

EDITORIAL COMMENTARY

Keeping the Homeless Homeless

The Los Angeles Homeless Service Authority (LAHSA) is currently undergoing a long overdue makeover. Attorney Rebecca Isaac obligingly accepted the job of Executive Director as of November 1, 2007 and will become the 4th executive director to head LAHSA since the agency was created by a Joint Powers Agreement between the City and County Governments in 1993.

But 14 years after the agency's birth and millions of dollars later, LAHSA still finds itself primarily focused on providing emergency shelter relief, a method of relief that does more to maintain homelessness than it does to end it. With the inducements of the operant conditioning of food, clothing and free bed spaces, LAHSA provides an inadvertent millstone of perpetual poverty around the necks of the 34,000 chronically homeless clients that shelter existence has produced.

Yet with each passing year and with great fanfare, LAHSA celebrates the possibility that something effective will result from the opening and the expansion of these temporary shelters alone. And like years past, this patrician air of virtuous wisdom and pretentious proclamation dissipates almost as quickly as does the overnight dew with the dawning rays of a morning sun.

Without an application of real change or meaningful programming, LAHSA has nonetheless charged forward, banging its head against the same immovable wall without the guiding light of oversight and without a single goal-directed performance benchmark to measure its progress. Underwritten with a seeming unending stream of taxpayer appropriations, LAHSA has instead created a web of administration mismanagement and a meshwork of co-mingled fiscal misappropriations as it scandalously, though inadvertently, provides the cannon fodder for the development of the status of the chronically homeless person.

Obviously, if we continue to accept Ms Isaacs' predecessors' way of handling this business as the precursory exemplar of visionary leadership, then we shouldn't anticipate seeing any meaningful change in homeless services. And we shouldn't expect to see (except by random variable) a reduction in our homeless population any time soon.

Year after year, between the vested influence of shelter service provider/sub-contractors, the circumstance of winters coming and the public's hue and cry about the numbers of homeless people still living on the streets, the Authorities (LAHSA, City Council and the Board of Supervisors) have been provoked into action, reacting

rather than pro-actively crafting plans of homeless services. That in itself may be why we see an over-emphasis on the development of short-term temporary shelters. And for almost as many years, independent advocates, with a growing agitation and a decided lack of success, have implored these authorities over and again that it is the development of permanent housing that provides the real definitive solution.

Yet evidence is demonstrating that sub-contractor interest coupled with the aforementioned pressures have prevailed and programs that maintain homelessness have won the day. It has taken 14 years for the authorities to figure out for themselves that developing affordable housing, low-income housing or subsidizing permanent housing is indeed the only sure way to solve the problem of homelessness.

Homeless people have been the foils of these enduring but intolerable misapplications of multiple priorities. And it is the people of this city and county who have had to suffer the debris of the unattractive aesthetics of homelessness and the disconcerting aftermath that has resulted from this stagnant application of homeless programming.

Recent police crackdowns on homeless people living on the streets of downtown Los Angeles

resulted in the scattering of Skid Row's inhabitants into the kitchen light scatters roaches. But with nowhere to go and no relief to be found when they arrive there, it will be interesting to see how these fleeing homeless will ultimately fare, how the communities that attempt to absorb these homeless refugees will cope and how the homeless service agencies will react this time to another critical mass of dysfunctional settlement.

Perhaps as a suggested first step, LAHSA could begin this homeless season by standardizing its methods of service delivery. To better insure that the full array of entitlement services are offered, as needed, and as per the individual need and as a certainty that every potential service-based need of the individual will be addressed, the incorporation of a standardized system would better ensure completeness of service delivery and as the means to ensure the readiness of each client to re-engage the independent living status.

In my next report we will explore how the network of homeless service partners negligently failed to secure 545 government permanent-housing units on 9 acres of deed free land.

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HOMELESS IN HOLLYWOOD

OPINION

— "Shut up," they explained. —

Those Hollywoodland residents who did not attend the Design Review Board's March 8th hearing at the Village Coffee Shop missed possibly one of the most marvelous evenings of Surreal Theater since Samuel Becket premiered "Waiting for Godot" 54 years ago in Paris.

That night's performance by the DRB had a little of everything: Mystery, Melodrama, Comedy, Tragedy, Suspense-enough flim-flam for half-a-dozen sequels to "The Music Man"—but mostly...Farce.

Synopsis: Two gentlemen—call them *The Applicants*—have applied for DRB approval of *The Project*, a McMansion they wish to build on two contiguous lots on Lugano Place (the cul-de-sac off Heather Drive). This, by the way, was *The Applicants'* second bite at the apple; at a first DRB hearing they were asked to reduce the size of their proposed McMansion by 20% and re-submit revised plans and a 3-D model for approval or disapproval.

The Applicants chose not to attend this soirée, which is their right, but were more than adequately represented by several employees (paid and unpaid).

Call them *The Representatives*.

The other players: the aforementioned Design Review Board, comprised of five people (architects, mostly)...Oops, make that four. About 20 minutes into the first act, one Board Member rose, gathered his belongings and, without a word of explanation, exited stage left. When asked, for the record, for the name of the departing Member and the reason for his leaving, the chairman apparently couldn't remember his name and gave no reason for his exit. The mystery remains.

The Board was led by a chairman who said more than once that *he* was chairing this meeting and thus *he would decide* what time limits to impose on any speaker. Fair enough. In the interests of strict accuracy then, let us call him *The Decider*.

The remaining players: Hollywoodland homeowners; a few in support of *The Project*; the vast majority, **opposed**. Let's call them, pro or con, *The Speakers*.

ACT ONE

*"I've got a swell idea!
Let's not hold the show right here!"*

This curtain almost didn't go up. A boatload of written testimony had been sent in advance of the hearing—via correct channels (pursuant to Brown Act, § 54954.3 and c/o The City Planning Dept.)—to be forwarded to the DRB for inclusion in their official deliberations.

Problem: the testimony was **not** forwarded to the DRB. Oddly (or perhaps not), *The Applicants'* revised plans **had** reached the DRB, but **not** the voluminous correspondence in opposition. Why not? *The Decider* smiled and shrugged. (Perhaps it's just this reviewer's imagination, but smiling and shrugging seemed to be Thursday's Theme.)

*"I've got another swell idea!
Let's blame the messenger!"*

We were told the DRB would not be held responsible for the City's failure to deliver the correspondence to each Member. Hmm... Okay, clearly the show can't go on—the players only have half the script. Re-

schedule, give the audience a raincheck and send 'em home, right? Wrong.

And here it **really** starts to get interesting...

Follow this: Even though...

1. legally-submitted testimony had not been forwarded, and although the Board was well aware of massive community opposition to this Project, evidently not one of them—not one-enquired of the City Planning Department if there was any written testimony to be read in preparation for this hearing. And,

2. by their own admission only one Board Member had in fact seriously reviewed *The Applicants'* revised plans (*The Decider* freely volunteered he hadn't had a chance to even look at them) and

3. *The Representatives* now added to the mix the *diktat* that their clients, *The Applicants* **would not accept** a postponement but were demanding a vote to approve or disapprove *The Project* that night...

4. The sum product of the above facts rendered it impossible for any legislative body to arrive at any logical, *supportable* conclusion...

And yet, despite all this, *The Decider* called "Places!" The players took their seats and the hearing was called to order. As the curtain rose the adults in the audience looked at each other, completely and utterly mystified.

An aside: I love architects—I really do. There's a deliciously pure, almost crystalline arrogance about them which is completely unique to their trade.

(Howard Roark *lives!*) But more about that in a minute...

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