



## *IN THE CITIES: TEXAS' BIG CITIES CONVENE TO AFFIRM STRATEGIES TO END CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS*

*FORT WORTH. TEXAS.* Fort Worth Mayor Mike Moncrief last week hosted his fellow "Big City Mayors" from Texas cities for their quarterly meeting to discuss common issues and solutions and fashion a shared legislative agenda for their cities which represent about 4.7 million of the state's more than 20 million population. Mayor Moncrief was joined at Texas Christian University by Mayor Robert Cluck of Arlington, Mayor Tom Leppert of Dallas, Mayor Mark Burroughs of Denton, Mayor John Cook of El Paso, and Mayor Bill White of Houston. As Hurricane Gustav was making its way to the Gulf Coast, the Mayors focused on how the state could partner with local governments who are working to implement their 10 Year Plans.

The Mayors were briefed by Mayor Moncrief on the impact of current state policies on local efforts to address homelessness. Mayor Moncrief noted data from the Fort Worth/Tarrant County 10 Year Plan which indicated that, in 2007, the 10 most expensive homeless patients at the public hospital ER cost taxpayers more than \$500,000. Additionally, more than \$5.5 million in health care costs over the last two years are attributable to the homeless population. MedStar ambulance and the Fort Worth Fire Department responded to 3,128 calls to 911 in 2007 to four homeless shelters.

At a press conference following the meeting, the Mayors announced their support for proposals to increase state support for housing, jobs, treatment and services to help end homelessness. Noted Mayor Moncrief: "Although homelessness is not an issue that is confined to the urban areas of our state, the overwhelming majority of Texas' homeless population lives in our largest cities. And so it is fitting that a gathering of Mayors of Texas' largest cities would tackle this issue head on." Read Mayor Moncrief's remarks for the meeting in *Words of the Week*.

The proposals outlined by Mayor Moncrief included increasing investment by \$20 million each year in the Housing Trust Fund and a setaside of 33% of all Trust Fund resources for supportive housing for homeless people and other special need populations; adopting a proposed amendment to the state's tax credit allocation plan to incorporate a basis point bonus for projects that include up to 50% supportive housing units; providing state dollars for supportive services that help the most vulnerable homeless people in Texas access and retain housing; increasing by \$30 million per year the Texas investment in community-based substance abuse treatment, prevention and case management services; providing 1,000 permanent supportive housing residents with employment readiness, placement and retention services per year; and issuing pre-release a Texas ID card for all persons discharged from a Texas jail or prison.

Fort Worth and Tarrant County partners recently adopted *Directions Home*, their new 10 Year Plan. Mayor Mike Moncrief, Tarrant County Commissioner Roy Brooks, Tarrant County Judge Glen Whitley, and Fort Worth Homeless Coordinator Otis Thornton hosted United States Interagency Council on Homelessness Executive Director Philip Mangano for the celebratory event.

"The effort to coordinate a larger agenda among cities in a state is another best practice now at work in several states in the country," indicated Director Mangano. "Texas now joins in that innovation and Mayor Moncrief is leading the way."

Director Mangano has visited Fort Worth several times at the Mayor's invitation and also that of business leaders, including Downtown Fort Worth's Andy Taft, to encourage and support the city-county 10 Year Plan. Under Mayor Moncrief's leadership and with the support of business partners, Fort Worth established a Study Group to "pilgrimage" to other cities to see what's working as they developed their plan. The Plan proposes to increase the supply of Permanent Supportive Housing to meet the need for over 1,000 additional tenancies, setting a goal of over 540 units in six years. The City has its own Housing Trust Fund with \$570,000 earmarked for homeless housing, and the Housing Authority has committed 200 vouchers to the initiative. The Plan also proposes a new local form of Shelter + Care vouchers to accelerate the availability of housing. Fort Worth will commit to an annual Project Homeless Connect event, develop a Homeless Court, and focus on discharge planning by hiring a transition coordinator for the local jail.

USICH *e-news* 9-5-08