

IN THE CITIES AND COUNTIES: NEW ASHEVILLE/BUNCOMBE COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA 10-YEAR PLAN STRESSES ECONOMIC COSTS AND HOUSING OUTCOMES

"Looking Homeward: The 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness in Asheville and Buncombe County" was unveiled as a draft 10-Year Plan for the Asheville, North Carolina, City Council this week. The new initiative is the result of six months of work by a 33-member joint advisory task force of business, non-profit, and government leaders appointed by City Council and the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners in May 2004 to develop solutions for persons experiencing homelessness in the County's population of just over 212,000. The Council will consider a resolution in support of the Plan in January 2005. Asheville Mayor Chares Worley is pictured here with United States Interagency Council Executive Director Philip Mangano, who met the Mayor in April to encourage the planning process.

The Plan places the City-County effort within the context of intergovernmental partnership to end chronic homelessness, stating: "Under the leadership of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, a national consensus has emerged that all levels of government must focus on improving efforts to house chronically homeless individuals and families. Looking Homeward is consistent with, and complementary to, the federal government's efforts in this area. Likewise, the state of North Carolina, through its Interagency Council on Coordinating Homeless Programs, is creating a plan that will coordinate state efforts with federal and local plans. Federal, state, and local plans must complement each other, because each level of government will play an integral part in implementation. "

Planners analyzed the service use of 37 men and women over 3 years and found that they cost the city and county more than \$800,000 each year. Those 37 were arrested 1,271 times over three years, generating \$278,000 in jail costs. EMS services were used 280 times for a cost of \$120,000. Hospitalization costs were \$425,000.

The Plan addresses a major goal of Asheville's Strategic Operating Plan and a recommendation of the Downtown Social Issues Task Force. Planners relied on evidence-based strategies in their recommendations, and developed five key proposals:

- Designation of a lead entity that will oversee implementation of the plan
- Development of a Homeless Management Information System, (or HMIS,) that will link all services, screen for program eligibility and gather data needed to monitor progress of implementation
- Prevention measures that include better coordination of financial assistance and discharge planning for people leaving public institutions like prisons, mental health facilities and foster homes
- Development of a community-wide Housing First program that will include permanent housing for all homeless people with a 2005 goal of 30 persons experiencing chronic homelessness, and adding 10 new placement each of the next two years
- Provision of services that will ensure that homeless individuals and families placed in permanent housing can remain housed long-term, including adding

a second Assertive Community treatment (ACT) team with substance abuse expertise

- USICH enews 12-9-04