

Capitol Region Council of Governments

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FINAL REPORT TO CRCOG POLICY BOARD ON A REGIONAL STRATEGY TO ADDRESS LONG-TERM HOMELESSNESS

At the November 12, 2003 Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) Policy Board Meeting, Dr. Robert Painter, Hartford City Councilman, made a presentation on homelessness in the Capitol Region. After discussing issues raised through this presentation, including the need for a regional approach to address long-term homelessness, the Mayors and First Selectman of the Capitol Region voted to refer this issue to the CRCOG Housing Committee for study. The Housing Committee was directed to report back to the Policy Board with its recommendations by May 2004.

This report combines information presented in the CRCOG Housing Committee's Interim Report on a Regional Strategy to Address Homelessness, presented to the CRCOG Policy Board on May 26, 2004, with final recommendations regarding this issue.

OVERVIEW OF ISSUE

Who are the Homeless?

Homelessness continues to be a problem facing some Capitol Region citizens. While the primary factor that defines a homeless person is lack of a stable housing situation, the homeless in our region and state have many faces:

- They are families experiencing problems with access to and retention of affordable housing.
- They are adults experiencing difficulty finding and maintaining stable jobs.
- They are adults in recovery from serious mental illness and/or chemical dependency, and include people who are repeatedly or chronically homeless.
- They are young adults, aged 18-23 who have recently moved from foster care or juvenile rehabilitation systems.

The Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness estimates that 33,000 people in Connecticut experience homelessness in a 12-month period. Approximately 13,000 of these people are children.¹ At any given time, about half of our state's homeless individuals are experiencing long-term homelessness. The following statistics document the emergency shelter services used by individuals and families between October 2002 and September 2003:

- Statewide, 16,793 people used emergency shelters (unduplicated count). Capitol Region shelters served 6,017 of these clients (36% of state total), predominantly in Hartford shelters.

¹ Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness, February 2004. Data for CT derived from recent studies on homelessness conducted by the Urban Land Institute, Washington D.C., the University of Pennsylvania, and from 2000 Census data.

- Nearly 18% of the statewide clients were children.
- In FY 2003, people were turned away from shelters due to lack of space 37,500 times, an increase of 38% over FY 2002.

The disparity between estimates of people who are homeless and those using shelters is due to the fact that shelter use is only a partial indicator of the extent of homelessness in our state. Some people are living doubled-up with friends or relatives in overcrowded conditions. Others are living on the streets, under bridges, in cars or abandoned buildings. Recent Urban Land Institute research² estimates that on any given day, at least 800,000 people are homeless in the United States, including about 200,000 children in homeless families.

The study concludes that only strategies that address systemic problems as well as provide emergency relief can eliminate homelessness in this country. The research cites several structural factors in the United States that have fueled the problem. They include:

- Changing housing markets for extremely low-income families and single adults are pricing more and more people with below-poverty incomes out of the market.
- Dwindling employment opportunities for people with a high school education or less are contributing to the widening gap between the rich and the poor.
- The removal of institutional supports for people with severe mental illness, such as drastic reductions in the use of long-term hospitalization for the mentally ill, are leaving many individuals with few housing options.
- Racial, ethnic and class discrimination in housing, along with lack of affordable housing opportunities, persist in many areas.

Once the structural factors are in place, a complex web of personal factors can increase a person's vulnerability to losing his or her home. These may include limited education or skills training, mental or physical disability, lack of family to rely on, and alcohol or drug abuse.

Current Strategies to Address Chronic Homelessness

Urban Land Institute research and local experts working in this field—such as the Hartford and Manchester Continuum of Care Working Groups, the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness, the Partnership for Strong Communities, and the Corporation for Supportive Housing—have concluded that public policies may moderate the effects of both structural and personal factors to help prevent chronic homelessness. Those that hold promise include:

- Helping more people afford housing by providing them with better schools, better training and better jobs.
- Building more housing and subsidizing the costs to make it affordable to people with incomes below the poverty level.
- Providing transitional and supportive housing opportunities for those who require health care, mental health services, job training or other assistance to enable them to retain housing.

² “What Will it Take to End Homelessness?” by Martha R. Burt, Urban Land Institute, September, 2001.

