identify their needs and what benefits and programs are available to them, said Ilona Kerby of CAP.

After housing is secured, clients also would be referred to partner agencies for other services, including employment, health care, and life skills. The program also would work to recruit more landlords who can offer housing to the homeless and may offer landlord incentives, according to the grant paperwork.

The stimulus funds are a lot more flexible than previous state homelessness dollars and should offer more help and assistance to those in need, Taylor said. For example, some of the money can be used to help prevent someone from becoming homeless, perhaps by paying overdue utility bills that will help them get back on their feet.

Even if someone doesn’t qualify for homeless prevention dollars, the initial screening may find other assistance that can help, Taylor said.

If the federal money comes in on time, the new program would start in July.

For more information about the Lower Columbia Community Action Program please visit www.lowercolumbiacap.org.
HUD Officials Dedicate New Puyallup Tribal Housing Project in Tacoma

By Joshua Okrent

On January 12, U.S. Housing and Urban Development Assistant Secretary Sandra Henriquez arrived in Tacoma to dedicate a new affordable housing development being built by the Puyallup Tribal Housing Authority (PTHA).

Henriquez joined Puyallup Tribal Chairman Herman Dillon Sr. to dedicate the 22-unit Grandview Townhomes. The tribe combined a $1.2 million Washington Department of Commerce grant with a $4.7 loan from HUD to build the project on Grandview Avenue. The housing is geared particularly toward young families. The site is located adjacent to the Tribe’s childcare facility, Grandview Early Learning Center.

“We identified a need with younger people who are 24 or 25 and having kids and they don’t have enough money to buy a house,” program project manager Gregory Combs said.

“Putting a roof over our tribal member’s heads is the key for our families to move forward,” said Bill Sterud, vice chairman of the Tribal Council. “And it always makes me feel proud to see us moving forward as a people.”

The units have three bedrooms, with the exception of two ADA-accessible units, which have two bedrooms. The project was designed with the environment in mind – extra insulation, metal roofs and special flooring will make the buildings energy efficient.

These units are a new trend in the Housing Authority’s mission to provide more adequate, affordable, healthy housing for tribal members young and old.

Following the completion of Grandview, two more housing projects are on the horizon. Eight units are currently under construction specifically for Tribal elders and are slated for completion in 2010. Another three-phased housing development in Northeast Tacoma will provide 20 more living quarters total to tribal families. Construction on phase one of this project is planned to start in 2010.

“Housing can and does transform lives in meaningful ways,” said Sandra Henriquez who visited the ceremony as part of a larger tour of Native American housing programs in the Puget Sound.

Rodger Boyd, deputy assistant secretary for the HUD office of Native American programs, noted the real impact he has seen in an Alaska Native Community.

“Housing is not just shelter. Housing has a huge impact throughout the community,” he said, noting that health, academic performance and school retention has improved in the youth of many communities he has seen, with crime going down when adequate, healthy, safe housing options are available to the low-income community.

Ground broke on the Grandview Townhomes project a little more than a year ago after the Housing Authority received financing support through a Wells Fargo Bank federal loan, as well as state and federal grants.

The total cost of the project has not been finalized, but is estimated at about $5 million.

“It makes me very proud to be a part of such a wonderful project,” said Tribal Councilmember James Miles. “The Housing Authority has worked very hard to address the housing needs of our Tribe.”

Applications are still being accepted for units at Grandview Townhomes. To qualify for the Tribe’s low-income housing, applicants must be a member of a tribe and must meet certain income qualifications. Puyallup tribal members are given priority placement above members of other tribes. For more information on these or other housing projects or programs, call the Puyallup Tribal Housing Authority at (253) 573-7956.

The tribe will repay the HUD loan with deductions from Tribal Housing Block Grants it receives from the government, said local HUD spokesman Leland Jones.

