

DOWNTOWNDC

A PROPOSED ACTION AGENDA

Meeting the
Growing Challenge
of Chronic
Homelessness in
DowntownDC

December 2014

Downtown Business Improvement
District Corporation





A GROWING CHALLENGE

Summary

Less than a decade ago, the District of Columbia government was a national leader in reducing chronic homelessness for individuals. Now, as the city grapples with multiple social service demands, this is no longer the case and the number of chronic homeless individuals living on city streets is increasing. Today solving chronic homelessness for individuals in our city will require the city and its Interagency Council on Homelessness (ICH) to substantially change from the city's current approach to a goal to restore and extend Housing First policies begun under the 2006 to 2010 city administration. In order to sincerely address the concerns and issues surrounding chronically homeless individuals in the Downtown area, and regain its leadership role, the City needs to refocus efforts in five key areas: 1) Leadership; 2) Organization; 3) Staffing; 4) Program Development and 5) Funding. This proposed Action Agenda provides a framework for this refocused effort.

Background

The needs of the homeless continue to grow throughout the city, including both homeless families and chronically homeless individuals. While the plights are similar, the needs are different. The majority of the concerns and issues surrounding homelessness in Downtown D.C. are related to those of the chronically homeless individual.

Chronically homeless individuals, who primarily reside on Downtown D.C. streets or in the parks are overwhelmingly single males, usually with existing conditions including mental illness, substance abuse problems and/or disabling

health issues. Many chronically homeless individuals choose to stay outside or in low-barrier Emergency Shelters for a number of reasons including, 1) there is no right-to-shelter in the District except in hypothermic conditions; 2) most shelters for the chronically homeless individual are spread throughout the city and are nighttime-only shelters (the largest emergency shelter is the Federal City Shelter located downtown at 2nd and E streets northwest. With 1200 beds, it is one of the largest shelters in the nation); 3) while patrons can stay in the shelters from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. they must fend for themselves on the streets during the day and 4) many find their way Downtown, either on foot or in city-sponsored shuttle buses, which means a significant number of homeless individuals from Emergency Shelters join the unsheltered homeless Downtown during the day. Downtown D.C. is witnessing an increase in chronically homeless individuals.

The numbers in the following chart, based on information from the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH),

State of Homelessness in America

	2005	2013	+/-
National Homeless Population	763,010	610,042	-20%

Source: NAEH, *State of Homelessness in America*

	2007	2014	+/-
All Homeless			
Washington Area Region	11,762	11,946	+2%
DC	5,757	7,748	35%
Unsheltered			
Washington Area Region	1,238	886	-28%
DC	321	396	24%

Source: MWCOG, *Homelessness in the Metropolitan Washington Area*



and the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG), tell the story of the challenges facing the District – that the city’s trends are moving in the opposite direction—the wrong direction—compared to national and the larger Washington metropolitan area statistics.

There was a time when the District was among national leaders in improving the plight of the chronically homeless individual. From 2006 to 2010, the District government, working in cooperation with homeless services providers and assisted by organizations such as the DowntownDC BID, led nationally in implementing a “Housing First” strategy. According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, “Housing First is an approach to ending homelessness that centers on providing people experiencing homelessness with housing as quickly as possible—and then providing services as needed.” The District’s Housing First effort placed an emphasis on the provision of Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH),

a model that includes ongoing social service support and targets the most vulnerable and long-term homeless individuals for housing placements.

From 2006 to 2010, as the Housing First program was ramped up, the city’s initiative added 1,000 new units to the PSH program. These units were mostly provided to chronically homeless individuals who had been living in low-barrier shelters or on the streets. The addition of PSH units allowed the city to close the La Casa shelter and the Franklin School shelter and for a time resulted in a substantial reduction in the number of unsheltered chronically homeless persons.

The following chart shows progress in the cumulative number of units in the PSH program added between 2009 and 2011 but shows only a modest increase in the number of units in recent years, far short of a goal of 2,500 units set back in 2010.

Cumulative Number of Permanent Supportive Housing Units Added

	FY2008	FY2009	FY2010	FY2011	FY2012	FY2013	FY 2014
Individuals	300	854	704	694	817	817	909
Individuals (site)				5	36	36	36
Families		100	250	250	250	250	250
Families (site)				28	28	28	28
Seniors		25	25	25	25	25	45
*Veterans			105	205	205	205	205
Totals	300	979	1,084	1,207	1,361	1,361	1,473

*Note that the increase between FY2009 to FY2014 totals projections is largely attributable to 1) PSH for families and 2) PSH for veterans, but the total includes little in the way of new PSH for those chronically homeless individuals who are not veterans.