The goal of such approaches is to invest in prevention and support that leads to self-sufficiency and independence for all residents of our region, and nation. This philosophy is consistent with that of the range of organizations serving the state's homeless population.

The Emergency Shelter Approach

In the Capitol Region, 427 emergency shelter beds are available in 11 separate facilities, representing 31% of all shelter beds in the state. Approximately 332 of these beds (78% of total) are located in the City of Hartford, with other shelters being found in East Hartford, Manchester and Vernon. While necessary, emergency shelters are only a temporary solution to the complex range of issues that lead individuals to chronic homelessness.

The Supportive Housing Approach

In most cases, the more effective approaches are those that address the root causes of homelessness and provide longer-term support to individuals and families. These include transitional and supportive housing.

Supportive housing is a practical, proven and cost-effective solution to the problem of chronic, long-term homelessness. There are two main components to supportive housing:

- Supportive housing provides safe and secure rental housing that is affordable to people with very low incomes, offers independent apartment units (as opposed to congregate or group living), and is permanent, with occupancy continued as long as the tenant complies with the terms of his or her lease.
- Supportive housing provides support services by skilled staff at or very near the housing site that are designed to be flexible and responsive to the needs of the individual.³

The Corporation for Supportive Housing reports that 1,700 supportive housing units currently exist statewide. These include single-family and multi-family scattered site housing, produced under the following programs:

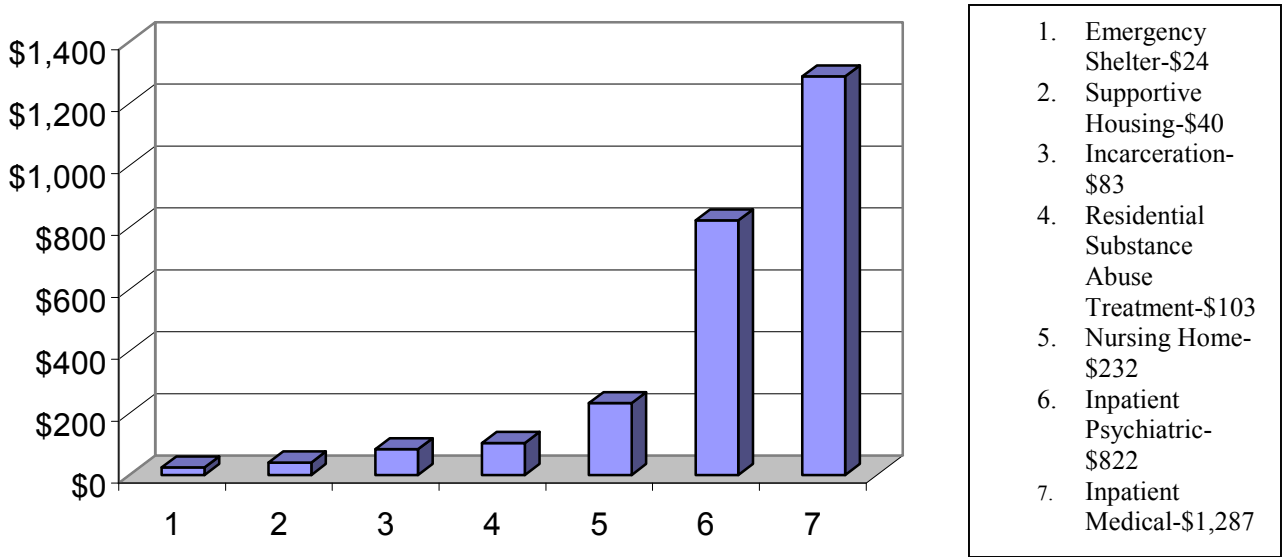
- 281 units created under the Connecticut Supportive Housing Demonstration Program. 58 of these units are located in two Hartford developments, Hudson View Commons and Mary Seymour Place.
- 300 units created in first phase of the Supportive Housing Pilots Initiative.
- Over 1,100 other units created by non-profit providers, public housing authorities, and the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services using a variety of state, federal and private financing sources.

As with emergency shelter beds, Hartford is the primary host community for the region's supportive housing. While opportunities exist for scattered site and project-based supportive housing throughout the Capitol Region, funding and community resistance to this type of development are two of the main obstacles that have limited the creation of supportive housing units in suburban communities.