Information for this story came from the Puyallup Tribal News.
Seattle Bank Announces $2.8M in 2009 Affordable Housing Program Awards

The Federal Home Loan Bank of Seattle has announced it will provide nearly $2.8 million in Affordable Housing Program (AHP) subsidies to fund 10 projects in Hawaii, Oregon, Washington, and Wyoming. The AHP awards will be used to help create 258 units of housing for very-low-, low- and moderate-income households, including those with special needs, homeless individuals and families, and Native peoples.

“We are very pleased to announce our 2009 AHP awards,” said Seattle Bank President and CEO Richard M. Riccobono. “Our contribution to affordable housing is an important part of Seattle Bank’s mission, and it is particularly gratifying to be able to provide this funding at a time when so many communities are stressed and so many households are at risk of losing their incomes and their homes.”

In 2009, six of the 10 projects receiving AHP awards will be located in rural areas, and four will be located in urban areas. Five of the projects awarded will support homeownership and five will provide affordable rental housing. All of the projects will reserve at least 20% of their units for households with special needs. Five projects will serve the homeless and three will serve Native peoples.

The AHP awards are allocated through a competitive application process and may be used: to fund the acquisition, rehabilitation, or construction of new or existing housing structures; to reduce mortgage principal or interest rates on loans; or to provide down-payment and closing-cost assistance.

The Seattle Bank received 32 applications requesting $7.5 million in AHP subsidy and approved 10 applications. In addition, the bank approved four alternate applications, which may be funded if sufficient subsidy becomes available.

In Washington state, funded projects include:

**Colville Homes II**

Inchelium – Golf Savings Bank and co-sponsor Sterling Savings Bank were awarded $240,000, which Colville Indian Housing Authority will use to construct 20 two-, three-, and four-bedroom, lease-to-own single-family homes on the Colville Indian Reservation. The majority of the units will be set aside for residents earning at or below 50 percent of area median income.

**Homestead 2009**

Seattle and King County – Peoples Bank was awarded $180,000, which Homestead Community Land Trust will use to acquire 15 owner-occupied housing units. Ten of the units will be located in Seattle, and five of the units will be located throughout King County. The homes will be affordable to households at or below 80 percent of area median income. This project will also take advantage of Neighborhood Stabilization Funds, which will be used to purchase foreclosed properties for the project.

**Market Street Station Spokane**

Spokane – Washington Trust Bank was awarded $296,700, which Inland Empire Residential Resources will use to convert a vacant commercial building into 33 apartments with ground floor retail. The units will be set aside for households at or below 50 percent of area median income, and many will be reserved for the elderly or persons with special needs.

**Paine Court Supportive Housing**

Walla Walla – Banner Bank was awarded $107,988 to assist Blue Mountain Action Council with the construction of 12 permanent supportive housing units for homeless families with children. Eleven of the units will be affordable to households at or below 30 percent of area median income.

**Parkview Homeownership 3**

King and Snohomish Counties – Sterling Savings Bank was awarded $224,750, which Parkview Services will use to provide down payment and closing cost assistance for 25 single-family and multi-family units in King and Snohomish Counties. All units will be purchased by first-time homebuyers with special needs.

**Talon Hills Senior Apartments**

Liberty Lake – Bank of America Oregon, N.A. was awarded $530,941, which the nonprofit and for-profit team of Spokane Housing Ventures and Whitewater Creek, Inc. will use to construct a 60-unit rental project for the elderly near Spokane, Washington. The units will be affordable to households at or below 60 percent of area median income.

**Wanity Park**

Toppenish – Banner Bank was awarded $251,972, which Yakima Nation Housing Authority will use to reconstruct 29 rental units on the Yakima Indian Reservation. The majority of the occupants will earn less than 30 percent of area median income. At least six of the units will be set aside for elderly or special needs tenants.

Alternate projects in Washington include Appian Way Rehabilitation in Kent, an award to Banner Bank for Intercommunity Mercy Housing to rehabilitate a 150-unit apartment building and HfH – Hope Meadow I in Deer Park, Washington, an award to Sterling Savings Bank for Habitat for Humanity – Spokane to construct 10 single-family, owner-occupied homes affordable to households at or below 50 percent of area median income.

