

MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 25, 2005
TO: The Board of Supervisors
FROM: Doug Powell, Acting Manager of Community Services
SUBJECT: Status Report on Homelessness

Introduction

The issue of homelessness is gaining more attention locally, regionally, throughout the State of Virginia and the entire nation. President Bush has initiated an effort to end chronic homelessness by 2012. In January of 2004, Governor Warner approved a plan to end homelessness in Virginia, and the Peninsula Mayors and Chairs appointed a Commission on Homelessness earlier this year.

At its June 28 meeting, the Board of Supervisors requested a status report on homelessness in James City County. Specifically, the Board has been approached by a representative of Vibrant Life Ministries about the potential for amending the Zoning Ordinance to allow a homeless shelter in James City County.

This report attempts to address the following:

- Define homelessness
- Identify the number of homeless in the community and present demographic information about this population
- Discuss present efforts locally and regionally to address homelessness
- Identify gaps in services and outline options for serving the homeless

What is Homelessness?

There are many definitions for homelessness. For the purpose of this report, the following definitions have been applied:

A. Homeless Person includes persons residing:

- Outdoors, under bridges, in cars, abandoned buildings, or in other places not meant for human habitation;
- In permanent or temporary quarters in violation of leases or governmental regulations;
- In emergency shelters; or
- In transitional housing who previously came from the streets or emergency shelter.

A person is also homeless if he or she:

- Is in any of the above places but spending a short time (up to 30 consecutive days) in a jail, hospital, or other institution;
- Is being evicted within a week from a residential unit, motel, campground, or other temporary lodging; no subsequent residence has been identified; and the person lacks the resources and support networks needed to obtain housing;
- Is being discharged within a week from an institution, such as a mental health or substance abuse treatment facility or a jail, in which the person has been a resident for more than 30 consecutive

- days; no subsequent residence has been identified; and the person lacks the resources and support networks needed to obtain housing; or
- Is fleeing a domestic violence situation; no subsequent residence has been identified; and the person lacks the resources and support networks needed to obtain housing.

B. Chronic homelessness is defined as an unaccompanied individual with a disabling condition (such as substance abuse disorder, mental illness, developmental disability, or chronic physical illness or disability) who has been homeless:

- Continuously for over one year; or
- At least four times in the past three years.

The chronically homeless are far more difficult to serve. A recent national study concluded that the chronically homeless comprise 10-20 percent of the homeless population, but consume 50 percent of the resources devoted to homelessness.

A person is not homeless if he or she is:

- In housing, even though the housing is substandard, in need of repair, crowded, or expensive;
- Living in a motel or other temporary lodging;
- Currently incarcerated;
- Living in a Board and Care, Adult Congregate Living Facility, or similar place;
- Being discharged from an institution that is required to provide or arrange housing upon release;
- Wards of the State, although youth in foster care may receive needed supportive services that supplements, but does not substitute for, the State's assistance; or
- Living legally with other unrelated individuals by choice in order to save money.

The Homeless Population

Identifying the homeless population is difficult, and data compiled on homelessness is almost always described as "soft." Duplication is avoided when possible but inevitably occurs. Conversely, some homeless are not counted at all, partially because they do not want to be identified and partially because surveys will miss some.

Homelessness is inextricably tied to poverty. Lack of education/job skills, lack of a living wage, lack of family and social networks, domestic violence, divorce or serious injury, or illness can all lead to homelessness. National data indicates that 80 percent of the homeless population experiences "episodic" homelessness (non-chronic) with an average duration of four months. While the causes of homelessness vary, it is important to note that approximately 60 percent have substance abuse problems or suffer from mental illness and 50 percent have criminal histories that make obtaining jobs and housing difficult. About 20 percent or more are working and simply can't afford the rent.

The best two local sources of data are the point-in-time survey conducted annually on the entire Peninsula and the monthly reports prepared by the Greater Williamsburg United Way and Salvation Army on the Historic Triangle. The 2005 point-in-time survey was conducted in January and identified 1,034 homeless on the Peninsula. Unfortunately, demographic data is not collected on all of the identified population. However, over half of the identified homeless were in an emergency shelter known as People Offering Resources Together (PORT) located in Newport News, and PORT maintains useful demographic information. PORT is an annual winter shelter program that provides emergency shelter, breakfast, and dinner for a 20-week period from November through April. The following chart illustrates the demographic information about the population at PORT in FY 2005.