³ *Reaching Home—Ending Long-Term Homelessness in Connecticut, A Guide for Expanding Supportive Housing in Connecticut.* Corporation for Supportive Housing Reaching Home Steering Committee, 2004, page 7.

Recent research has documented that transitional and supportive housing is a cost-effective alternative to the use of shelters, hospital emergency rooms, and other institutional facilities to provide housing and services to those individuals who are not currently able to live independently. The following graphic illustrates this point.

Cost per Day of Connecticut Supportive Housing vs. Alternative Settings for Homeless Behavioral Consumers



Source of Data: Partnership for Strong Communities Reaching Home Campaign, 2003.

WORK OF CRCOG HOUSING COMMITTEE

The CRCOG Housing Committee has taken the following steps to educate itself regarding current approaches to serving our region’s homeless population, and alternatives to the short-term shelter solution:

- Conducted a meeting with the Social/Human Service Directors of Capitol Region communities to learn about their local experiences in serving clients who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, and to gain their perspective on how the region’s municipalities can or should participate in strategies to address short and long-term homelessness.
- Received presentations from the Partnership for Strong Communities on supportive housing as an alternative to emergency shelters, and “Reaching Home,” the statewide Campaign to End Long-Term Homelessness. "Reaching Home" has a goal of creating 10,000 new supportive housing units in the State in the next 10 years.
- The Partnership also reported on Governor Rowland’s Executive Order to Create an Interagency Council on Supportive Housing and Homelessness, issued April 7, 2004. The Executive Order calls for the Interagency Council to devise a plan by September 1, 2004 to develop 1,000 new supportive housing units. This plan is due to be released soon.
- Received a presentation by Common Ground, a nationally known organization that is working to solve homelessness through innovative programs that transform people, buildings

and communities. The intent of this presentation was to help the Committee better understand what supportive housing is and how it works. Issues addressed included: philosophy, design, maintenance, security, community activities, clinical support services, vocational help, and coordination of medical and mental health care.

- Conducted research on emergency shelter beds, transitional housing, and supportive housing available in the Capitol Region. Through CRCOG staff, met with the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness to determine current statewide issues and strategies to end homelessness.
- Met with representatives of the two Continuum of Care working groups that are currently operating in the Capitol Region (Manchester and Hartford) to discuss their perspectives on current needs, and strategies appropriate to the Capitol Region. The Housing Committee also met with a representative of the Corporation for Supportive Housing, an organization that conducts Continuum of Care planning for other municipalities throughout the state.
- Began to explore opportunities for intertown cooperation in expanding affordable housing and supportive housing opportunities, specifically with regard to what can be done through individual or multi-town Small Cities Community Development Block Grants or other state funding programs.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on its study and deliberations, the CRCOG Housing Committee has reached consensus on the following issues:

- The problem of homelessness is an issue of importance to all Capitol Region municipalities, not just those that currently provide emergency shelter beds, transitional housing, or supportive housing. A regional discussion and response sponsored by CRCOG is appropriate.
- CRCOG should adopt the statewide and national goal of focusing on prevention and support that leads to self-sufficiency and independence. This will include: 1) continuing to expand affordable housing opportunities; 2) supporting improvements in education and job training efforts that will lead to good jobs for those who are currently underemployed or unemployed; and 3) providing transitional and supportive housing for those who require health care, mental health services, job training or other assistance to enable them to retain housing.
- There is a need to educate ourselves and those we represent on what supportive housing is and why it is better approach to long-term homelessness than shelters.
- CRCOG's legislative program for 2004 included supporting development of a statewide strategy to end homelessness. CRCOG and its individual municipalities should continue this support in the future.
- More work is needed to develop specific strategies appropriate to the Capitol Region, and to identify what role Capitol Region municipalities should play in implementing these strategies. At this time, the most effective way to develop specific strategies is the constructive involvement of CRCOG officials in the process soon to be initiated by the Mayor of Hartford's Commission to End Chronic Homelessness. The purpose of this Commission is to conduct a planning process that will result in recommendations on how to end chronic homelessness in Hartford in 10 years. Recommendations on how to achieve this involvement follow.