For more information visit Federal Home Loan Bank at www.fhlbsea.com.
Statewide Homeless Counts Find Mixed Results

By Joshua Okrent

Late on the night of Thursday January 28, volunteer teams across the state ventured out into the cold darkness to count the number of people living on the streets. From Seattle to Spokane, from Bellingham to Walla Walla, thousands of volunteers worked to produce a snapshot of the total number of unsheltered individuals sleeping outside in the urban and rural areas of Washington state. This year’s count was part of an annual effort mandated by U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and conducted by dozens of nonprofit and government partners across the state. Information from the various counts is used to help determine the amount of state and federal aid the community receives for social services.

The numbers that resulted from this year’s count were decidedly mixed: some large municipalities reported a significant decrease in the number of homeless people living on their streets, but some smaller cities and towns reported exactly the opposite. In and around Seattle, Alison Eisinger of the Seattle/King County Coalition for the Homeless announced that the number of people living on the streets of King County is down 5% since last year. Volunteer teams counted 2,759 people living on the streets of Washington’s largest county, down from 2,827 the previous year. That number does not include the estimated 6,000 people staying in emergency shelter and transitional housing overnight.

Organizers cite a number of possible reasons for the decrease. Included among them is the increased awareness of homelessness and an increase in available services. According to Bill Block, the Director of the Committee to End Homelessness, “We know that we have programs that work, but every single person who was counted tonight must be taken as a call to redouble our efforts, bringing proven programs to the scale they need to fully address the problem.”

On the other hand, on the exact same night in Thurston County volunteers found the highest total of homeless individuals in nearly a decade. The Thurston County Homeless Census found 1,082 homeless people sleeping on the streets, up from 1,016 counted last year and 722 counted in the 2008 tally. “The sad truth is that we don't have enough public funding to turn the tide on homelessness. We have to find ways to help our community to help itself,” said Anna Schlecht, housing program manager for the city of Olympia who spearheaded this year’s homeless count.

Homeless counts also took place in Walla Walla, Yakima, Bellingham, and other cities and towns across the state, but those municipalities generally wait until spring to release the total numbers.

In Kent, the number dropped considerably, from 193 last year to 60 this year. However, while Kent saw a decrease, other surrounding cities saw increases, such as Federal Way, where 116 were counted last year and 181 were counted this year. With the economic recession continuing to worsen since last year’s count, Kent Housing and Human Services Planner Jason Johnson said he was “surprised” the numbers were lower this year. He also said part of the drop in Kent’s count could be due to increased security patrols at an overflow lot for the ShoWare center, which was a place many of those living in their car would park for the night. He said it is likely that many of those people have found a new lot in which to park, potentially in Federal way, adding to their increase.

“Last year there wasn't security,” he said. Johnson also said while the outdoor count may be down this year, local agencies have told him that their numbers are way up, including the numbers of families who have to be turned away at shelters for a lack of space.

The consistent message from every team across the state is that regardless of local trends, the numbers of homeless remain too high. At the announcement in Seattle, Ms. Eisinger stated, “We need to educate our friends and neighbors about the scope of homelessness; we have got to connect community members to the many ways they can help their neighbors who are homeless; and we must apply pressure to our elected representatives to fund housing and homelessness solutions at every level of government. When people become aware of the problem we can make a difference. Our job now is to use that knowledge.”

On returning home at 5:22 AM on Friday, one of the Seattle volunteers sent a note to the organizers saying, “I think that the reverberations of this event go way beyond just counting – it’s a strategic and powerful event that I was really pleased to be able to be able to join.”
Mary McBride Named HUD Northwest Regional Director

U.S. Housing and Urban Development Secretary Shaun Donovan announced in late January President Barack Obama’s selection of Mary McBride to serve as HUD Regional Director for the four states in HUD’s Northwest Region including Washington, Idaho, Oregon, and Alaska.

As the regional director, McBride will serve as HUD’s liaison to mayors, city managers, elected representatives, state and local officials, congressional delegations, stakeholders, and customers, and will be responsible for overseeing the delivery of HUD programs and services to communities and evaluating their efficiency and effectiveness.