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	NN	HPT	Wmb/JCC	York	Other	Unknown
Men	218	36	37	26	76	59
Women	58	8	5	11	14	10
Children	20	4	0	2	5	1
TOTAL	276	44	42	37	88	71
Black	234	45	36	27	68	52
White	57	1	6	11	24	15
Other	5	2	0	1	3	3
Vet	53	14	0	0	26	13
TANF	4	0	0	2	0	2
HIV/AIDS	20	3	1	0	7	4
Chronic SA	64	13	3	2	17	10
Alcohol Dep	121	14	11	7	32	26
Drug Dep	104	19	5	7	26	19
Mental Illness	72	12	6	4	23	12

Peninsula Mayors and Chairs Commission on Homelessness - June 2005

As you can see, 42 shelter residents identified their last area of housing as Williamsburg/James City, accounting for 7.5 percent of the shelter population. The shelter residents identifying themselves as Williamsburg/James City County residents are overwhelmingly African American males, and most have either a substance abuse problem or a mental illness.

The United Way/Salvation Army survey yielded the following results for the period January 1 - May 31, 2005:

Men	43
Women	34
Children	31
TOTAL	108
African-American	48
Caucasian	34
Other	18
Unknown	8
Adults Employed	19
Adults Unemployed	43
Adults Unknown	13
Lost Job	2
Legal - release	6
Eviction	14
Financial Problems	36
Transient	1
Other - fire, family problems	22
Unknown	27

Wmb	JCC	York	NN	VB	Glou	Woods	Unk	Other
22	35	4	1	1	1	6	26	12

AGE					
0-18	19-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	Unkn
32	24	15	18	10	9

Spent previous night						
Motel	Fam	Auto	Unkn	Sheltr	Othr	Woods
28	21	7	6	21	17	8

Data: 1/1/05-5/31/05

From United Way and Salvation Army

As you can see, the individuals served by the United Way and Salvation Army are more diverse by race, sex, and age than at PORT. There are a fairly significant number of children identified in this survey. Those identifying their last housing as being in James City County comprised 32.4 percent of the total served. Most spent the previous night in a hotel, with family, or in a shelter, although some had spent the previous night in a car or on the street. About 1/3 of the total adult population served were employed. The total of 108 served represents 85 individuals.

Based on the data above, the homeless in the James City County area appear to be disproportionately male, African American, with a substance abuse problem or mental health issue. In addition, it appears that a significant portion of the population being served by the Greater Williamsburg United Way and Salvation Army are families.

The Continuum of Services for the Homeless

Homeless services generally fall into the following categories:

Prevention programs provide assistance to those who are vulnerable and allow a person or family to maintain current housing while they resolve the issue threatening homelessness. These programs are generally the most cost effective.

Emergency placement is generally defined as a shelter setting. Stay is typically less than 60 days with no fee for services.

Transitional housing usually consists of scattered sites or less congregate settings. Stay is up to 24 months and the resident is generally charged a percent of income for rent.

Permanent housing may or may not be based on income and stay is not time limited other than the provision of the lease.

Permanent supported housing is affordable permanent housing (usually through rent supports) for persons who are disabled.

Supportive Services are services that help people obtain and maintain housing, health, and mental health. Services include case management, life skill classes, vocational training, primary and mental health care.

Current Efforts to Serve the Homeless

Within the Historic Triangle area, the following services are available for assisting the homeless:

- **James City County's Office of Housing and Community Development (OHCD)** has operated the State funded Homeless Intervention Program (HIP) since 1990 serving James City County, the City of Williamsburg, and York County with Williamsburg addresses. The purpose of the HIP program is to prevent homelessness and to assist homeless or temporarily housed persons and families to get into permanent housing. The HIP program provides short-term rental or mortgage assistance for individuals and families who are experiencing a temporary, unavoidable financial crisis. Additionally, the HIP program may provide security deposit and temporary rental assistance to individuals or families who are homeless or in temporary housing who have located affordable permanent housing. Over 1,000 households have been assisted by the HIP program in the Historic Triangle region during the past fifteen years. In FY 2004, 85 applications for this program were received and 52 were approved. In FY 2005, 56 applications were received and 35 were approved. OHCD has seen an increase in requests for HIP assistance in the first quarter of FY 2006 with 22 applications received and 15 approved. It should be noted this program provides once in a lifetime

benefit. In addition, OHCD operates the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program. The purpose of this program is to provide ongoing rental assistance to eligible families. Currently, 154 housing choice vouchers are allocated to James City County. The waiting list, which was last opened in 2001, has 148 families waiting for vouchers. The program is operated on a first-come, first-serve basis and priority is not currently given to the homeless.

- **James City County Division of Social Services** can provide some limited assistance with utilities and/or partial rent for residents who are categorically eligible for one of their programs designed to prevent foster care or promote the independence of the elderly or disabled. Social workers frequently work with other community resources to prevent homelessness. Social Services, the United Way, and some area nonprofit organizations and churches provide payment for short stays in motels for emergency shelter.

