

HOUSING WORKGROUP REPORT TO LWV BOARD

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Jan Kay

The LWV of Wheaton has had its position on affordable housing for many years. We have advocated on this position throughout those years, but at no time has the provision of affordable housing for all been at such a level as it has been these past few years. Whether one is a senior, a family, a middle aged individual or a young adult who has aged out of the Foster Care system — whether one is working, retired or lost one's employment, we still need a place to call home. This might be a one room efficiency, a small apartment or condo or a single family residence, whether we share the space or live alone, whether we have a health or disability issues or are a veteran or a person with mental health issues, we still need a place to call home to bring basic stability to one's life.

In the League, there hasn't always been a specific housing workgroup through the years, but instead we would see a need for public comment or action and then would provide such, but recently we have established a committee to continue working through observing the issues before the City Council and other venues to be sure to be ready to advocate from our position.

The issues presently seem to us to be:

1. Homelessness
2. Foreclosures
3. Senior homes
4. Veterans
5. Housing for the mentally ill
6. Housing for the developmentally delayed
7. Housing for the physically disabled
8. Housing for the young people aged out of the foster care system
9. Housing for the immigrant, refugees and asylees
10. Housing affordability for families and individuals in general

11. Funding sources available from the Fed and State which comes down to County and local entities.

The poverty level for a family of four in DuPage County is \$22,050. Low income = up to 200% FPL or \$44,100 for a family of four.

The poverty numbers in DuPage County in 2009 were 59,459 and low-income numbers were 101,355. These numbers are up from 32,163 and 63,290 respectively.

In order to afford a 2 bedroom apartment at Fair Market Rent [\$1015] a FULL time worker must earn \$19.52 per hour. A minimum wage worker would have to work 98 hours per week, or 2.4 full time jobs. Affordable rent at \$8.00 per hour = \$416.

Furthermore, the supply of rental housing has not kept pace with growth in lower wage jobs, often the service jobs. Between 1990 and 2000 the new jobs were 132,639 and the growth in rental units was 5541. Of course, this is from the last census and the new census will be taking place soon with the released numbers probably growing.

In addition, the other costs in the individual or family such as transportation in order to get to a job etc. add a terrific burden to the family budget situation. The Center for Neighborhood Technology has a study just released on this subject. The Wheaton League also addresses this need in our Transportation position indirectly.

Add Fair Housing issues to the mix and one has a huge obstacle to be confronted just to have the stability of a home. HOPE Fair Housing has been in existence for over 25 years and they are soon releasing a report regarding a study here in DuPage County on openness of our communities to all races.

So, given these statistics, we can see that low income families and individuals face severe problems.

1. low wage service sector jobs
2. housing costs that are out of reach
3. very little public transit

4. increasing need to rely on human services who are experiencing dwindling resources themselves

This brings us to the need for a State and Federal budget which will pay for the privately contracted and public services for us all, especially, however, for the income stressed families and individuals.

Following a pie chart completed recently by Business and Professional People For the Public Interest, a Full time worker at \$12.00 per hr. could spend:

1. \$1000 rent
2. \$688 food
3. \$40 electric
4. \$50 phone
5. \$250 car payment
6. \$90 gas
7. \$50 car insurance
8. \$56 extra

One can easily see why the need for help for basic necessities is growing here in DuPage and in Wheaton. Imagine what would be happening should one not be able to get to work due to unstable transportation, or poor health? What if a simple cold turned into pneumonia for the lack of medicine to relieve symptoms or the pain in one's chest couldn't be diagnosed short of a heart attack or stroke?

How well can a child learn in school if that child is hungry or tired or distressed due to a dysfunctional family situation? How is one who needs help with their daily life and turns to alcohol or drugs, leading to dependency, going to find relief from that dependency without treatment? Should we just allow those persons to be sent to prison? What of the comparable costs of those options?

How is a young adult, 18-22 going to fare for themselves now that the support of a foster home is removed? And what about the ability of public health systems to treat only a suicide attempt, but not to

follow up with the long term counseling needed to relieve the anxiety through the local publicly funded health department?

Where are those without the money to pay for the help needed, often through no fault of their own, going to get help?

Finally, where are those who are employed through agencies giving the well needed help going to find work in this job dearth time? More homeless? More in need of food?

More in need of health services? Less money going into the local economy? More unemployment benefits being paid out of an already stressed budget?

The League's housing workgroup continues to watch for every opportunity to advocate for more housing availability for those who are already in a distressed situation. We work with the DuPage Housing Action Coalition locally to pass laws that provide more affordable apartments, protect housing of domestic violence victims, preserve affordable townhomes and to maintain State homelessness prevention funding and we will always ask our community to plan for affordable housing wherever possible.

There are many housing resources available. Some of these are:

1. DuPage Homeownership Center
2. Senior Home Sharing
3. P.A.D.S
4. Wheaton Housing Commission for Seniors
5. Midwest Veterans Home
6. Bridge Communities
7. DuPage Mental Health
8. DuPage County Human Services
9. DuPage Housing Authority
10. HOPE Fair Housing
11. World Relief
12. Community Housing Assoc. of DuPage [CHAD]

Most of these receive Federal and State and County, [often pass through grants from the Federal level] dollars. If the agencies themselves do not receive public dollars, the

help available to their clients usually has substantial public funding behind that service. If we do not have the revenue available in the present budget, where do we go? Some say we must cut the waste, fraud and abuse in the system. No one would advocate for anything but a accurate and honest budget accountability. However, we now have a \$13 B budget deficit [as well as the State's payments to local entities including municipalities being 6-9 months in arrears, asking these to eat away at any reserves and then to borrow to make their payrolls and expenses] and no matter what, we just won't be able to find that much

abuse and waste. We might be able to put more efficiencies into the systems, but even with those measures, we will not meet the expenses.

In our own lives, we say we must go out and earn more money which will bring the expenses and revenue needed in our own budgets in line. It only seems reasonable that this is what public entities must do as well.

The question is this: will we bring in additional revenue on a statewide basis or will we need to increase the local revenue through increases in property, sales and other fees to meet the budgets locally. The latter unfortunately will result in uneven systems throughout the State, given the ability of the various communities to supply the revenues at a higher or lower degree.

Obviously, it would behoove the State to add the revenue evenly throughout the State which would be through a probably combination of sales taxes and income rate increases. However, the education piece is certainly not only up to the private entities, but also must take place through the public offices.

The Housing Workgroup alongside of the Wheaton League and the LWVIL will continue to advocate for steady funds as well as good policies and decisions that will add to the housing affordability for all our citizens.