“Mary knows the region and is the ideal person to help us build partnerships that will ultimately improve our services and the delivery of programs to the communities that rely on them,” said Donovan. “Her economic and community development experiences will be great assets to us as we assist communities during these challenging economic times. I am excited to have her as a part of our team.”

“I am honored to be asked to serve as the HUD Region X Director,” McBride said. “I look forward to working with Secretary Donovan, Deputy Secretary Sims, and HUD stakeholders to remove barriers, create greater efficiencies, and accomplish needed reform and improvements within HUD.”

More information about HUD and its programs is available on the Internet at www.HUD.gov.

Enterprise Names M.A. Leonard to Lead Pacific Northwest Efforts

Enterprise Community Partners has named M.A. Leonard the new Impact Market leader for the Pacific Northwest. In its Pacific Northwest market, which includes Washington and Oregon, Enterprise has invested more than $1 billion in community development in the past 20 years. Of that total, $800 million was invested in low-income housing tax credits for the creation of affordable rental properties.

“The Pacific Northwest is a very important market for Enterprise,” said Paul Cummings, senior vice president and regional executive, Western Region, Enterprise Community Partners. “We are fortunate to work with strong partners that are innovative, mission-focused, and driven to make a difference in the community. With M.A.’s extensive history in the region and in the field of community development, we are excited to have her on board to help drive our activities in Washington and Oregon.”

Prior to joining Enterprise, Ms. Leonard worked as an independent consultant.

Adrienne Quinn Resigns as Seattle Housing Director

Seattle Office of Housing Director Adrienne Quinn has resigned to move closer to her elderly parents and work for a national affordable housing group, Mayor Mike McGinn’s office announced in January.

Quinn served as housing director for five years — the longest term since the city created the office in 1999. Bill Rumpf, the office’s former deputy director, served as acting director from Quinn’s departure on Feb. 5 to his own departure in mid-March. Rick Hooper is currently serving as the second interim director. During Quinn’s tenure, the Office of Housing shepherded creation or preservation of more than 3,700 units of affordable housing, passage of a $145 million housing levy, and expansion of the city tax exemption and incentive zoning programs for affordable housing.

Quinn will be vice president for public policy and government relations for Enterprise Community Partners, a nationwide affordable housing and community development organization that has a strong presence in Seattle.

Visit the City of Seattle Office of Housing website at www.seattle.gov/housing.
Is a Safe Parking Spot Too Much to Ask?

by Linda Kenny

Adapted from comments made
January 29, 2010, before Seattle City
Council’s Housing, Human Services,
Health and Culture Committee.

I’m formerly homeless. I lived in
a car – a sedan – with my cat Tabitha
Laptop, for five months. It started when
I was living in Santa Fe, New Mexico
and then I headed to Seattle, through
Arizona, Nevada, California, Oregon,
and for a month after arriving. So I’ve
experienced homelessness and what it’s
like to live in one’s car in six different
states. And despite the fact that we still
have a long way to go in Seattle, I thank
Councilmember Nick Licata, Council-
member Sally Clark, and others who
work hard every day to make Seattle a
city that tries to take care of its needy
with respect and dignity.

However, as I said we do have
a long way to go. There’s only one
reason I’m getting back on my feet
now – housed, employed, in school
part time, and an advocate for the
homeless. That reason is the generosity
of Trinity Parish Episcopal Church,
one of downtown Seattle’s oldest and
most beautiful churches.

Trinity allowed me to park my
vehicle in one of their paid parking
spaces in a pay lot. I’m not going to say
it was with the lot owner’s permission
(or knowledge), but I had a place of
relative safety and privacy to spend the
night and protect myself and my cat
from the elements. When I had a job
interview or medical appointment, I
had to leave my car in that lot, with
my cat inside, but at least I didn’t have
to fear every minute that that car, my
home and my belongings might be
towed off the street, never to be seen
by me again. My cat could have died,
unfed and forgotten in a car in a tow
lot. Thanks to Trinity, that didn’t have
to happen to us.

