

# City of Perris

## Report on Homeless Issues

**“The homeless are not problem people, but rather people with problems”**

Fort Lauderdale Police Department

February 2008

Prepared By:

William R. Kelly – Principal Consultant

**Urban Futures Inc.....**3111 North Tustin, Suite 230Orange, Ca. 92865

## **Introduction:**

The City of Perris retained Urban Futures Incorporated, to review the homeless issues affecting the community. Numerous group meetings were held with the City Homeless Task Force comprised of city officials (elected and appointed), local ministers', concerned citizens, business interests, the County Sheriff's Department (the Perris Police Dept.) and the County of Riverside, Department of Public Social Services.

In addition, Urban Futures Inc. conducted one on one "confidential" interviews with several of the stakeholders' to gather additional input on this issue.

These City Task Force discussed observations, opinions and facts presented by various individuals and groups. The stakeholders also reviewed the 2007 County of Riverside Homeless Survey and Homeless Count (see attachment 1).

The "Riverside County Report" results accounted for 4,508 homeless in the County, with the City of Perris accounting for 379 persons or 8.4% of the County total, or the 4<sup>th</sup> highest in the County.

This document will provide some general issues about the homeless, discuss City of Perris issues, provide some general comments on alternatives for consideration, provide a brief overview of costs issues for alternative programs and finally to provide a list of recommendations

# **1** General Issues Regarding the Homeless

According to the National Center on Homeless and Poverty, in 2007, on any given night there were between 700,000 and 2 million people classified as “homeless”. The U.S. Conference of Mayor’s December 2000 Report indicated that single men comprised the majority of the homeless, families with children being the next largest category, followed by single women and finally the smallest category being unaccompanied minors.

The County of Riverside Report (2007) stated that of the 4,508 homeless, 2775 (61.6%) were counted on the street and 1733(38.4%) were in facilities. The age breakdown was 149 (4%) age 62 or older, 264 (7.1%) were youth between 18-24, and 15 (.4%) were unaccompanied children between 13-17. The gender breakdown was 2525 (67.9%) male and 1189 (32.1%) female. The ethnic statistics consisted of 1689 (45%) White, 1258 (33.9%) Hispanic, 565 (2.2%) Black and the remaining were other races. Other data included stated that 797(17.7%) were children under the age of 18 living with a homeless parent and 1165 (25.8%) were persons in families with children.

On October 11, 2007 the Los Angeles Homeless Service Authority announced the results of the 2007 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count. This report noted there were some 73,000 homeless people in Los Angeles County.

Of note in the L.A. County survey it was stated that while homelessness has many causes, the most common cause was a loss of job, the next cause-being eviction from a dwelling unit, then conflicts with family members or friends and lastly alcohol and drug related issues.

Homelessness is a nationwide problem and communities across the country are grappling with identifying solutions that serve the community, while protecting the rights, dignity and personal property of the homeless persons. In the past the most common method of dealing with this issue has been to criminalize the conduct associated with these people, by adopting various ordinances or codes. Many of these legislative remedies have been struck down by the courts as being “unconstitutional.”

The homeless population is generally highly migratory, moving between communities in search of shelter and food. Additionally, they become very aware of local attitudes/interventions e.g. tolerant (accepting) or aggressive (punitive) Once they identify a location where they can remain for a period of time unmolested or challenged, they tend to stay, usually in a low profile manner, whenever possible.

Many homeless persons suffer from varying degrees of mental disability. Some are simply individuals who have lost their jobs and homes and have no other place to stay. In general the homeless tend to try and blend in with the general populace, so as to not draw attention; however their general lack of personal hygiene may be troublesome to the general populace.

One of the interesting findings from the research was that typically male homeless persons were cooperative with the assistance of housing, food or counseling provided there was no religious overtones e.g...”No Preaching”. They

preferred to stay on the street, rather than receive shelter food or counseling, to avoid religious discussions.

## 2 City of Perris Issues and Concerns

As noted previously the City of Perris has 387 homeless persons based upon the Riverside County Homeless Report. This number is disputed by some members of the Task Force as being too high! Some members opined that the actual number in the City of Perris was probably lower because some of the count might be attributed to areas outside of the City, but considered part of the Perris service area. In addition many of the 387 persons were most likely located within service facilities when the count took place. It was suggested that the “real” number of homeless on the streets in the City of Perris was closer to 50.

Some of the information exchanged also dealt with the matter of “drunk in public” and whether or not there was a direct relationship to the homeless. The task force discussed new codes/ordinances and the practical effectiveness. The group also reviewed the programs offered by the County, as well the private or religious based programs.