Source: Department of Human Services – Council Responses, October 21, 2014



DOWNTOWN CONCERNS

DowntownDC BID Program

The DowntownDC BID budgets \$500,000 annually on homeless services. A significant portion is dedicated to provide outreach workers, through a contract with Pathways to Housing DC, to assist Downtown’s homeless population with services. This includes everything from providing showers to medical and mental health assistance to identifying opportunities and moving homeless individuals into housing. From 2006 to 2010, the DowntownDC BID and its Pathways DC outreach staff, working with the D.C. government, placed more than 400 homeless persons into housing. The DowntownDC BID also allocates a portion of its specially trained Safety/Hospitality and Maintenance (SAM) service staff to provide assistance to distressed homeless individuals, allowing the BID to respond in emergency situations.

Currently, the large number of Downtown chronically homeless individuals exceeds the DowntownDC BID’s organizational capacity to both secure their well-being and to find alternatives to living on the street.

Beyond the outreach initiative, the DowntownDC BID has also focused efforts on four city programs that, while originally well intentioned, have proven ineffective in addressing long-term homelessness goals or the consequences of which contribute directly to the number of chronically homeless individuals living on the city streets. Reassessing, significantly restructuring or perhaps terminating these efforts for programs that effectively support Housing First standards will

require city resources, policy changes and participation from multiple city agencies. These four programs are:

Federal City Shelter

The Federal City Shelter, located at 425 2nd Street NW, just south of Georgetown Law Center, houses approximately 1,200 homeless persons in a temporary World War II building. It is purported to be the largest homeless shelter in America. In many respects the conditions in this shelter are worse than the conditions for families at the former DC General Hospital. For many residents, whose average length of stay is 3½ years, and whose average age is over 50, this facility has become their home. Over the past three years, the DowntownDC BID has been working intensively with the shelter management and neighboring property owners to help create a better environment for both shelter residents and neighbors. Included in these efforts are regular meetings to improve security in the area (see Encampments) and to help frame options for shelter residents to find alternative housing options. While the DowntownDC BID continues to facilitate these meetings, there are significant health, infrastructure and safety concerns for both the residents of the shelter and the surrounding community that demand the city’s increased attention.

Shuttle drop-offs

Seven days a week, the city contracts for shuttles to pick up homeless persons from neighborhood shelters and drops them off in front of the MLK Library. Few if any services for



CONCERNS

homeless individuals are available at this location. The net result for Downtown is the influx of a significant number of homeless persons that have to fend for themselves on Downtown streets each day. This situation promises to become even more problematic in the near future when the MLK Library closes for renovation.

Food distribution

Each Saturday and Sunday a number of faith groups, predominantly from the suburbs and beyond, gather in Franklin Park and other downtown public spaces to hand out food, clothing and other goods to homeless persons and other needy people. While well-intentioned, the initiatives are not at all coordinated, regulated or monitored by neither the D.C. government nor the National Park Service. The result each weekend is that the parks and other public spaces are strewn with trash, especially food waste, resulting in an unattractive and unhealthy area prone to rodent infestation.

Encampments

A large group of individuals (between 50 and 100) are attracted to the East End of Downtown near and around the Federal City Shelter and Georgetown University Law Center. In addition to setting up furniture and other obstacles in public space, many of these individuals engage in disorderly activities, such as public alcohol consumption, prostitution and gambling. The Metropolitan Police Department monitors the activities but to date has been unable to significantly restrict much of what occurs.



Well-intentioned food distribution in Franklin Park has led to high levels of food waste and rodent infestation.



Disorder is a common occurrence at the encampment near the Federal City Shelter.



ACHIEVABLE GOALS

Goals

The DowntownDC Business Improvement District is committed to a renewed partnership with the City. By reorganizing programs and coordinating efforts from non-profits and private businesses, the following goals could be achieved:

1

Focus on chronically homeless individuals in addition to the current emphasis on homeless families.

2

Proclaim a goal of “ending chronic homelessness” by 2020 or earlier - led by the Mayor and supported by business and civic organizations.

3

Restructure the current Community Partnership/ICH structure to a stronger, more centralized structure, to be headquartered in the Mayor’s Office, with ambitious but achievable goals and more efficient use of resources.

4

Link purposefully policies and actions regarding housing (Office of the Deputy Mayor of Planning and Economic Development (DMPED), Department of Housing and Community Development (DCHD), Department of General Services (DGS), DC Housing Authority (DCHA)) with human services (Department of Human Services (DHS) and Department of Behavioral Health (DBH)).