Yet it happens every day to others.

Their vehicles (temporary homes, and
the vessels of all their possessions,
often with unseen animals inside)
are constantly, needlessly, and cruelly
towed and ticketed because there is
no commitment to this issue by the
City. Instead, new signs go up in every
neighborhood barring parking after
1:00 am, or barring sleeping in one’s
car, which isn’t even against the law.

Residents of vehicles are a vastly
underserved population. While the
majority of human services resources
go to those considered “most at risk,”
people who live in their cars are a
population that would benefit the
most from the least amount of help.

Their turning point – the point at
which their downward spiral could be
stopped – is far higher than the average
homeless person, because all they need,
most of them, is a safe place to park. It
doesn’t have to cost a dime.

Many of them are employable,
trainable and willing to work or
already working. Many of them are
educated and have held positions of
responsibility before experiencing rough
times. My hope is that Seattle will
follow the example of Santa Barbara,
California, Eugene, Oregon, even
Kitsap County, by encouraging, design-
ing, and financing safe parking sites,
whether on private or public land, with
or without hygiene facilities.

The issue is simple. Vehicle residents
need a parking space. They need a place
to park their vehicles safely, without fear
of being towed, losing their belongings, scattering their families, losing their pets, or collecting tickets and towing
fees they can’t afford to pay. Is that so
much to ask?

In closing, I’d like to offer a list of
recommendations for the City of Seattle
to consider:

• Send an ambassador to Eugene to
meet with Richie Weinman, the City
of Eugene’s Urban Services Manager.
Find out why his plan works.
• Appoint an Urban Services Manager
here – someone who would liaison
with private property owners and
Empty Promises: Vancouver Olympics Fail to Keep Housing Commitment

By Sean Condon

When Vancouver handed in its official bid to host the 2010 Winter Olympic Games, it included an unprecedented package of promises that would ensure Vancouver’s inner-city communities wouldn’t be adversely affected, and would in fact benefit, from the Games.

The Inner-City Inclusive Commitment Statement made 37 “goals and objectives” to protect low-income neighborhoods and included everything from ticket affordability to civil liberties. However, perhaps the most significant promise made was around housing. In the commitment statement, the Vancouver Organizing Committee (VANOC) and the federal, provincial and municipal governments promised to:

a) Protect rental housing stock
b) Provide alternative forms of temporary accommodation for Winter Games visitors and workers
c) Ensure people are not made homeless as a result of the Winter Games
d) Ensure residents are not involuntarily displaced, evicted or face unreasonable increases in rent due to the Winter Games
e) Provide an affordable housing legacy and start planning now

In a city that had seen 1,000 low-income tenants evicted from Single Room Occupancy (SRO) hotels during Expo ’86, it was a substantial promise meant to alleviate people’s fear that the same tragedy would be repeated if the Olympics came to town.

But in the six years since Vancouver won the Olympic bid, housing prices have skyrocketed, hundreds of low income tenants have been evicted and the number of homeless has increased by 373 %. With the Games about to begin, housing advocates say the promises made in the Inner-City Inclusive Commitment Statement now look empty and misleading.

The Village Idiot

The biggest broken housing promise occurred early on with the much-mangled Athletes’ Village. Long before this project became the city’s financial ball and chain, Vancouver had planned to make the 1,100-unit Village the crown jewel of the affordable housing legacy.

The Coalition of Progressive Electors (COPE) council at the time earmarked one-third of the project for social housing, one-third for middle-income housing and the final third for market housing. But before it could sign off on the deal, COPE was defeated in the 2005 election by the Non-Partisan Association (NPA), which then cut the social housing component to 20 % and eliminated the mid-income housing altogether.

While the federal government allocated $30 million to secure at least 250 units of social housing in the Athletes’ Village, the development’s financial problems has now put that modest number in jeopardy.

