



WASHTENAW COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

WORKING SESSION

January 19, 2006

The meeting was called to order by Chair Solowczuk at 6:30 p.m. in the Board Room, Administration Building, 220 North Main Street, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Comms. Bergman, Gunn, Irwin, Kern, Ouimet, Peterson, Prater, Smith, Solowczuk.

MEMBERS ABSENT: Comms. Brackenbury, Sizemore

OTHERS PRESENT: Bob Guenzel, County Administrator; Frank Cambria, Deputy County Administrator; Michael Scholl, Public Health; Ken Schrader, Information Technology; Stephen Kirschner, Clerk's Office; various citizens; and members of the press.

Roll Call

Citizen Participation

None.

Commissioner Follow-Up to Citizen Participation

None.

Discussion Items

Heating Assistance

Frank Cambria introduced Michael Scholl. Michael Scholl presented to the board on utility assistance. [Report on file at Clerk's Office]

Comm. Peterson asked about the DTE community training session. Michael Scholl explained that DTE came and offered direct access to the case management system. Comm. Peterson asked if the training was just government agencies or if it was diverse group. Michael Scholl stated that it was all agencies in the Barrier Busters. Comm. Peterson stated that there are many faith based agencies that can offer assistance in this issue. He stated that education is important in this issue and faith based groups could help establish even more balance. Comm. Peterson asked about specific agencies involvement in the program. Michael Scholl explained how various agencies interact with Barrier Busters.

Comm. Gunn asked what will happen in April when the shutoff moratorium ends. Michael Scholl explained that there are other options to deal with shutoffs. Comm. Gunn asked if electronic payments can be made by the county. Michael Scholl stated that the payment service they work with allows for electronic payment.

Comm. Bergman expressed concern about gas prices. Comm. Bergman asked if workers can access bills through Encompass. Michael Scholl responded the DTE website allows workers to access the bills. Comm. Bergman asked what other categories are funded by Barrier busters. Michael Scholl responded that the program began as an eviction prevention group, but expanded from there.

Comm. Ouimet stated it is terrific that the county is being proactive in helping people with energy costs. He asked what other agencies the county could go after to expand the pool of dollars. Michael Scholl responded the faith based groups are largely untapped and the Salvation Army works as a last resort. Comm. Ouimet stated that he expects requests to increase over the next few years and the county should be making estimated budgets based on this. He asked how an individual who needs the funding know what agency to go approach. Michael Scholl

responded that this question underlines one problem, since the state often handles requests, as well as the various agencies that partner with Barrier Busters. Comm. Ouimet asked how education of the customer is accomplished. Michael Scholl stated that it is a PR problem on which the county is working. He stated newspapers and agency education are the routes that the county is pursuing.

Comm. Irwin asked about decision making process for who will get assistance. Michael Scholl stated that the agencies are given guidelines on who the program will assist. He stated that selection is based partly on ability to pay. He added some requests are denied. Comm. Irwin asked if the eviction prevention covers only rent or utilities as well. Michael Scholl responded that the eviction prevention funding is only used for rent payments. Comm. Irwin asked if any of the barrier buster members have had issues with landlords who have had code compliance problems. Michael Scholl responded that this has not been discussed. Comm. Irwin asked to what extent the group has looked at the factors that are specific to renters and specifically items that are out of the renter's control. Michael Scholl responded that this issue is being addressed.

Comm. Bergman agreed with comm.. Peterson that information can be easily disseminated by faith-based groups and stated that faith networks are not necessarily geared for this type of financial assistance. Comm. Bergman stated that liability of landlords is a difficult issue to address. Michael Scholl stated that his organization attempts to interact with any and all groups in the community.

Comm. Smith stated that the Barrier Busters is doing a great job. He stated that the changing systemic issues should be addressed. Comm. Smith asked about funding. Michael Scholl responded. Comm. Smith asked about energy saving thermostats and whether this program uses these devices. Frank Cambria stated there are very clear guidelines of when those funds can be used. Comm. Smith asked about developing a cross jurisdictional program that could do domicile evaluations. Comm. Smith stated that there may be a benefit to taking a regulatory approach to landlord issues. He encouraged the idea of working with jurisdictions to promote something like this. He made several suggestions as to how to accomplish this.

Comm. Kern stated some townships do try to regulate the landlord issues that Comm. Smith brought up and asked what incentives could be put in place to encourage all townships to create ordinances like this.

Comm. Solowczuk asked if DTE forgives late fees and what other contributions DTE makes to the program. Michael Scholl responded that DTE waives late fees if the payment is made by a third party.

Comm. Smith asked if it is possible to tie the physical rehabs that the county is involved in with the energy saving.

Comm. Ouimet stated Comm. Smith had a good point in regulating landlords, but that regulations on the landlord would be reflected in rent prices.

Commissioner Items

None.

County Administrator Report

None.

Items for Current/Future Discussion

None.

Pending

Status of Annual Activities/Goals

No report.

Citizen Participation

None.

Commissioners Follow-up to Citizen Participation

None.

Adjournment

Comm. Prater seconded by Comm. Gunn moved that the meeting be adjourned until February 2, 2006, at 6:30 p.m. in the Board Room, Washtenaw County Administration Building. Motion carried.

The meeting adjourned at 7:24 p.m.

Stephen Solowczuk, Chair

Lawrence Kestenbaum, Clerk/Register

By: Stephen Kirschner, Deputy Clerk

APPROVED: