



Blueprint to End Homelessness In Atlanta In Ten Years

Executive Summary

March 2003




CITY OF ATLANTA

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SHIRLEY FRANKLIN
MAYOR

November 1, 2002



Mr. Mark O'Connell
President
United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta
100 Edgewood Ave.
Second Floor
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

Dear Mark:

I write to ask the United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta to lead a broad effort to analyze the issue of homelessness in Atlanta and to make specific recommendations to the City on how to address the issue.

Homelessness is a priority for me, and I am eager to develop a practical plan on how to solve Atlanta's long-standing problem. While many people see the homeless merely as an unwanted presence in our parks and streets, an ugly problem to be swept away, I believe that the homeless are people who should be treated both with compassion and a sense of accountability. The homeless have a personal responsibility to overcome their current situation, and at the same time we as a society have an equal obligation to make sure that services are available to assist the homeless in making the transition to self-reliance. Unfortunately, for too long society has not done its part.

I am convinced that our city – with help from the philanthropic and faith communities and from the state and federal governments – can do much to solve the homeless problem in Atlanta. I am convinced that there are practical and effective ways to tackle homelessness head on. I am convinced that we can help individuals one-on-one and at the same time make the city a more pleasant place to work, live and visit.

To do this, I need your help.

As a broad-based community organization with a rich history of assisting a diverse range of service providers, the United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta is uniquely situated to lead the effort to address homelessness. My challenge to you is to create a working group of concerned individuals, representing hands-on experience in the homeless field, to develop a practical set of recommendations to alleviate the problem. I am interested in a thoughtful and workable action plan that can be implemented as soon as possible. The plan should be steeped both in a sense of realism – reflecting the limitations of current funding – and in a sense of the possible – reflecting what we can accomplish if we are bold and innovative.

While I do not want to dictate the way the United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta chooses to take on this task, I think it would be helpful to outline a mutual understanding of the scope of the work. Please consider the following topics as a starting point:

1. A review of previous studies.
2. An analysis of the current homeless population.
3. An analysis of the supply of services, including location, capacity, hours of operation.
4. A rating of provider agencies.
5. An analysis of service levels mandated by government entities.
6. An analysis of funding sources.
7. A practical action plan to include specific projects, costs and measurable results.

I want to emphasize the need for a specific set of recommendations from the working group. I believe a thorough study by the United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta can form the basis of the City's homelessness policy for the next decade. In that regard, the City needs an action plan – a step by step road map of practical projects that we can begin implementing quickly, but which will also guide the allocation of City resources for the long term.

I believe that the state and federal governments must play a key role in any successful action plan. I hope that your working group will include significant representation from the appropriate state and federal agencies, and I trust that your final recommendations will include a specific role for those agencies in solving this problem.

Of course, I pledge to you the full support of the Mayor's office in the development of the action plan and its implementation.

I can think of no better organization to lead this effort than the United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta. Thank you for considering this request. I look forward to discussing the project in more detail after you have had a chance to reflect on it.

Sincerely,



Shirley Franklin



Letter to Mayor Shirley Franklin

March 24, 2003

Mayor Shirley Franklin
City of Atlanta
55 Trinity Avenue, S.W.
Atlanta, GA 30335

Dear Mayor Franklin:

On behalf of United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta and each of the members of the Commission on Homelessness, and in response to your request of November 1, 2002 for a practical action plan to guide the City in assisting our homeless citizens to become self-reliant, we submit this letter and the enclosed report entitled "Blueprint to End Homelessness in Atlanta in Ten Years."

In developing the plan, we were guided by your admonition that the homeless "have a personal responsibility to overcome their current situation, and at the same time we as a society have an equal obligation to make sure that services are available to assist the homeless in making the transition to self-reliance." We have also attempted to honor your request for specific, practical and fundable solutions.

We draw your attention to several aspects of the report. First, you will note that a number of the projects focus on the necessity to develop "supportive housing." Supportive housing is transitional or permanent housing linked to onsite social services. This type of housing is provided for individuals with long histories of shelter use, many of whom suffer from drug dependency, mental or physical health problems or both. It is estimated nationally that the 10% of the homeless population who fall into this category utilize over 50% of the funding devoted to serving homeless individuals. Secondly, you will note an emphasis on prevention. To have a successful program, it is necessary to prevent as many of our citizens as possible from becoming homeless. Third, you will note projects aimed at moving individuals and families more expeditiously into permanent affordable housing by providing the services necessary to minimize their stay in the homeless system.

The recommended projects constitute a full range of services and facilities necessary to serve the complex needs of our homeless citizens – often referred to as a complete Continuum of Care. In our report, we organized the recommended projects according to the components of the Continuum of Care to which each relates. In the Addendum to this letter, we indicate the priority that we give to these projects.

We caution, however, that much homelessness is a direct result of a shortage of permanent low cost housing and the inability of very low income people to afford the housing that is available. To completely end homelessness, it will be necessary to address this housing shortage. Although the affordable housing issue was beyond the scope of this Commission's work, we are recommending the creation of a task force to further explore policies designed to make more affordable housing available to the homeless and those "at risk" of becoming homeless.

We recommend the creation of a Regional Authority. We strongly believe that the most effective solution to homelessness in the metropolitan area will come from the coordination, planning and resources that can be provided by a Regional Authority, and we are volunteering to take the lead in coordinating the establishment of such an authority. The concept of a region-wide approach was strongly endorsed four years ago in a report prepared by the Atlanta Regional Commission after a year long study of homelessness. Also, the Regional Authority approach in Savannah/Chatham County has resulted in a decrease in homelessness by over forty-five percent.

During our work, we became aware of two existing facilities – the City owned Annex at Garnett and Pryor Streets and the Center at Peachtree & Pine operated by the Metro Atlanta Task Force for the Homeless – that could meet the needs of at least two of our important recommendations: the 24/7 Service Center (see page 27 of the Report) and the Regional Administrative and Services Offices (see page 56 of the Report). We asked a committee of the Commission to look at both facilities with those two projects in mind. The Committee reported that both facilities could be used for each of the two projects. We then got preliminary construction estimates for preparing each of the facilities for the projects. We were told that the cost of preparing the Annex to be the 24/7 Service Center would be substantially less than the cost of preparing the facility at Peachtree & Pine to be such a center. Accordingly, we ask that you hold any decision on the future use of the Annex facility pending more detailed study of that facility for the 24/7 Service Center.

Of 2267 homeless persons who used a shelter in the City on January 23, 2003, almost one third (over 700) were housed in the Center at Peachtree & Pine because there was no other place for them to go. Because our society has not provided sufficient housing, some years ago, the leaders of the Center, in a departure from their original mission, decided to provide overflow shelter so as to “to leave no one outside.” As the homeless population in the City grew, this policy resulted in hundreds of men depending on that Center for shelter each night. This large number has strained the staff and other resources of the Center with the result that the residents of that Center are not receiving the full range of assistance they need, the Center has been unable to achieve its original mission, and significant friction has developed between that Center and the neighborhood.

We believe that a 24/7 Service Center located at the Annex will greatly reduce the demand for the Center at Peachtree & Pine as an overflow shelter. The 24/7 Service Center will allow that current overflow population who have mental illness or are multiply diagnosed to choose a shelter where the services needed by those persons are available to facilitate their return to a self-sufficient life. Discussions with the Board and management of the Metro Atlanta Task Force for the Homeless lead us to believe that their Center would welcome the opportunity to refer clients to another service center that can provide them the full range of appropriate services. We recommend that the proposed 24/7 Service Center and the Center at Peachtree & Pine cooperate to ensure that clients of Peachtree & Pine are referred to the 24/7 Service Center where the full range of needed services is available. This would also allow the Board of the Metro Atlanta Task Force for the Homeless to fulfill more fully its original mission as the operator of the Homeless Hotline, a Resource Center and a provider of transitional housing, transportation and outreach. We support and recommend that the City and community support the Center at Peachtree & Pine and the Metro Atlanta Task Force for the Homeless for those purposes.

We have been greatly impressed by the excellent work currently being done by service providers, governments, the faith community, and others, and by the interest and concern shown for those who are homeless by the business community, foundations and the community at large. At one of our public hearings, a woman made a very brief but important statement: “ Show me the money!” The overwhelming concern for our homeless citizens that we encountered in all quarters, gives us great confidence that the resources and support necessary to carry out the enclosed plan will be forthcoming from the public and private sectors working together.

In making the recommendations, we have attempted to follow your suggestion that those who find themselves without a home should be treated with “both compassion and a sense of accountability.”

Finally, we thank you for the opportunity to serve you and our great City to reach out to those in need.

Sincerely,

Mark O’Connell
President, United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta

Horace H. Sibley
Chair, Commission on Homelessness

Acknowledgements from the Chair

The report “Blueprint to End Homelessness in Atlanta in Ten Years” could not have been prepared without the input, support, and guidance of many unselfish people and organizations.

Thanks are extended to the Commissioners for their leadership and contributions of time and expertise in the development of the Action Plan. They operated with a combined sense of urgency and caring in their charge of developing an implementable plan for the Mayor of Atlanta to alleviate the problems associated with homelessness.

Special thanks go to participants of the Work Groups for their tireless efforts throughout the process. They gave of their time and expertise to ensure that the Action Plan accurately reflected issues regarding homelessness and to contribute input from their hands-on experiences in the homeless field that would lead to development of the most effective solutions. A detailed list of the group participants is included in Appendices II and IV of this report. The group topics were:

- ◆ Chronic Homelessness Due to Physical and Mental Disabilities
- ◆ Chronic Homelessness Due to Addictive Disorders
- ◆ Temporary Homelessness

Thanks also go to the 76 homeless people and people vulnerable to becoming homeless who provided comments in interviews. Thanks are also expressed to the subject experts/stakeholders who provided invaluable input through interviews, as well as to those individuals who attended meetings, submitted comments, or provided other help.

Special thanks are also due to the following for their excellent, oft times herculean, efforts and work in supporting the Commission on Homelessness.

Mark O’Connell	CEO & President, United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta
Chris Allers	Vice President, United Way 211; Leader of the Support Team for the Commission
Allison Ashe	Special Projects, United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta
Regina Cannon	Priority Work Group Coordinator, Commission on Homelessness
Khurram Hassan	Director, Impact Measurement, United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta
Brenda Marshall	Commission Coordinator, Commission on Homelessness
Diane McCants	Investments Project Coordinator, United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta
Teri Smith	Director, Public Relations, United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta
Mtamanika Youngblood	Senior Vice President, Community Impact, United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta

Thanks to the following organizations that supported “Blueprint to End Homelessness in Atlanta in Ten Years” by allowing their representatives to participate in the planning process or by providing other pro bono assistance.

- ◆ Fletcher, Martin, & Ewing
- ◆ Deloitte Consulting

- ◆ Glencastle Construction
- ◆ HomeAid Atlanta
- ◆ King & Spalding LLP
- ◆ Homeward, Inc.



Executive Summary

Background

During 2001, the unduplicated homeless population in Atlanta was estimated at 12,000 persons. In November 2002, the Mayor of Atlanta, Shirley Franklin, decided to address the issues surrounding homelessness head-on. By letter to Mark O'Connell, President United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta, (see Appendix I) Mayor Franklin expressed her belief that those who are homeless should be "treated both with compassion and a sense of accountability"; and she called upon United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta to create a working group of concerned leaders and experts on homelessness to develop an action plan to enable her to address homelessness in the City. Mayor Franklin requested that the plan be practical and innovative; she asked for a plan that can be implemented as soon as possible and guide the City in the long-term.

The Mayor asked the Commission to address the following matters:

- ◆ Review previous studies
- ◆ Analyze the current homeless population
- ◆ Analyze the supply of services, including location, capacity, hours of operation
- ◆ Assess the current ability of provider agencies to expand their services
- ◆ Analyze service levels mandated by government entities
- ◆ Analyze funding sources
- ◆ Provide an action plan to include specific projects, costs and measurable results

The purpose of this report is to respond to Mayor Franklin's request.

