

DANE COUNTY RECOGNIZES HOUSING AS A HUMAN RIGHT

Many homeless individuals and families in Dane County have been unable to find shelter because the demand outstrips the availability of space at area homeless shelters. In 2009, over 2,400 individuals were turned away from shelter, and 92% were individuals with families. In all but 6% of cases, the turned-away families were rejected due to a lack of shelter space or lack of funds to pay for motel vouchers. As a result of resource limitations, families with children can only stay in a shelter up to 90 days and have a 180 day life-time limit on staying at a shelter.

People in need of shelter include women who fear the threat of violence, school children, people of color, the elderly, and youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender and/or queer.

- In 2010, 25% of families and 23% of single women reported “the threat or fear of violence” as the reason they were seeking shelter; 791 household members spent at least one homeless night as a result of “violence or the threat of violence”.
- In 2010, 1055 children in families and 29 unaccompanied youth were served in homeless shelters.
- Homelessness impacts a disproportionate number of people of color in Dane County, with 70% in shelter identifying as non-white. African Americans make up the largest minority group (87%) seeking shelter.
- In 2010, 29 persons in the Dane County shelter system were 65 years old or older.
- Nationally, 20 – 40% of homeless youth identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or queer compared to only 3 – 5% of the overall youth population.

Access to housing is a key element in addressing many issues in Dane County, including gang prevention, crime, and poverty.

- In 2007, the Dane County Enhanced Youth Gang Prevention Task Force listed “accessible and affordable housing” as one of their prevention strategies and recognized that “stable and affordable housing is foundational to family stability and gang prevention”.
- In 2009, the Dane County Task Force on Racial Disparities in the Criminal Justice System, reported “ex-offenders returning to the community after prison face great difficulty obtaining stable housing, employment, support, and treatment” which is “instrumental in avoiding re-incarceration”.
- In 2009, the Dane County Task Force on Poverty’s 2009 report identified “seeking housing” as one of the underlying problems for Dane County citizens in poverty.

The cost of rent for housing in Dane County is high, and well beyond the ability of workers making minimum wage or who rely on government assistance. Currently, there is a high demand for rental housing and little vacancy, resulting in a price increase of almost 18% in the past year alone. A renter making minimum wage would have to work 79 hours per week to afford rent for a 1 bedroom rental unit, 93 hours for a 2 bedroom unit, and 125 hours for a 3 bedroom rental unit. Those who rely on SSI or W-2 as income make hundreds less than necessary to pay fair market rent. Fully 52% of Dane County renters are unable to afford a 2 bedroom unit at fair market rent. Pressure on rental housing can be expected to increase as record numbers of Dane County homeowners face foreclosure.

The lack of accessible housing in our country has reached crisis levels and people with disabilities have named housing their #1 issue of concern. Because of work disincentives, employment discrimination and the lack of educational opportunities, over 70% of people with disabilities are not working and are on benefits. People receiving SSI earn an average of \$650 per month and this results in tremendous need for affordable and accessible housing.

Communities across the country have worked to recognize housing as a human right, including Washington D.C., Cook County, Illinois, Minneapolis, New York City, and Los Angeles. As a recipient of federal funds for housing and development, Dane County has an obligation to affirmatively further fair housing.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Dane County Board of Supervisors recognizes housing as a human right and that providing access to this basic need both temporarily and permanently for those who desire a place of shelter is a priority.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Dane County Board of Supervisors recommits to the goal in the Dane County Comprehensive Plan to “promote and support a full range and adequate supply of housing choices throughout the county that meets the needs of persons of all income levels, age groups, household sizes, and persons with special needs”, as well as the policies that accompany that goal.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Dane County Board of Supervisors endorses the goals and objectives of the Community Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness in Dane County, Wisconsin, updated in June, 2011 by the Dane County Homeless Services Consortium.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Human Services Board, working with other local government groups as necessary, initiate a process of developing a Housing Plan by September, 2012. The Housing Plan should:

1. Include recommendations for strategies both to provide housing units and shelter beds at affordable levels, and to address the need for accessible housing;
2. Consider creation of a staff position responsible for housing policy;
3. Provide an approach for reducing the number of homeless children in schools in Dane County by 50% by September 1, 2015; increasing the number of single room occupancy housing units by 100 units and the number of housing units affordable to families supporting themselves on SSI or W-2 by 100 units by Sept 1, 2015; and ensuring that no one seeking shelter will be denied access to shelter; and providing additional daytime shelter space in the downtown Madison area;
4. Explore creative uses of public and private dollars to increase affordable housing, accessible housing, and shelter beds, to achieve one-to-one replacement of affordable housing removed from the community, and ensure relocation costs or the right to return for those displaced;
5. Consider issues and solutions contained in the People’s Affordable Housing Vision
6. Affirmatively further Fair Housing as required by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development; and
7. Recommend policies to prevent foreclosures, evictions, utility shut-offs, criminalization of homelessness, and to help stabilize people in their housing.

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the Human Services Board provide an annual report by September 1 of each year to the County Board that tracks and assesses the affordable and accessible housing needs in Dane County by community, using information initially provided by federal, county and cities sources.

Adopted by the Dane County Board of Supervisors July 12, 2012.