

**The Bitterroot Valley Homelessness Task Force
October 25, 2016
Meeting Notes**

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Next Task Force Meeting Date

Tuesday, November 15, 2016

9:30 – Noon

at the Hospital

Second draft Mission Statement

(The purpose of our work, the reason we exist, what makes us unique in the County, what we're all about)

The Bitterroot Valley Homelessness Task Force exists to develop and facilitate affordable and safe solutions for Ravalli County's housing needs – from emergency to permanent and for citizens of all ages, abilities and circumstances.

- 1. What brought us here today, the housing needs we are each concerned about**
 - A lack of housing overall, inadequate numbers.
 - The high number of Early Head Start kids who are on the Section 8 Waiting List.
 - There are no services for people who are homeless.

- Veterans are the biggest percentage of those who are homeless; there is no shelter specifically for them.
- The homeless population is also single moms with children.
- A lot of homeless women go to SAFE.
- There are a large number of homeless students.
- There is a need for advocacy to help people access housing, both learning how and delivering it.
- The current housing inventory is not affordable.
- Several young friends are homeless; they are couch surfing and sleeping in cars.
- A number of people we serve are couch surfing, sleeping in cars, and under bridges. The nearest homeless shelter is in Missoula.
- We need a family shelter, primarily for women and children.
- The 211 calls from Ravalli County to the Human Resources Council are between 30 and 40% about housing needs.
- Locating available rentals below \$900-\$1,000/month for one parent families is a challenge.
- It's tough to get housing advocacy assistance for people with disabilities.
- There is an inadequate amount of affordable and subsidized housing in the County.
- Some of the housing is substandard.
- We need more awareness by people who own land and homes – and the ability to give them incentives to be of help.
- Single men have a harder time than others who need housing; it's a huge need.
- Single moms need education about their future planning.
- Domestic violence survivors need permanent, safe and affordable options.
- People with decent, steady incomes can't even find housing; it's a true crisis.
- We have a quite a large number of empty homes that are not for rent.
- We need prevention efforts to help people stay housed.
- There needs to be a housing policy for the continuum of housing needs.
- There needs to be housing for people with disabilities and mental illness.
- SAFE is bursting at the seams.
- The homeless population is invisible.
- There is a growing need among seniors for housing.
- There is a disconnect between wages and rent levels.
- Ex-felons experience special challenges.
- People with disabilities often earn sub-minimum wages, experience high unemployment, have service animals that present a challenge, and are forced to live in un-accessible spaces.
- We need a clearinghouse of the numbers, to inform people of the situation. We need to document exactly what is taking place to educate and persuade policy makers.

2. The progress made at the March 4, 2016 meeting

- a. The community assets we identified: What services and/or facilities currently exist? What assistance is in place to meet housing needs – on the whole spectrum?

- All of us, people who want to help. There are more than 30 people here today!
- The community readily jumps in to help, such as when a family loses a house to a fire.
- The churches are very generous. Of the 60 local churches, we know of 45 that are active in providing people with assistance, food, utility money, rent, deposits, and more.
- SAFE has 9 housing units and 4 bedrooms of emergency shelter. The facility is 98% utilized, and taking in residents to an over-capacity status takes place at least half the time. In 2015, 56 adults utilized the Shelter, and we provided 9,000 shelter nights.
- Head Start serves 180 children between birth and 5 years of age. Six pregnant women are in the Prenatal Program. At Westview, 68 infants and toddlers are served, and another 17 are served in Stevensville. Head Start provides a good deal of outside-the-classroom services, with connections to doctors, dentists, meals, parent supports, and assistance with housing.
- The RAPP Family Program allocated \$14,000 for families with various immediate needs.
- The 211 information line is an asset.
- HRDC has some limited money available to cover people's rents, deposits, etc.
- Programs similar to RAPP exist. There are family foundations and other very generous individual donors in the Valley.
- Gary and the Family Shelter are a huge asset! They provide short-term emergency hotel vouchers. In 2015, 651 were distributed. If a child is in the household, they put them up for three nights over any 6 month period. They also provide funds to repair cars, cover the cost of food, pay electrical and propane bills, and in total spent \$18,000 on benevolent costs. In addition, community meals are provided 3 nights a week at Community Church, which amounted to 6,049 meals in 2015.
- Big Sky Christian Shelter provides housing for single men. (Rent is charged to the residents.)
- Pantry partners are important to people with modest incomes.
- Job Service can and does provide one-time deposit and rent money, and other supportive services.
- HRDC has funds available to cover three months of rent, deposits and utility deposits.
- Sapphire Community Health Center.
- There is a lot of longevity and community knowledge by the service providers. We know who to call and have strong informal networks.
- The expansion of Medicaid now makes so many services and treatments available that were not before – treatments, prescriptions, mental health services, eye glasses, dental care, hearing aides ... now all are standard coverage.
- The Duty of Care statutes law enforcement follows may require they take people to the Emergency Room, whether the person needs it or not. In Missoula a member of a consortium goes out on calls, evaluates, and refers to the appropriate service provider. Also, there is a Crisis Team available.
- West House takes people versus the person being sent to jail.
- NeighborWorks Montana counsels home buyers and will soon start a Renter Education program. Last year they graduated 104 people in our area.