The Commission on Homelessness

In accordance with Mayor Franklin's request, United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta established a Commission on Homelessness whose members are:

Chair

Horace Sibley
Retired Partner, King & Spalding

Co-Chairs

Myrtle Davis
Former City Council Member

Dr. Louis Sullivan
President Emeritus
Morehouse School of Medicine

Members

Bill Bolling Executive Director Atlanta Community Food Bank	Reverend James Milner Community Concerns
Jack Hardin Partner Rogers & Hardin	Carl Patton President Georgia State University
Archie Hill Director Fannie Mae Atlanta Partnership Office	Ed Renford President Grady Health System
Laura Keenan Director, Community Development Bank of America	William Riley Judge Atlanta Community Court
Jim Laney President Emeritus Emory University	Dr. Joseph Roberts Senior Pastor Ebenezer Baptist Church
Randy Merrill Senior Vice President CB Richard Ellis	Gary Thompson CEO Georgia Banking Wachovia Bank, N.A.
Tim Mescon Dean, Coles College of Business Kennesaw State University	

Process Summary

The 16-member Commission was formally constituted on December 9, 2002. At the initial meeting Commissioners reviewed three 2002 reports pertaining to homelessness. (Exhibits A-C)

- ◆ The Continuum of Care Report for the Atlanta Tri-Jurisdictional Collaborative, Spring 2002
- ◆ The Ten-Year Plan to Eliminate Homelessness in Georgia (Georgia Policy Academy, 2002)
- ◆ Recommendations for the Mayor's Action Plan for Alleviating Homelessness (Homeward, Inc, 2002)

In addition to these documents, the Commission also used the 1998 Atlanta Regional Commission's report, The Homeless Action Plan: A Regional Framework for Addressing Homelessness (Exhibit D). The authors of these documents were a part of the Design Team (Appendix II) that worked with United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta staff to identify eight reoccurring service themes affecting the lives of persons experiencing homelessness. These reoccurring themes include: outreach to the chronically homeless, mainstream benefits assistance, permanent supportive housing, alternative sentencing, addictive disorders treatment, prevention assistance, early intervention and reunification services. The eight identified themes were clustered into three working group topics: "chronic homelessness due to physical and mental disabilities," "chronic homelessness due to addictive disorders," and "temporary homelessness."

Work Groups

More than 90 individuals representing 64 organizations participated in one or more of the 18 work-group sessions (Appendix II). Work group members generated major issues statements (Appendix III) that formed the basis for the “10 Community Goals” presented in this report. Work groups reviewed interview data collected from over 40 subject expert/stakeholders (Appendix II) and identified specific project or policy recommendations for the Commission’s review.

Community Input

In addition to work group and interview data, input was collected from a number of diverse sources.

- ◆ Comments were collected via the United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta Commission on Homelessness website (www.unitedwayatlanta.org) and telephone contacts.
- ◆ A Faith Advisory Group facilitated by Reverend Jim Milner and Mtamanika Youngblood was comprised of thirty-three (33) representatives from faith-based organizations and institutions and reviewed the draft recommendations for participation and partnership opportunities. The list of participants is provided in Appendix IV.
- ◆ Seventy-six (76) client interviews were conducted and a summary of the results is provided in Appendix V.
- ◆ Thirty-nine (39) persons presented concerns, recommendations and general comments during the public forums offered at regular Commission Meetings or during the public hearing held on February 13, 2002. Those persons are listed in Appendix VI.

Components of a Continuum of Care

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines a Continuum of Care as a local or regional system that provides the resources required to move a homeless person to self-sufficiency. Building on that definition, the Commission added a new component – prevention – to the existing six, and adopted this system as being necessary to prevent homelessness and meet the diverse needs of individuals and families experiencing homelessness:

- ◆ Prevention
- ◆ Outreach, intake, and assessment
- ◆ Emergency shelter
- ◆ Transitional supportive housing
- ◆ Supportive services
- ◆ Permanent supportive housing
- ◆ Permanent affordable housing

Community Goals Recommended By the Commission

Within the framework of the Continuum of Care set forth above, the Commission adopted ten (10) community goals to ensure the most effective utilization of resources and services for the homeless and those “at risk” of becoming homeless. The goals are:

Goal A: Enlist the support of all adjoining metropolitan Atlanta counties to meet the needs of their homeless residents in creating services that provide individuals and families with effective outreach, benefits assistance, supportive housing, addiction treatment, prevention assistance, early intervention and reunification services.

Goal B: Ensure that all persons who are living within the City of Atlanta have access to emergency shelter and other humane services within 12 hours of a request for assistance.