James City County also provides \$15,000 per year to the **Salvation Army**. The Salvation Army operates six transitional housing units, primarily for families.

- **Community Services Board (CSB)** operates a Transitional Living Apartment program for approximately 15 individuals in the Colonial Town apartment complex. It should be noted that CSB views this as a treatment program and not a housing program. This program is geared to serve the seriously and persistently mentally ill and is designed to transition people from a hospital setting to independent living. Individuals are expected to work in the community either in a volunteer or paid capacity, or participate in the People’s Place program. There is staff supervision on-site from 3 p.m. to 9 a.m. The typical stay is 6-18 months. The individuals served in this program are not typically homeless, though they may be in danger of becoming homeless. It should be noted that it is difficult to find permanent placements in adult living facilities for the mentally ill who cannot live independently.
- **Avalon’s** primary mission is to serve females who are victims of domestic violence, but Avalon also provides shelter to homeless females who are not victims of domestic violence if space is available. It should be noted that Avalon serves clients from outside of the Historic Triangle area, just as PORT in Newport News serves clients from outside its immediate geographic area, including those from the Historic Triangle area.

A number of area churches and private individuals are also known to assist the homeless, but quantification of their efforts is beyond the scope of this report. It should be noted, however, the Vibrant Life Ministry has served 84 people since December 10, 2004. Of this amount, 60 percent are captured in the United Way data.

The following chart helps to illustrate the types of services available for the homeless in the Historic Triangle area and identifies the service providers:

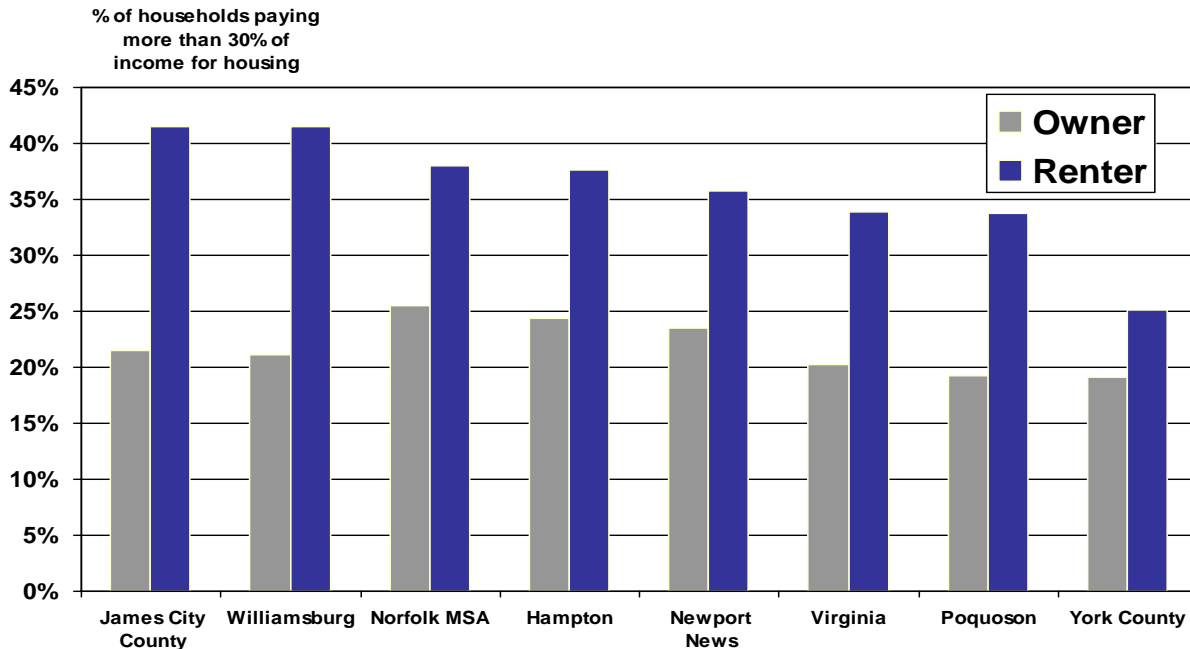
Prevention	Emergency Shelter	Transitional Housing	Permanent Supported Housing	Permanent Housing
HIP-JCC OHCD	Avalon	Salvation Army		Section 8
	Various charities and individuals	Community Services Board		

In addition to local initiatives in the Historic Triangle area, it is important to mention two regional efforts to improve services for the homeless: the Mayors and Chairs Commission on Homelessness and the Continuum of Care. The Mayors and Chairs Commission on Homelessness consists of a representative from each of the following localities: the Cities of Hampton, Newport News, Poquoson and Williamsburg, and the Counties of Gloucester, James City, New Kent, and York. The Commission formed about six months ago and has identified gaps in services for both families and individuals. As a result, the Commission established two basic goals: reducing the chronic homeless population and preventing individuals and families from homelessness. The Commission is in the process of establishing work groups and developing a specific action plan to meet the two goals stated above. The Commission has also prepared a list of short-term recommendations for consideration by the Mayor and Chairs. Those recommendations are included in this report as Attachment 1.