According to Chris Shaw, spokesperson for 2010 Watch, the inflated costs of the project means the city will have to sell all 1,110 units at market rates just to break even. If it does decide to maintain the 250 units of social housing, it is unlikely the federal government’s $30 million will be enough to foot the bill. Architect Michael Geller was recently quoted as saying that given the Village’s construction costs per square footage, 250 units would cost at least $100 million to build.

Organizers of a tent village near the site of the Olympic Games in Vancouver say homelessness has nearly tripled in the region since the Olympics. Photo by Dr. Lawrence Choy
Vacant Promises

But as the Olympic Village quickly went from crown jewel to cubic zirconium, VANOC was still making promises that the housing commitments made in their original statement would be fulfilled. In March 2007, VANOC released a report by the Inner-City Inclusive Housing Table – which included housing advocates and private developers – that called for the creation of 3,200 units of social housing.

Almost immediately after the report was released, the City of Vancouver said it would not be able to meet that commitment; making the call for more housing once again ring hollow.

However, in November 2007, the City of Vancouver made a reportedly “historic” step when it announced it would hand over 12 city-owned sites to the provincial government for social housing. The agreement meant the city would expedite the development permits on the sites and the province would build 1,200 new units of social housing. While the sites weren’t expected to be ready in time for the Olympics, six of the 12 were supposed to be ready by the summer of 2010.

To date, none of the sites have even broken ground and there are no plans to start construction.

Although the province insists the 12 city sites will still be used, it also claims that it is doing more for social housing than ever before. According to figures released by the Ministry of Housing and Social Development, since 2003/04, the provincial budget for housing has increased from $153 million to more than $400 million.

However, most of that money is not for new housing projects and instead has gone towards rent supplements for low-income families, homeless outreach programs and the purchasing of SRO hotels. While housing advocates have lambasted the provincial and federal governments for failing to build new social housing, the majority of them do commend the provincial government for buying up vulnerable SRO buildings – a key demand made by the Inner-City Inclusive Housing Table.

Since 2007, the government has bought 23 SRO buildings in Vancouver, which means 1,376 low-income units are now protected from being closed or converted. This goes far beyond the 800 SRO units that the Housing Table asked for. However, housing advocates note that the purchases still don’t create the desperately needed new housing.

“The SRO purchases are good because they take the buildings out of the private market and protect them from conversion, but they’re not new units,” says Laura Track, a lawyer with Pivot Legal Society. “When the government says that it’s fulfilling its commitment to leave a lasting legacy of affordable housing, it’s really frustrating because these buildings were occupied when they were purchased and are not creating new units for people to move into from off the street.”

And although the province has made a big investment in SROs, Vancouver has still lost more units than were saved. According to statistics from Pivot and the Carnegie Community Action Project, 1,448 units of low-income SRO housing in the Downtown Eastside have been closed, converted or remain empty since Vancouver was awarded the Games in 2003.

That call for new housing has been made greater by the fact that the number of homeless people in Metro Vancouver has increased from 1,121 in 2002 to 2,660 in 2008. And while the Olympics may not be the only reason this number has soared, it certainly doesn’t appear that it has helped bring it down.

The Numbers Game

Despite all the lofty housing promises made when Vancouver bid on the Winter Games, it appears the Olympics will produce very little new housing for Vancouver. While the tough economic times and the province’s number games make it difficult to know for certain how many new units of social housing will actually be built, reports suggest that it could be just a few hundred.

Aside from the 250 questionable units at Vancouver’s Olympic Village, the only other housing commitment made by VANOC has been to convert the Whistler’s Athletes’ Village into 156 units of social housing. However, these modular-housing units will be sent to cities and towns across B.C. once the Games are over – not Vancouver.

According to a June 2007 special report, only 521 new social housing units have been built since 2001. Many of these units, including the 200 at Woodward’s, were promised long before the Olympics were awarded to the city. Between 2005 and 2010, Vancouver will have achieved a total of 117 actual new units of social housing.

When Vancouver won the Olympic bid, VANOC and all three levels of government promised no one would be evicted because of the Games, and applauded itself for the creation of an affordable housing legacy. The Inner-City Inclusive Commitment Statement was celebrated for its protections and feted as a benchmark for future Olympic cities to follow.

