



John Parvensky overcame NIMBY attitudes by gaining broad community support, culminating in the siting of housing for the homeless across from City Hall; the Mayor stated, “If these projects can’t be in our own city/county backyard, how can it be expected for other sectors of the community to do so?”



Jaimie Ross facilitates discussion with national experts, Sharon Lee and John Parvensky as they explain a few keys to their success such as a reliable source of project funding and operating subsidy, excellent support services, and property management.



Sharon Lee’s Low Income Housing Institute developed the Green Communities award winning Denny Park Apartments, a tax credit project that consists of 50 apartments and support services for homeless and extremely low income individuals, couples and families in Seattle, Washington.

Homeless and Extremely Low Income Housing Leadership Forum

BY LYDIA BELTRÁN
FLORIDA HOUSING COALITION

A forum to address housing the homeless and extremely low income held in late March was designed by the Florida Housing Coalition in collaboration with the Florida Coalition for the Homeless, the Supportive Housing Coalition, and the Florida Housing Finance Corporation. The Leadership Forum featured John Parvensky, Executive Director of the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless, and Sharon Lee, Executive Director of the Low Income Housing Institute in Seattle, Washington. A caucus was held the second day of the Forum for a roundtable discussion to address overcoming obstacles to producing housing for the homeless and extremely low income in Florida.



public sources for operating and supportive services. It owns or manages approximately 48 properties consisting of approximately 1,600 units, including more than 500 designated for homeless persons. Seventy-five percent of the units are provided for families or individuals earning less than 30 percent of the area median income.

COLORADO COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS (CCH)

CCH has developed over 1,000 affordable housing units across eleven housing communities in the Denver Metro area. The CCH is the lead agency in the Denver Housing First Collaborative whose mission is based on a nationwide initiative to implement the “housing first model” with support from the Interagency Council on Homelessness. The CCH is able to be the lead agency given its program design to collaborate with various service providers in providing services such as professional counseling and a vocational services program to assist in a person’s transition to employment.

Mr. Parvensky provided insight into the struggles and successes of its mission driven goals to provide affordable housing and services. He attributes some of the successes to its capacity building over the years and overall leveraging

LOW INCOME HOUSING INSTITUTE (LIHI)

In addition to revitalizing neighborhoods and stabilizing communities, the LIHI is engaged in advocacy work to increase affordable housing opportunities and end homelessness through leadership efforts by Sharon Lee. Since 1991, the organization has grown from a staff of one, Ms. Lee, into a staff of 110, which includes housing, finance, property management and resident services departments.

Since its inception, the LIHI has developed over 3,000 units and generated over \$260 million in capital from private and



The ELI forum was facilitated by: Jaimie Ross, President, Florida Housing Coalition. (Pictured from left to right), Bill Aldinger, Vicki Robinson, Nancy Muller, Steve Auger, John Parvensky, Sharon Lee, Jaimie Ross.

of service dollars with housing dollars. At its inception, in 1984, the CCH was in the business of health care because the homeless did not have health care services. CCH then found that comprehensive services were needed to address additional needs and therefore implemented mental health services and a drug treatment program. Although these services were of benefit to the homeless, the CCH found that housing options were very limited for the persons they were assisting. As a result housing providers were sought but the CCH found that it was not an effective way to address the housing problem. CCH decided to expand into housing development and eventually incorporated a property management component. To this end they have been successful in stabilizing homeless individuals and families and integrating them into the general population.

Throughout the Forum, John and Sharon shared common themes in their project and advocacy successes, including:

- Cross subsidizing (lower rents with higher rents from other projects, reduce costs by matching supportive services funds);
- Reducing parking requirements;
- Work with Housing Authority to secure Section 8 vouchers;
- Establish relationships with Housing Authorities for Section 8 vouchers, and referral agencies and services agencies so that advocacy and support is not just from the developer side;
- Seek matching funds from Foundations;
- Consider underutilized motels, businesses and abandoned buildings (illegal occupations can be mediated with owner with an option to purchase to maintain as low income housing);
- Establish services agreement specific to needs and compare with cost to create business in-house. Assess whether services are working and have a back-up plan because the break down of services can affect the entire project; and
- The housing planning process must include homeless advocates
- They also shared tips for newcomers