As was stated above, the problem of homelessness is an issue of importance to all Capitol Region municipalities, not just those that currently provide emergency shelter beds, transitional housing, or supportive housing. There are many ways in which the Capitol Region Council of Governments and its member communities can participate in the development and implementation of a regional strategy to address homelessness. We recommend that the Capitol Region Council of Governments and its member municipalities begin with the following actions.

- **Educate the CRCOG Policy Board on this issue.** The current CRCOG Policy Board has never received a detailed presentation on homelessness in the Capitol Region, and its impact on individuals, families and communities. We recommend that a presentation on the Partnership for Strong Communities “Reaching Home Campaign” and the findings of the CRCOG Housing Committee be scheduled for the November 2004 Policy Board Meeting. This presentation should incorporate statistics on the extent of homelessness in the region, and current services being provided to address identified needs.
- **Participate in the work of the Mayor’s Commission to End Chronic Homelessness.** It is anticipated that one of the charges given to the Commission will be to develop a ten-year plan to end chronic homelessness. It is hoped that CRCOG staff will continue to serve on the project team set up to support the work of the Commission, and that several Capitol Region chief elected officials will be asked to serve on the Commission. In developing the ten-year plan, the Commission should think about what it needs from CRCOG as an agency, and the individual Capitol Region communities, in order to implement the plan.

The Capitol Region Council of Governments and its member municipalities can support the work of the Mayor’s Commission to End Chronic Homelessness in the following ways.

- Establish within CRCOG an Ad Hoc Advisory Committee to work with the municipal officials appointed to the Mayor’s Commission. The Ad Hoc Advisory Committee should include the following representatives from one small, one medium and one large community: chief elected official, town manager, social services director, and housing authority director. This Ad Hoc Committee should meet as needed during the term of the Mayor’s Commission to provide input on how municipalities can assist in implementing the ten-year strategy, as it evolves.
- **Advocate in Support of Proven Solutions**
 - Advocate for state and federal funds to assist in the development of supportive housing.
 - Advocate for state and federal funds to provide support services necessary to help individuals move from homelessness to more stable living situations.
 - Publicly show our support for long-term solutions through having CRCOG sign on to the “Reaching Home Campaign”, and encouraging our member municipalities to do the same.
 - Include support for state initiatives to end chronic homelessness in CRCOG’s 2005 legislative program, and the legislative programs of individual municipalities.

- **Work at the municipal level to produce more affordable and supportive housing, and participate in regional strategies to end chronic homelessness.** Although responses will vary based on the size of the community and resources available, experience throughout the state has shown us that all communities can play a part in expanding housing opportunities for those of low and moderate income, and individuals and families with special needs. We recommend that all municipalities consider the following actions:
- **Provide public support and leadership.** Town Councils and Boards of Selectmen can publicly show their support for affordable and supportive housing development in their community through signing on to the “Reaching Home Campaign,” and through informing non-profit developers of their willingness to have such housing built or created through the rehabilitation of existing structures in their municipalities. Planning and Zoning Commissions can periodically review and revise local zoning and subdivision regulations, to ensure that the regulations permit affordable and supportive housing development at appropriate locations.
 - **Develop and implement local emergency shelter options.** Establish a local policy of first trying to provide emergency shelter within the community rather than referring individuals to shelters in other communities. Work with local housing authorities and non-profit community service organizations to develop and implement options.
 - **Support public education on housing issues.** Town Councils, Boards of Selectmen, Planning and Zoning Commissions, and Chambers of Commerce can sponsor affordable and supportive housing forums to educate the community at large on what affordable and supportive housing is, and why it is needed in all communities. CRCOG is willing to work with communities to plan such events.
 - **Participate in the implementation of regional strategies to address chronic homelessness.** It is likely that there will be a role for individual municipalities to play in implementing the recommendations of the Mayor of Hartford’s Commission to End Chronic Homelessness. We encourage all Capitol Region municipalities to work through CRCOG to identify what their town can do to contribute to the regional solution to this problem, which affects all of our communities. Municipal commitment to action in the areas of prevention, emergency shelter, and the provision of permanent supportive and affordable housing must be part of the regional solution.

**ADOPTED BY CRCOG POLICY BOARD
NOVEMBER 17, 2004**