5

Set ambitious, measurable housing goals:

- Right-size the Emergency Shelter System to reflect best-practices.
- Deliver 500-plus new permanent, supportive housing units and affordable housing units combined per year for four years.

6

Set ambitious, measurable human services goals:

- Shift focus from current low-barrier shelter model to Housing First model by 2016.
- Fully implement the Coordinated Entry system, which is a standardized access and assessment for all individuals.
- Increase financial resources for chronically homeless individual outreach.
- Redevelop and/or reconfigure low-barrier shelters into smaller, service-enriched, 24-hour facilities.

7

Devote adequate city financial resources to fully implement a Housing First homeless services program, perhaps as much as \$50 million per year for four years as estimated by the ICH.

The single strategy that has proven most effective in addressing problems associated with chronic homelessness



is “Housing First,” a set of programs to provide permanent supportive housing with accompanying social services for the majority of homeless persons and affordable housing for the rest. The current system of shelters by night and street life by day not only is dated, but also is ineffective and undignified for chronically homeless individuals.

While a goal to end chronic homeless for individuals seems ambitious, it is a goal now being set-- and timelines are in place to be met--in other major American cities. In addition to being the humane thing to do, the cost of placing a homeless person offsets the significant cost of sustaining a homeless person on our streets—a cost estimated by some researchers to be close to \$50,000 annually. Much of that cost is attributed to multiple calls to emergency responders, frequent visits to emergency rooms and provision of police services.

The ICH is working on a strategic plan that will set specific targets, and is currently estimating that it will be necessary to create approximately 2,000 units of permanent, supportive housing and 500 units of affordable housing to reach a goal of ending chronic homelessness for individuals in DC.

The DowntownDC BID believes the District of Columbia can achieve this goal, but the DC government needs to recommit to providing resources and leadership, including developing a strategic program integrating social service needs (the focus of the DHS and the DBH) with housing needs (the focus of DMPED, DHCD, DGS and DCHA) and devoting the proper amount of resources and staff to enable priority attention to this matter.



The current system of shelters by night and street life by day is ineffective and undignified for homeless individuals.



Anthony Blount is one of more than 250 formerly homeless individuals that the BID has placed into supportive housing.



ACTION AGENDA

Developing an Action Agenda

As part of this recommitment, and to meet the above mentioned goals, the DowntownDC BID recommends an Action Agenda with a focus on five key areas: 1) Leadership; 2) Organization; 3) Staffing; 4) Program Development and 5) Funding.

1

Leadership: The most critical component to an action agenda is a commitment by the leadership of the DC government to end chronic homelessness in the District of Columbia. Since 2010, leadership appears to have resided primarily in the not-for-profit sector among individuals who have dedicated their lives to working on behalf of home-

less persons. They also have engaged the homeless in the process of advocating for their needs.

However, these not-for-profit leaders represents only one of three legs of the table—public, private and not-for-profit sectors--needed to successfully end chronic homelessness. The DowntownDC BID understands addressing the concerns and issues related to homelessness is a major part of the incoming Mayor's commitments to the city and the new administration has promised to refocus efforts to ending homelessness. The BID recommends inviting representatives of the business community to join with not-for-profit leaders to form a coalition of interests to assist this administration in taking on this complex task.

Action(s):

- Mobilize leadership (and staff and money) in at least two very different city administration functions—human services and housing;
- Offer supportive services to approximately 2,500 homeless persons;
- Produce housing for the same; and
- Move the city from a shelter-based system to a Housing First-based system.





NDA

2

Organization: Today much of the decision-making about homeless funding—and thereby homeless policy—for both homeless families and the chronically homeless individual resides in the hands of the Community Partnership to End Homelessness, a non-profit coordinating organization, which redistributes U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development homeless dollars. Much of the decision-making process on how these federal dollars are allocated is neither transparent nor data-driven.

In addition to the Community Partnership, the City Administrator chairs the Interagency Council on Homelessness (ICH), a District government structure. The ICH convenes city agencies along with some community not-for-profit organizations, client stakeholders and advocates determining how to coordinate services.

For the past four years, DHS and the Community Partnership have taken an incremental approach to homeless services delivery.

Action(s):

- Restructure the ICH with greater direction and attention under the City Administrator and led by a high-level executive with authority and accountability to compel coordinated acts across multiple city agencies.

3

- Re-examine and more clearly define the mission of and the relationship between the Community Partnership and the ICH.