# 3 Alternatives: Passive versus Aggressive

In the past the most often used tool to deal with the homeless was to have the local police department respond using the strict enforcement of codes/ordinances or enacting new codes/ordinances. Issues regarding the homeless were handled usually on a complaint basis. This meant that if the conduct in a particular area or by a particular individual had an impact upon the community health, safety or property rights, then the police would intervene and use the laws to address the problem.

Unfortunately, as was the experience in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, the strict enforcement and sometime arrests became a short term solution to only treat the immediate problem. The Fort Lauderdale community saw the immediate correction; however if the person was arrested, they only served time for several days, then were released and the person was back out on the same street or close to it and the same problem was back and began all over again.

More importantly, in some cases a “citizen’s arrest’ was necessary and many citizens did **not** want to become personally involved in the citation or arrest of the homeless. In addition, since the homeless person has no permanent address, phone or permanent location, if they are required to appear in court, they simply disappeared!

Short term enforcement and arrests have therefore become a very inadequate solution to the problem and has created adversarial relationships between police agencies and advocates for the homeless. Many of the homeless tend to know there “constitutional “rights and enforcement is difficult for these reasons.

There have been over the years many examples of what other jurisdictions have utilized to address this issue. The following are some examples, with brief descriptions of the programs;

### **City of Riverside – Homeless Action Plan**

The City adopted the “Homeless Action Plan” as a proactive approach to addressing this issue. The concept of partnerships of non profits, social service organizations, and faith based institutions and the City was the basis of the plan. Some of the actions implemented were;

- 1: Conducted a 2007 Census of the homeless.
- 2: Created a Homeless Street Outreach Program – This is a four (4) member team of professional service providers who conduct daily mobile outreach. The team is a partnership with local service providers, law enforcement, health professionals and city staff. The team also responds to citizen and business concerns.
- 3: Emergency Shelter Programs – this activity functions year round by providing shelter for the homeless for individuals as well as families. During “cold “climate occurrences, additional beds are made available as needed.
- 4: Homeless Care Network – this activity is a monthly meeting of all service providers. The goal is to exchange information by coordinating, communicating, and collaborating on solutions to changing events or activities

### **City of Barstow – Transitional Housing**

The City of Barstow converted an old fire station in the downtown area into a transitional housing site. A coalition of churches, other non profits and the city combined to create this project.

### **City of San Diego – Single Room Occupancy (SRO)**

The city converted old hotels in to single room units for the homeless.

### **Cities of West Covina, Baldwin Park, Covina, Glendora and Azusa – One Day Service Center**

The five cities with county health and mental health services, the public defender’s office and other service groups coordinated a “round up’ of homeless persons and they were transported to a church to receive medical attention, job counseling, referrals and other social service assistance. This was a one (1) day event.

### **City of Fontana – Transient Enrichment Network for Assistance (Ten-4) Plan**

The Ten-4 Plan had the following objectives: develop an independent social service organization to deal with homeless issues, reduce the number of homeless people, reduce the number of Police calls for services related to homeless people, positively impact the community’s sense of safety, and improve the community’s physical environment.

Vacant space in a commercial center was located and social and mental health agencies, religious agencies, the probation office as well as the Police Department were set up to counsel the homes.

### **City of Corona**

This City has taken an aggressive code enforcement action. The Police Department was tasked to handle the homeless problem. They began issuing citations for the possession of shopping carts taken from grocery stores, encouraged property owners to trim and keep landscaping low or open to discourage encampments and many other similar actions. One issue noted by the Police Chief was that the transient were not the homeless as usually defined. In his opinion the homeless desired assistance, where the transient did not and deliberately chose the encampments.

The City also utilizes a “voucher” system where the Police Department and/or churches pays for a night’s stay at a contracted hotel, for families when shelters are full or unavailable.

### **City of Ontario – Tent City**

Due to the large number of homeless persons in the city living on property too close to homes and the railroad tracks the City provided space on city owned property. The people received assistance from City departments and social service and health care workers while a city built shelter was being constructed.

### **City of Fort Lauderdale, Florida**

This city is an attractive location for the homeless due its location and climate. After many years of using the strict enforcement of laws by the Police

Department, they determined they were simply conducting a “revolving door program” and the problem was not being solved.

