

Okaloosa/Walton Continuum of Care/Opportunity, Inc
Minutes of the Membership Body
Seventh Day Adventist Church
February 16, 2009

Attendance:

Nate Smith, President
Alma Banks, Shelter House
Lydia Barton, Seventh Day Adventist
Gloria Battle, St. Simon's Episcopal Church
Doris L. Berg. Sharing and Caring
Stan Berg, visitor
Lancy Colaco, Waterfront Rescue Mission
Bob DeAngelis, Christ Our Redeemer
Cathy Ducharme, City of Fort Walton Beach
Martin Fancher, Seventh Day Adventist
Yvonne Franklin, First Presbyterian
Bill Garvie, Fort Walton Beach City Council
JoAnn Gorsuch, St. Simon's Episcopal
Mary Hauge, St. Simon's Episcopal Church
Maryann Helfrich, FRESH Start/ Okaloosa Coalition on the Homeless
Donald Jernigan, Macedonia Community Development Corporation
Carolyn Ketchel, Catholic Charities
Chris Lefebvre, Seventh Day Adventist Church
Butch McKay, OASIS
Ann Peeples, First Baptist Church
Jackie Pilcher, Rosewood Realty
Nicole Randolph, Catholic Charities
Judy Byrne Riley, Workforce Development Board
James Robbins, Gregg Chapel AME
Marietta Scheer, Mental Health Association
Lisa Jo Spencer, FWB Chamber of Commerce
Jane Strickland, Sharing and Caring
Yvette Torrey, S4P Synergy
Carrie Ziegler, Okaloosa County Health Department
Lenore Wilson, Opportunity, Inc.

The meeting was called to order at 3:30 pm by Chair Nate Smith who welcomed members and guest. Mr. Smith clarified that today's meeting would be restricted to two specific issues of deep interest to the Okaloosa Walton Homeless Continuum of Care/ Opportunity, Inc., namely, the situation regarding the property on 305 Lovejoy Road, and that involving the Homeless Prevention Fund.

Mr. Smith spoke to the issues regarding the property purchased through the Okaloosa Community Housing LLC using funds secured from the State Housing Initiative Program through contract with the Community Development Corporation. The property was purchased with the understanding that it would be leased to Opportunity, Inc. in accordance with the corporate mission of alleviating and preventing homelessness. Opportunity, Inc. has purchased property insurance for the lot at \$6,000, has funded landscaping efforts for another \$1,000, and has plans to purchase liability insurance for an additional \$1,000 all on the assumption that this transaction would take place. The Okaloosa Community Housing LLC has prepared a lease which would confirm this understanding, which lease is under review by the Opportunity, Inc. Board of Directors.

In the meantime, some members of the community adjacent to the property have raised vocal and heated complaints about having services designed to assist homeless persons located in or around their neighborhood. They have an entrenched belief that the homeless persons utilizing the services would add to the numbers of drug addicts, alcoholics and prostitutes already too common in that neighborhood. Opportunity, Inc. has committed to using the property for women and households with children only, but this has not calmed the community to a significant degree. Leaders have accused the Opportunity, Inc. Board members and executive director with being deceitful on this issue, based on past community experience with other entities.

Conversations between the leadership of the Board of Directors, the Okaloosa Community LLC, and community organizations are ongoing at multiple levels: between individuals, small groups and larger forums. It is hoped that an agreement will be forthcoming.

Ms. Wilson was asked to report on the Neighborhood Stabilization Program and the Homeless Prevention Funds being disbursed to the community. Ms. Wilson stated that Opportunity, Inc. had no stake in the Neighborhood Stabilization Program other than serving as a referral agent to whatever entity received funds for extremely low income housing. It is her understanding that Okaloosa County would receive somewhere in the neighborhood of \$3.8 million, that both Habitat for Humanity and the Community Development Corporation had applied for these funds, and that it was likely that the money would be divided between the two agencies. However, she was not part of this decision making process.

As to the Homeless Prevention Fund, Ms. Wilson said those funds would come directly to Opportunity, Inc., for an amount as yet undisclosed. However, Opportunity, Inc. had already been tasked with developing a plan for fund distribution, so that funds could be utilized as soon as received by the state. To jump-start that effort, Ms. Wilson had invited the major non-profits to the February 9, 2009 cold night shelter meeting, and had discussed the parameters of a homeless prevention program. She had summarized the results of that meeting through a draft of an outreach plan, and was now looking for a task force to develop the plan further, to include creation of an intake form and tracking tool. She asked for volunteers for a task force. Members expressing interest included Bob DeAngelis, Carolyn Ketchel, Maryann Helfrich, Lin Mack and Yvette Torrey, Lydia

Barton, Gloria Battle, Lancy Colasco, and Jim Robbins. Ms. Wilson said that she would be out of town the remainder of that week, but would call for a meeting of the task force upon her return.

Mr. Smith called for announcements/ hot button issues/ discussion prior to ending the meeting. Mary Hauge reported on the work done by Nitsi Bennet, executive director for Habitat for Humanity, in securing Neighborhood Stabilization funds for the community; Donald Jernigan reported on the progress made by the Macedonia CDC, which is attempting to provide low-income housing in Crestview; while Bill Garvie invited participants to get involved in the upcoming race for Fort Walton Beach City Council.

Motion was made to adjourn and the meeting was adjourned at 4:56PM by Chair Nate Smith

Respectfully submitted by Lenore Wilson