The Continuum of Care is a year-round planning entity that includes service providers and public agencies and serves as a forum for discussing critical community issues. The COC evaluates needs, resources and gaps, and serves as the funnel for homeless grants from Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Funding received through the COC is currently focused on transitional and permanent housing.

The Cost of Housing

Although affordable housing and homelessness are two separate issues, they are linked. The cost of housing can be a factor that leads to homelessness. Generally, housing is considered affordable if the household is paying less than 30 percent of income for housing. As you can see from the following chart, James City County does not fare well among renters on this measure compared to other localities in this region, although it does compare favorably among owners.



Proposal from Vibrant Life Ministry

Vibrant Life Ministry, a coalition of Christian churches in the community, wishes to serve the homeless in a dwelling or dwellings and provide supportive services to residents for approximately nine months. Their intent is to serve males and males with families. Their proposal has been referred to as a shelter, and they have requested that the County amend the Zoning Ordinance to allow emergency shelters since the use is not currently allowed in any zoning district. However, Vibrant Life Ministry's proposal does not meet the definition of shelter. Their proposal actually constitutes transitional housing.

Conclusions

Staff suggests the following conclusions about homelessness:

- Based on the data, there is a homeless population in James City County. While most are offered only short-term assistance, emergency needs are generally met. Therefore, an emergency shelter is not justified.
- Efforts to improve services to the homeless in James City County should focus on prevention and permanency. National research shows that homelessness is best solved through permanent housing. National trends indicate that funders are shifting resources from emergency shelters to permanent housing.
- While permanent housing is the ideal solution, many are simply not able to immediately move into permanent housing and would benefit from the supportive services received in a transitional setting. Therefore, transitional housing is justified as a key step in assisting the homeless gain a permanent housing solution.
- Efforts to improve services to the homeless in James City County should focus on serving the most underserved population - chronically homeless males and families.
- The County should continue to work on the issue regionally through active involvement in the Mayors and Chairs Commission on Homelessness and the Continuum of Care. By combining resources, the localities can more effectively coordinate services and provide a more comprehensive array of services. In addition, other regions that have attempted to address homelessness report that there must be a coordinating entity. The Mayors and Chairs Commission on Homelessness can be the coordinating entity.
- The County should continue and strengthen partnerships with the faith community, the development community, and the service providers (including those who address the needs of the mentally ill, recovering substance abusers, and persons released from jail) to improve supportive services to the homeless and create more permanent, affordable housing opportunities.
- The County should continue to work with service providers to further improve on data collection methods.
- The County should continue its focus on self-sufficiency since poverty and homelessness are tied closely together.

Options

Specific options the County should consider to improve services to the homeless include:

- Prevention - the HIP program has been very effective in preventing homelessness. Unfortunately, the future funding of this program is uncertain. The County should consider contributing local funds to this program if Federal funds become insufficient to meet the need.
- Transitional Housing - a number of options exist to increase the number of transitional housing units in the community. All of the options presented below assume that a private or nonprofit entity would be the service provider.
 1. The County can amend the Zoning Ordinance to allow transitional housing with a special use permit to accommodate more than three unrelated individuals. Increasing the number of unrelated individuals that can live together would allow a service provider to serve more individuals for the same cost. However, living with a larger number of individuals can reduce the stability of the living environment for the homeless persons.
 2. The Zoning Ordinance currently allows three unrelated people to live together, and transitional housing can be developed and operated within that constraint. The County could encourage service providers to create transitional housing within the current provisions of the Zoning Ordinance. When developed and operated within the framework of the current Zoning Ordinance, transitional housing can blend into the community because it looks like the surrounding housing. It can be single, scattered single-family dwellings, or small stand-alone apartment complexes. In recognition of the added expense to operate transitional housing units with a limit of three occupants, the County could contribute funds to a service provider to offset the additional cost.
 3. The County could also increase its funding to the Salvation Army to allow them to expand their existing transitional housing program.
- Permanent Housing options for permanent housing include the continuation of existing affordable housing programs that either preserve existing affordable housing programs (such as Lafayette Apartments) or produce additional units (such as the Ironbound Elderly Apartment Complex). These options are costly and require continuation of partnerships with funding agencies, private developers and service providers.



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DP/gs
homeless.mem

Attachment