The department moved from adversarial relationships to partnerships in the following fashion. The Police Department now has a two hour Homelessness Course for all police officers. The department philosophy now is “homeless is not a crime” and the officers are provided with training so as to assist the homeless with their specific need or problem be it physical, mental or other matter.

The new mantra for the Fort Lauderdale Police Department is ....”The homeless are not problem people, but rather people with problems” .....

### **City of Tacoma, Washington Outlawing “pan handling’**

This City in dealing with the homeless or underemployed/unemployed has adopted ordinances to prohibit any solicitation in the public right of way. No one is allowed to solicit by ordinance within 15 feet of many commons areas, bus stops, car washes and related areas.

### **City of Coachella – Church Shelters**

This City has coordinated with area churches in a program where churches rotate the feeding and shelter of the homeless on a weekly basis

## 4 Alternatives with Economic Impacts:

As described in previous sections of this report the homeless problem is on-going and will probably always be a social issue. There have been homeless people throughout the decades and centuries and no remedy or solution has been found to permanently correct this social issue.

The programs referenced in Section 3 of this report profile some traditional and unique ways to address the problem. Most recently in a speech at the University of Southern California, to students in the Master of Public Administration program, Mr. William T. Fujioka the County Chief Executive Officer (former Los Angeles City Chief Administrative Officer) opined that having been with the city and now the county he has observed that the problem of the homeless doesn't have boundaries and the problem is every municipalities issue sooner or later.

Mr. Fujioka clearly stated that providing shelters was a good idea to help the homeless get out of the adverse weather conditions; but, the real problem could only be handled by addressing the real problems .e.g..mental health issues, alcohol/drug addiction dependencies, lack of job skills training or access to jobs, and in some cases just simple opportunities to help re focus their lives with attention. Mr. Fujioka also stated that the costs to solve this social problem were staggering and that the **“only way government was going to be able to start correcting the problem was by collaborative efforts of governments pooling dollars and resources and sharing and not transferring the problem to other agency or communities”**.

Urban Futures Incorporated reviewed the City operating budget and observed that the City of Perris has limited financial abilities to separately consider shelter

construction or operation, as well as the inability to hire additional staff for outreach or similar counseling efforts.

# 5 Recommendations

Urban Futures Incorporated is of the opinion that based upon all of the comments from the Task Force and our research on how other municipalities developed programs, the following actions are recommended for consideration with responsible party for implementation “**(noted)**”:

1: Review all present City ordinances and laws that deal with the use of the public right of way e.g.; parks, parkways and related areas. If after review, new or modified ordinances or codes are needed, these should be prepared for City Council consideration. **(City Manager, Chief of Police and City Attorney).**

2: Co ordinate with the County of Riverside the development of a “Regional Shelter” with financial contributions coming from all affected municipalities as partnerships. Search for outside funds from charitable groups (foundations/churches etc) to assist in the construction and/or operation. Approach the federal government for \$’s on a regional needs basis. **(City Council and City Manager or designee).**

3: Co ordinate with the County of Riverside a “one day service center “to facilitate correction of some of the homeless problems by centralizing a service center.**(City Manager or designee and Police Chief).**

4: Facilitate a training program for the affected police officers serving the City of Perris as how to deal with the homeless relative to “solutions versus arrest” .**(Chief of Police).**

5: Consider the placement of a Police sub-station in a storefront space in the downtown to provide a presence. This office should be staffed by Police Officers, and police volunteers. The presence of a Police facility will provide the merchants

and shopping citizenry with a statement that the City and the Police Department are taking back control of the downtown for the residents and the merchants and that inappropriate behavior by the homeless or other parties misusing the public spaces will not be acceptable. **( City Manager or designee and Chief of Police).**

6: Create a Homeless Care Network Committee comprised of City officials, the Police Department, county social service providers, the clergy and interested citizens. The goal of this group would be to exchange information and collaborating on solutions to the changing environment of the homeless in the City of Perris. This group should meet quarterly. **( City Council).**

7: Consider a “voucher “system to allow the Police Department or authorized city agency to locate the homeless to contracted hotels, if the area shelters are full or unavailable. The funds for this system could come from some available city resources, as well as religious/social service institutions. **( City Council, City Manager or designee and Chief of Police).**

8: Consider a contract with the City of Riverside to provide some level of a “Homeless Street Outreach Program” to immediately address the problem. This contract could be scaled down once the problem declines and the other recommendations start to occur. **(City Manager or designee).**

## **Attachments:**

- 1: The 2007 County of Riverside Homeless Count
- 2: City Task Force Members
- 3: Minutes from the City Homeless Task Force