Goal C: Ensure that persons with addictive diseases/disorders and mental illness incarcerated by the City of Atlanta have access to community court services, as appropriate.

Goal D: Ensure that all homeless and disabled City of Atlanta residents have access to permanent supportive housing resources.

Goal E: Ensure that all homeless and “at risk” residents of the City of Atlanta have access to a seamless substance abuse continuum of care.

Goal F: Ensure that City of Atlanta residents who are facing eviction/foreclosure have access to appropriate services and assistance to prevent unnecessary displacement of individuals and families.

Goal G: Ensure that all homeless and “at risk” persons who wish to be reunited with verified family or support systems be provided the opportunity to do so.

Goal H: Ensure that all persons experiencing homelessness who are mentally ill, physically disabled or multiply diagnosed and living in the City of Atlanta have effective assistance within 3 working days of a request to access or maintain government entitlement benefits.

Goal I: Ensure that all City of Atlanta homeless or “at risk” residents are provided seamless coordination of services extending from onset of first contact with the service system (e.g., street outreach, admittance to a hospital, arrest by law enforcement, etc.) to housing.

Goal J: Ensure that all segments of the community (e.g., law enforcement, government officials, businesses, residents, hospitals, service providers) receive comprehensive education regarding the homeless and the services available to the homeless.

Recommended Strategies for Atlanta’s Continuum of Care

To address each of the components of the Continuum of Care and the ten Community Goals adopted by the Commission, the Commission recommends 29 strategies:

Prevention Strategies

- ◆ Foreclosure/ Eviction Prevention
- ◆ Reunification Assistance Expansion



Outreach/Intake/Assessment Strategies

- ◆ 24/7 Drop-in Center
- ◆ Youth Crisis Center
- ◆ Substance Abuse Rapid Response Team
- ◆ Community Court Expansion

Emergency Shelter Strategies

- ◆ 24/7 Center/Shelter (300 beds/units)
- ◆ Youth Crisis Center/Shelter (30 beds/units)
- ◆ Atlanta Family Hospitality Project (30 units)
- ◆ United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta Family Shelter Initiative (300 units, 250 outside City of Atlanta)

Transitional Housing Strategies

- ◆ Hope House
- ◆ Shelter-A-Family, Faith Community Initiative

Permanent Supportive Housing Strategies

- ◆ Supportive Housing Production Task Force
- ◆ 50+ Units of Single Room Occupancy Supportive Housing (O'Hern House Replication)
- ◆ Santa Fe Villas

Supportive Services Strategies

- ◆ Regional Administrative and Services Offices
- ◆ Harris County Replication Project (Intensive case management pilot project for frequently institutionalized homeless persons)
- ◆ In-custody Substance Abuse Programs
- ◆ Homeless Information Center
- ◆ Public Facilities Implementation Team
- ◆ Employment Opportunities Task Force
- ◆ Benefits Assistance Coordination Task Force
- ◆ Addictive Diseases and Dual Diagnosis Continuum of Care Task Force

Permanent Affordable Housing Strategies

- ◆ Workforce Housing Task Force

Systems Strategies

- ◆ Regional Homeless Authority
- ◆ Professional Training and Community Education
- ◆ Regional Summit on Homelessness
- ◆ Homeless Management Information System
- ◆ Homeless Census and Survey
- ◆ Pre-release Assistance Task Force
- ◆ Hospitalization Discharge Referral Protocol Task Force

With respect to each of the strategies, the Commission recommends specific actions to be taken by Mayor Franklin and others. These actions are set forth in the body of the report.

As the Mayor's letter recognized, the state and federal governments must play a key role in any successful action plan, and the Commission has concluded that the most effective plan must approach homelessness from a regional basis. Accordingly, although not specifically requested by the Mayor, the Commission strongly recommends the creation of a Regional Authority on Homelessness to develop and execute a long range planning process for coordinating and funding care to homeless individuals and families in the metropolitan Atlanta area.

The Commission believes that if the recommended strategies are implemented, the City will have made significant progress toward fulfilling its obligation, as expressed by the Mayor, "to make sure that services are available to assist the homeless in making the transition to self-reliance." The Commission concurs with the Mayor's conclusion that "for too long society has not done its part." It is now time for society to do its part.