But instead the city has only seen the opposite: more homelessness, mass evictions and a sparse number of new social housing. Six years after the much-vaunted housing commitments, the only legacy the 2010 Olympics will leave Vancouver with is a trail of broken promises.

Sean Condon is the Editor of Megaphone, the street newspaper of Vancouver, B.C. This article was edited from an article that ran in Megaphone in February, 2009. For more information, and to read the original article, visit www.megaphonemagazine.com.
Tacoma’s New Rental Assistance Program
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public housing and the voucher program. THA plans to reduce costs through triennial recertifications for fixed-income households, institute local verification policies, modify the housing choice voucher inspection process, and limit the number of moves for HCV households.

“The agencies we selected today clearly demonstrated their ability to create innovative approaches to housing and to form private partnerships that can really build on public dollars,” said Sandra Henriquez, who leads HUD’s Office of Public and Indian Housing. “HUD supports our housing partners to think outside of the box to improve our federal programs to better assist low-income families.”

More information about the Tacoma Housing Authority Moving to Work plan is available at www.tacomahousing.org/about/mtw_plan.html

Homelessness Advocacy Day
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including bills that would: add $100 million to the Housing Trust Fund; change the notice for evictions without cause to 30 days from 20 days; require 2 year’s notice for the closure of mobile home parks; and impose a recording fee on out of state banks for foreclosure and loan selling transactions. They emphasized that this year the main message advocates should convey to their representative were 1) Fully fund the Housing Trust Fund, 2) Fully Fund GA-U, and 3) Close corporate tax loopholes to help generate revenue.

Emboldened, the advocates, all wearing red, including bold red scarves made for the occasion, assembled into groups by legislative district and stormed the capitol to meet with their senators and representatives. Since both the Senate and House were in session on the floor, many of the meetings with legislators were done by “pulling” them from the floor for brief meetings outside of the door to chambers, giving advocates an up-close view of the legislative process.

While many advocates reported back that their legislators weren’t optimistic about the state’s revenue situation and their ability to fund social programs, some did report that their legislators said that they would not vote for a budget that didn’t include preservation of full funding for GA-U.

Housing Advocacy Day is a unique, annual opportunity for homeless people, housing professionals, non-profit leaders, and amateur and professional advocates to join together to remind their elected officials of the great strength that comes from a community determined to put an end to a great injustice.

Aaron Long works for the Low Income Housing Institute. Housing Advocacy Day is sponsored by the Washington Low Income Housing Alliance and the Washington State Coalition for the Homeless. To learn more about these organizations, including the issues addressed by their respective agendas, visit www.wliha.org and www.endhomelessnesswa.org.

Is a Safe Parking Spot Too Much to Ask?
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Yes!
I want to receive Housing Washington. Please add me to your mailing list.
I would like to subscribe:
☐ Free to low income individuals
☐ $20 individual
☐ $30 community-based organization
☐ $50 public agency or private business

Please make checks to Housing Washington.
Name:_____________________
Agency:_____________________
Address:_____________________
City:_____________________
State:__________ Zip:__________

city resource managers to identify potential locations for safe parking sites.
• Empower an Urban Services Manager to identify and negotiate with donors of additional services, off-site, such as hygiene and laundry, housing referrals, job opportunities, volunteer opportunities, and counseling for those who want it.
• Give a ticket amnesty to vehicular residents who have a source of income and who are willing to help work towards a solution, including volunteering their time to this issue.
• Give them a special parking permit, like used in Santa Barbara, which identifies their vehicle as one that is used for housing. And so long as simple rules of cleanliness and community respect are upheld, prevent that vehicle from being towed or ticketed.
• Give tax incentives to owners of private property, be it residential or commercial, who will allow unused fields and parking lots to be used as Safe Parking Sites for vehicular residents.
• Stop giving in to homeowners who make anonymous phone calls to the police, who respond by ticketing or towing vehicles from public property. Streets are public property!
• Support and implement the late Sam Walton’s wish to provide travelers and transients temporary safe haven.
• Above all, give a pat on the back and some words of encouragement to a woman or man who is forced to live in a vehicle and might just, with merely a safe place to park, once again become a productive and happy citizen of this beautiful city of Seattle.

