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Lee-Rodriguez, Nicole

From: Geoffery Bard [geofferybard@yahoo.com]
Sent: Monday, April 18, 2011 9:54 PM
To: Gray, Joni; Wolf, Janet; Farr, Doreen; sbcob; SupervisorCarbajal; slavagnino@countyofsb.org
Subject: Agenda Item 11-00278:I. St Bridgetts Under the Bus? II. C/E, New Begin

GREETINGS:

I am commenting on the CDBG allocations and am particularly shocked to see one of the most critical programs, St Bridgett's Fellowship, cut more drastically than other programs which serve people who are not nearly as desperate and problematic for the community.

I have been very active in the field of homeless advocacy for some years and have extensive academic and work background in housing related fields such as finance, real estate and construction. I was recently recognized for this background and awarded an appointment to the county's advisory board on homeless issues in the "Advocate" vacancy. I believe I have pertinent insight into the CDBG ESG recommendations and hope to be of assistance in evaluating three possible adjustments to the numbers.

In my opinion, St Bridgetts Fellowship is being subjected to an unduly harsh reduction vis a vis its requested amount. They asked \$31,000 but for some reason the recommendation is only for \$10,000. Most of the other cuts are on the order of perhaps 20%, so something is amiss. I am hoping that Supervisor Farr in particular will be able to check the recommendation against the facts on the ground and as appropriate persuade the Board to make an upward adjustment.

St Bridgetts serves some of the most intractable, difficult to serve clientele, people who resist shelters and even warming centers. Many people who do not interact with some of these clients may even find them to be frightening, and they occasionally are subject to behavioral decompensation if they do not have a point of contact with society.

Many do not keep psychiatric appointments or maintain compliance with psychiatric medications. I am opposed to over reliance on medication but I would be willing to concede they may be useful to such persons in some cases. If losing all contact with any form of structured program causes medication users to go off their meds due to lack of structure in their lives, the results may be unintended consequence to pennywise budget cuts.

But for St Bridgett's Fellowship, such individuals would have no contact with any sort of societal structure aside from the Sheriff's Department, which usually gets involved when things have already gotten way out of hand. Involving deputies is much more expensive than providing minimal social service, and St Bridgett's Fellowship is about as minimalist as it gets: one common meal social hour per week, and five brief fellowships on weekday mornings. These provide socialization where homeless people can bond with their fellow human beings in a safe environment and offset that terrible alienation which sets in when homeless people feel that they are being turned away at every closed door in the world.

Father John Hedges has a stellar reputation and is probably the only person who enjoys such a level of respect from such diverse sectors of society as the Sheriff's Department, of which he is the chaplain, and the most difficult sector of the homeless community, the unsheltered, themselves. And many of those people will frankly admit to psychiatric disorders for which they need help.

Therefore, I can only state that I am appalled at the depth of the cut they are being asked to take. It seems almost unconscionable. I am appalled by this budget. I can't believe that this is not a simple error based upon lack of information available to staff. I hope this statement fills the void and I am available should more testimony in support of the increase be required.

II. Carrillo Counseling (New Beginnings) and Casa Esperanza

These cuts are not as drastic, nor are their clients in as much immediate danger as the St Bridgett's cohort. But, in my opinion, New Beginnings and Casa Esperanza also should not have to take cuts, at all.

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They are too important to the community and it is a mistake to cut them back. On the other hand, if all agencies take cuts, those two should not in my opinion have to take cuts greater than any other program.

My reasoning is that these are two critical baseline safety net programs which reduce the strain on society at large. New Beginnings (Carrillo Counseling) in particular has an absolutely stellar reputation. I have heard nothing but good things about them from all sources. It provides the safe parking program and the jail prevention program which alone justifies its entire budget.

The cost of incarcerating even one person equals three times the CCS request or four times the recommendation. Please add back the \$5,000 bringing it back up from \$12,000 to \$17,000!

As much could be said for Casa Esperanza. I have personally inspected shelters in San Luis Obispo and other jurisdictions and have reviewed homeless services in Santa Cruz and Monterey Counties. I have interviewed dozens of homeless persons and listened to their complaints.

Casa Esperanza excels on many parameters and exceeds the quality of service in other jurisdictions. It has a superb program for picking up trash in the neighborhood in which it is located, including much trash which does not originate with their clientele. It also has superior provisions for prevention of transmission of airborne disease because it actually posts the proper signage, unlike CAP-SLO which resists innovation. Casa Esperanza has a large airy main room which makes it much safer for a day center than the tiny, cramped facilities available in other locations. They have an excellent record at immediately apprehending and sequestering incidence of communicable disease, which occasionally rears its ugly head, and, again, their excellence is not to be taken for granted as it is not universal throughout the state.

Full funding enables it to keep its excellent staff and stay on top of things. They leverage every dollar with volunteers but those who must rely upon their work there as their long term adult career include people who might easily be tempted away to better salaries in cities with a more attractive cost of living. We need to keep good provisional homeless services professionals, just as much as we need to keep good doctors and police officers, and they work for much much less.

It is imperative that we have well run shelters to prevent infiltration of disease vectors from neighboring counties where poor management practices have created higher incidences of infectious disease. This need for defensive management of homeless shelters also has a dimension regarding criminal justice issues and addiction.

Only by providing excellent drug treatment programs, juvenile offender counseling and intervention, and homeless services management will we be able prevent our county from being swamped with n'ere do wells who could easily ruin much of the good will which has been built between the social classes. Our very public order could fall into abject social anomie if we drop the ball and let our most needy become prey to malicious forces of addiction and crime. Obviously this somewhat over-dramatizes the matter, but the fact of the matter is that we need the best homeless services to protect the lifestyle to which middle class and well to do Santa Barbarans have become accustomed.

Casa Esperanza also provides afternoon workshops available on a walk-in sign up basis. This kind of service does not exist in any other county I have investigated. It is a superior way to do business because people can check out programs without having to give up their whole entire life story in a demeaning interview they may not be ready for. It is all workshop style, an ala carte menu so people can take what they are interested in and leave the rest.

Moreover, Michael Foley is an exceptional community leader. He is always available to both the surrounding community leaders and to homeless advocates such as myself. I have interacted with Milpas Community Association and things are on a very positive curve despite their often critical public posture on homeless issues: They have mitigated much of their harsh, destructive rhetoric in large part due to Mr. Foley's leadership skills. I am hopeful that the community will come together on solutions such as security enhancements at Cabrillo Ballfield and the proactive cleanups for which Casa is justifiably legendary.

Michael Foley has an exceptional open door policy and a can do attitude which we cannot take for granted. That kind of accessibility to the community simply does not prevail in other jurisdictions throughout the state. We should not squander an opportunity to forge best practices of our own initiative, right here in Santa Barbara. Let's fully fund our top shelf, proven programs.

The director of Casa knows his clients by name. He knows their situations, their behaviors, their needs and how best to keep them behaving with the least disruption to the surrounding community. He is truly a wizard; if he chose the field of finance he could probably solve the national debt crisis; we are lucky to have him and it is simply foolish to nickel and dime such a proven leader.

Sincerely,

Geoffery "Geof" Bard
California Houseless Information Team/
Crisis Housing Information Team