Staffing: The cost of providing services and housing for 2,500 homeless persons could exceed \$300-400 million over the next 6-8 years. (This would include significant costs of redevelopment or reconfiguration of some of the existing Emergency Shelters). A program of this order of magnitude requires professional staff that is not focused on Housing First at the present time.

Action(s):

- Request the Mayor create a position responsible to the Office of the Mayor, with authority, budget control and staffing, to implement programs in a transparent way and hold all parties accountable. Provide clear and goal-driven direction; with responsibility for oversight over both human services programming and, equally importantly, over development of needed new housing units.
- Create positions for six new staff people, some of whom would focus on social services and some on housing, to take on the work that is needed.
- Establish new standards as well as process and procedures to provide guidance to all.



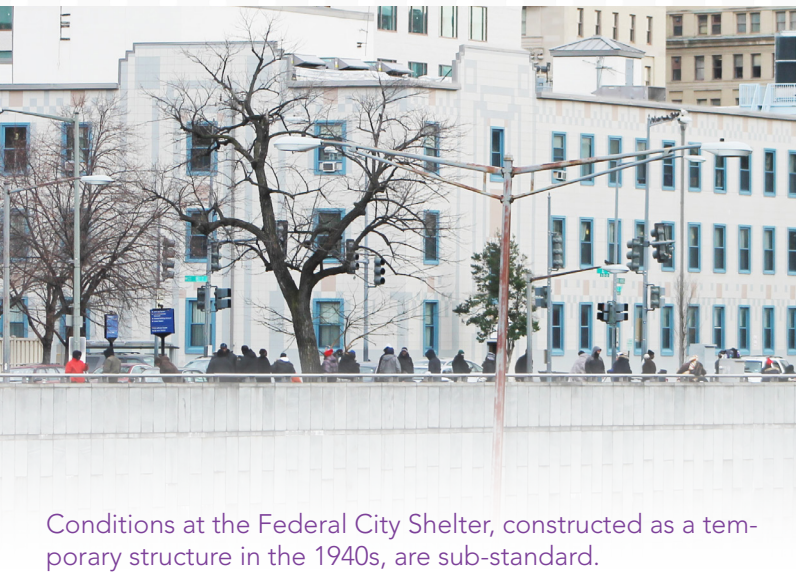
ACTION AGENDA

4

Program Development: A number of key program elements would fall within the action agenda:

Action(s):

- Develop a robust approach to build permanent supportive housing as well as affordable housing specifically targeted for homeless individuals.
- Begin to implement the re-visioning process for the Federal City Shelter and the related actions needed to better serve the people who are presently residing in the related shelters in that facility.
- Reconsider the nature of the city's shelters, including standards of service as well as the hours and the ways in which they are operated. There will be less need for shelters if more permanent supportive housing is built, but in the short run shelters need to be managed more effectively. Shelters need to better serve clients and provide options, especially in the daytime, so that individuals are not simply cast out to roam the streets waiting for each shelter to reopen in the evening.
- Expand, coordinate and integrate outreach services into the overall comprehensive system. There currently are not enough outreach workers to handle the needs of people on the streets.
- Develop coordinated focus among several city agencies, including MPD, to deal with the problems perceived to be caused by homeless individuals but are actually the result of panhandlers and people who have homes but loiter on the streets engaged in anti-social, unacceptable behaviors.



Conditions at the Federal City Shelter, constructed as a temporary structure in the 1940s, are sub-standard.



NDA

5

Funding: It is clear the level of financial resources currently devoted to serving chronically homeless individuals need to be dramatically increased. Once individuals are stabilized and living in permanent housing, the costs to multiple other systems, such as public health, are reduced. But in the meantime, fully moving towards and implementing a Housing First model could cost as much as \$50 million per year in housing and services expenses.

Action(s):

- Identify resources – perhaps by increasing the amount of funding in the Housing Production Trust Fund or by creating a dedicated stream of revenue from new sources (including forms of special purpose districts or internet sales tax) as well as other sources of funding to meet this need: federal funds (especially for veterans), social impact bonds, tax credits, and disposition of publicly owned land.



The cost of sustaining a homeless person on our streets is estimated by some researchers to be close to \$50,000 annually.

Conclusion

The DowntownDC BID is committed to working with the incoming city administration to, 1) support the reorganization of the current city homelessness programs, 2) partner and facilitate efforts from non-profits and private business, 3) organize activities to restructure outdated programs in order to reach the goals stated above and 4) move forward to end chronic homelessness for individuals in the city.



The BID has a 16-year history of funding homeless services and remains committed to ending chronic homelessness.



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