Linda Kenney is Director, Speaking of That; Past Chair, Homeless Outreach, Trinity Parish Church, Seattle; Past Co-Chair, Ballard Homes for All Coalition.
By Mark Putnam

Building Changes recently received a two-year, $1 million federal Recovery Act Strengthening Communities Fund grant. This new funding, with significant additional support from the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation and The Boeing Company, will allow us to reach out to the state’s 31 neediest counties, and through a combination of grant making and expert advice, boost the capacity of agencies serving homeless people.

Building Changes will award a total of $600,000 in 2010 to help expand the capacity of small agencies that provide services to the neediest clients. We’ll focus on developing agency leadership, strengthening partnerships, and providing tools that promote financial sustainability. We’ll also provide training and expert advice on how clients can access benefits and local job training programs – programs in which homeless people are frequently excluded.

While difficult to quantify so early in the process, we’re projecting that this increased focus on capacity building delivered through grant making and expert advice will impact as many as 50 nonprofit agencies, who, in turn, could more effectively serve up to 5,000 individuals statewide.

We will get an accurate assessment of the program’s impact through our long-time partner Clegg & Associates. In addition to assisting with some of the training efforts, the firm will conduct an outcome-based evaluation. A national evaluation of the Strengthening Communities Fund program is being conducted by The Urban Institute.

Right now, we’re reviewing applications from agencies interested in participating in the initiative. From this pool we will select the agencies that will benefit the most from our assistance.

“There will be plenty of other tasks as this effort gets underway,” says Building Changes Executive Director, Betsy Lieberman, “not least of which will be determining how to sustain this effort after the two-year grant period is up. For now, we’re deeply honored to have the funding necessary to make critical outreach during critical times.”

Program sustainability will likely include support from donors and partners, who see the long-term value of such an investment.

Other SCF grant recipients in Washington state include Seattle’s Human Services Department ($250,000), the Confederate Tribes of Colville Reservation ($249,301) and the Northwest Leadership Foundation ($1,000,000).

Mark Putnam is Consulting Services Manager at Building Changes. For more information about Building Changes’ Economic Opportunities Initiative write to Mark.Putnam@BuildingChanges.org or visit www.BuildingChanges.org.
Scholarships Available

Three scholarships are available to help young people receiving housing assistance. Scholarship funds may be used for vocational or technical schools, two-year colleges, or four-year colleges, depending on the program. Scholarships are available to students under 21 years old who are public housing residents or recipients of Section 8 assistance. The Higher Education Project will award up to four $1,000 Dream Big! scholarships to students in Seattle who would like to attend college, including technical school, on a full-time basis in the next academic year; PNRC-NAHRO has several scholarships available for graduating seniors attending four year universities; The Housing Authority Insurance Group awards a total of twelve $2,500 awards to students who are currently attending or planning to attend a college, university, or technical school.

For more information on any of these awards visit www.seattlehousing.org/residents/education/scholarships/index.html.

Affordable Housing Management Association Annual Conference April 19-21 in Wenatchee

Registration is now open for the upcoming joint conference of the Affordable Housing Management Association of Washington and her sister organization, the Washington State Council for Affordable & Rural Housing. The conference is entitled “Launching a New Decade of Excellence in Affordable Housing Management” and will be held April 19-21, 2010 at the Wenatchee Convention Center in beautiful Wenatchee, WA. Visit www.ahma-wa.org for more information and registration.

Washington State Coalition for the Homeless Annual Conference

The 20th annual conference of the Washington State Coalition for the Homeless will take place May 12-14 in Spokane, WA. This conference is the premier professional development event for homeless housing and service providers across the state. Keynote speakers will include Fred Karnas, Senior Advisor to the Secretary, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and Matthew Gardner from the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. For more information and registration visit www.EndhomelessnessWA.org.