

October 22, 2009

Dear Council,

The Ventura Social Services Task Force (VSSTF) is focused on ending homelessness and, as our City Manager, Rick Cole, noted when the City Council first accepted and endorsed the Ten Year Strategy to End Homelessness, this means it is no longer business as usual.

We need new and creative approaches if we are to end homelessness rather than simply “manage” it. The City Council has shown a willingness to take risks and try new responses and so has the VSSTF. The City Council has also shown a willingness to look for collaborative responses and so has the VSSTF.

One of the early steps the VSSTF took was to create the Homeless Prevention Fund. This program has now been nationally recognized for its creativity, innovation, collaborative nature, and effectiveness. As you know, it keeps families in their homes when they are on the brink of homelessness, sometimes with as little as a few hundred dollars. Since June 2007, assistance from the VHPF has made it possible for more than 100 Ventura households to maintain their housing. That means more than 220 Ventura residents, including seniors, children, families, married couples and individuals, have been able to avoid the emotional and financial devastation of homelessness.

United Way is the fiscal agent, at no cost. The program is managed by three different non-profits who charge no administrative fees. All money goes directly to benefit those most in need, although payments are always made to third parties (i.e. landlords).

We are seeing the need for more efforts like this which get the money directly to those in need. One of the proposals currently in front of the VSSTF would create a fund to help people who are homeless keep their vehicles registered, insured and in working order. Payments would always be made to a third party and efforts would be made to recruit businesses willing to donate some or all of the labor costs. Participants would have to meet a list of strenuous qualifications, including being involved in on-going case-

management with an agency. Unfortunately, neither of these worthy efforts meets the current guidelines as put forth by the City Council and other funding programs are also often reluctant to fund such programs.

At its October 7 meeting, the VSSTF voted to ask the City Council to give us increased flexibility so that we can consider such proposals along side more traditional proposals. We are committed to creating new solutions to old challenges and this flexibility would help us do just that.

Our city has made much progress in the past year and we look forward to an even better 2010.

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