- The Community Housing Referral Center, makes it so applications for various services are accepted system-wide. There is comprehensive outreach and a no wrong door approach.
- The Experience Works program provides training, work experiences, and income.
- Valley Villas Apartments at 10th and Pine streets will be staying in Rural Development rent subsidized status, thanks to a tax credit award from the Board of Housing. There will be a substantial renovation in the next year or so, including all 17 lower level units becoming handicapped accessible, a community garden, and improved energy efficiency.
- Parkside Apartments are also undergoing a renovation. It currently houses people 55 years of age and older.
- Montana Legal Services in Missoula serves our area.
- The Western Montana Pro Bono program includes services regarding landlord-tenant disputes. In addition, some law firms are now charging based on a sliding scale.
- Disability Rights Montana works statewide as a law firm for people with disabilities.
- Montana Fair Housing, based in Butte, works statewide.
- Habitat for Humanity builds a house or so each year.
- Habitat's Re-Store is a great resource.

3. Ideal vision for the future

Second *draft* **Vision Statements**, the outcomes we seek, the results we are striving for – in an ideal sense, what we want to accomplish for and in our community:

The community as a whole

- All sectors of our community – local government, state government, non-profit organizations, businesses, and citizens – are on the same page about the status of housing needs and gaps, and committed to finding solutions.
- Local government regulations allow for and encourage innovative approaches to meeting the housing needs.
- There is a face on homelessness; the stigma is reduced. People understand it and have overcome their fear about people who are homeless.
- Neighborhoods with a broad range of incomes are a norm.

Citizens

- No one experiences homelessness; a safety net for people in emergencies exist in adequate numbers and capacity for men, women, and families.
- People can access housing with their current income; affordable housing is available.
- People can age in place with caregivers nearby, the necessary adaptations, and services on-site or in close proximity.
- Housing exists for seniors and people of all ages who don't drive.
- There are housing options available for people coming out of incarceration.
- Supports are accessible to help people to avoid losing their current home or rental housing.
- Multi-income, un-related households can co-purchase and co-rent, are aware of the options to do so, and know how to go about it.

Housing stock

- The whole continuum of housing stock exists in adequate numbers.
- Emergency and short-term housing is available, and the local providers of such housing have sufficient capacity to provide it.
- Affordable housing is available to meet the needs; people with modest incomes can find and keep housing that costs no more than 30% of the income.
- New building incorporates accessible features that allow people to age in place. Universal design concepts are a norm.
- Housing is located with walkability and public transportation in mind.
- In any new construction, energy efficiency and sustainable sources are a norm.
- There are multi-generational, synthesized housing complexes that resemble the European village look of housing. Neighborliness is encouraged through the design resulting in the sharing of perspectives, life skills and experiences.
- Auxiliary Dwelling Units (ADUs) are legal.

4. What has taken place since the March meeting about this subject?

a. Progress and good news

- Stacey spoke to the County Commissioners about homelessness.

– The renovation of the Parkside Apartments, with 24 subsidized units specifically for senior citizens, is now complete.

b. New opportunities to address our mission

– HUD is focusing on permanent housing, with a funding opportunity of \$30,000 grants. Previously just for transitional housing, now the focus is on permanent housing and Continuum of Care transitional housing dollars where organizations share information, without a big formal group and structure.

– Housing Trust Fund dollars of \$3 million recently were made available by the MT Department of Commerce, for subsidized rental units targeted to people at or below 30% of median income, which will be good for people with disabilities, people on SSI, and families.

– The RC&D has a opportunity that could be applied to homelessness and affordable housing – the Bitterroot Collective Impact project:

- It is funded by a Washington Foundation grant.

- It is a process and structure for a wide collaboration and a common agenda.

- There will be measurements of success, mutually-reinforcing expertise and activities, continuous communication, and the ability to empower the existing efforts by local non-profits.

- It is a formal, facilitated large scale social change effort.

- RC&D would be the backbone organization to guide the vision and strategies, help the group establish a vision, build public will, advance policy and mobilize funding. (In this case, the vision is being identified, so the process could adopt it and not have to go backwards.)

- Staff would be available to move this forward – Tim and Kris at RC&D – over a period of three years.

5. To get this ball rolling toward tangible solutions ... What first steps make sense? Do we need to do any research? What else can we on the relatively short-term to start making real progress?

1. Maintain an e-mail list of all of us. *Tim and Kris will do this.*
2. Put all our research in one accessible-to-us-all location. Explore using Google Docs for sharing research. *Tim will do this, and Becky will check to ensure it is accessible for people with disabilities.*
3. *The Human Resource Council offered to gather the data and baseline numbers about homelessness, coalescing all the affected households.*
4. Form a Continuum of Care Committee, and qualify for the case management, building, operations service dollars. No one volunteered for this, as yet.
5. Commit to participating more fully in the Point in Time Survey of homeless people in January. Form a committee to meet in early December to ensure the entire Valley is included by providing free meals, free haircuts, and the Stand Down model to attract veterans. *Tina Shay at SAFE and Casey at the Human Resources Council committed to making this happen.*
6. Form a Steering Committee to look at the RC&D proposal. *Jim Morton, John, Gary, Stacey, Pam and Tim committed to this project.*

Notes prepared by Beki Brandborg. If any changes are needed, please just let me know.
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