ELI CAUCUS

The Forum included a round-table discussion of next steps in addressing barriers to homeless and extremely low income project development. It was a

particularly productive conversation because it included key staff from the Florida Housing Finance Corporation, including Steve Auger, Executive Director, Nancy Muller, Policy Director, Vicki Robinson, Director of Multi-family Housing Programs, and Bill Aldinger, Supportive Housing Coordinator. Participants exchanged the following ideas:

-  Establish a source(s) to provide project operating funding; (in the state of Washington a document recording fee is used to fund operating expenses for homeless projects)
-  Need on-going funding for homeless projects (not part of Universal Cycle);
-  Nonprofits need a way to find experienced consultants to ensure competitiveness in the application process. As an alternative, learn through the competitive scoring process. FHFC can host an application review follow-up to assess why applications were not funded;
-  Capacity building: Nonprofits need to see model projects of what has worked in the past including a fully functional project;
-  Demonstration Loan Report summarizing challenges and barriers of these projects;
-  Capacity building through housing rehab under the housing preservation set-aside;
-  Housing experience required for smaller nonprofits in the FHFC Universal Cycle is too demanding. Consider the possibility to count the development experience of some board members in a nonprofit developer organization and/or requiring less experience for those proposing smaller projects;

- 🏠 Allow inexperienced nonprofits to be funded provided they are required to have technical assistance (similar to PLP program);
- 🏠 Address weaknesses in Florida not being competitive in 811 applications;
- 🏠 Create outstanding and award winning design to gain public acceptance for homeless and extremely low income housing (anti-NIMBY strategy);
- 🏠 Review local land use codes to assess whether reform is needed to support the development of housing for the homeless and special needs populations;
- 🏠 Include periodic discussions similar to the caucus format to address next steps and include in Florida Housing Coalition's development based workshops and/or in conference roundtable and incorporate Continuum of Care based projects in the overall discussion; and

- 🏠 Summarize ideas/concerns into policy recommendations and assure that policy recommendations are considered by FHFC.

This list is a summary and not an exhaustive recount of the ideas that came out of the caucus. The Florida Housing Coalition, together with the Florida Coalition for the Homeless, the Supportive Housing Coalition, and the Florida Housing Finance Corporation will use this as a springboard to make improvements in our current system so that Florida can better house the homeless and the extremely low income. 🏠

Editor's Note-Update from 2007 Legislative Session:

The \$30 million dollar appropriation for the extremely low income in 2006 was cut in half in 2007; the appropriation for the extremely low income was \$15 million. At the same time, the appropriation for the CWHIP program (serving 140 % of area median income) increased from \$50 million in 2006 to \$65 million in 2007.

THE PINELLAS COUNTY SAFE HAVEN

In April of 2007 a new 25-bed "Safe Haven" opened in the Palmetto Park neighborhood of St. Petersburg. "Safe Haven" is a HUD term used to describe a residential treatment program for individuals who are "chronically homeless" and who have not succeeded in other programs. The Safe Haven is considered permanent housing because tenants can stay as long as they like and have their own space with a lease and a guarantee that their bed will still be there when they return from work or school.



St. Petersburg. The building required extensive rehabilitation including creation of individual rooms for 19 of the 25 tenants.

Boley Centers was approached in 2001 by the Pinellas County Homeless Coalition with a request to open and operate a Safe Haven in south Pinellas County. That request led to a three-year search for an appropriate site. Along the way, several buildings were considered including a site that looked like a good match near the downtown but not too close, with a commercial kitchen and enough space for 25 units, etc. After a neighboring business caught wind of the potential use of the site, the owner stepped in and purchased the building to stop the deal from proceeding. Eventually, a vacant boarded-up nursing home was identified on 31st Street South in



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The Pinellas County Safe Haven is a collaborative effort with local matching funds coming from the City of St. Petersburg, Pinellas County and Boley Centers. The building was purchased with funds from the City of St. Petersburg's HOME program. Rehabilitation of the building was accomplished with funds from Pinellas County, the Federal Home Loan Bank of Atlanta, the State of Florida's Homeless Housing Assistance Grant and the Bessie Boley Foundation. Operating funds come from HUD through the Pinellas County Homeless Coalition with the local match provided by the City of St. Petersburg and Pinellas County with a small portion contributed by tenant rents.

Today, the Pinellas County Safe Haven is providing services and supports to 17 men and eight women who would otherwise be on the streets of our community. Boley Centers would like to offer thanks to all the partners that have made this happen. Boley Centers can be reached at (727) 821-4819 or at www.boleycenters.org.