

COMMUNITY NEWS

**YIMBY Seeks To Involve  
Community In Solving  
Homelessness**

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A new initiative to help people out of homelessness kicked off last week in Long Beach.

Called Project YIMBY (Yes! in My Back Yard), the effort is being replicated in several Los Angeles County cities. It is a creation of PATH Partners of LA, the Long Beach office of Mental Health America and the city's Health and Human Services Department. About 30 service providers and advocates (including four members of the Neighborhoods First organization) met last Thursday, Nov. 13, to ask for volunteers and start discussions of projects.

Joel Roberts of PATH Partners, the originator of the program, said that its primary goal is to engage the community in helping to solve the issue of homelessness. To do that, the community must be shown that there are ways to address the problem, he said.

"We want to run a pilot project to help the chronic homeless in Long Beach," Roberts said. "We're talking about the 75 or 80 people who frequent Lincoln Park. Those are the people who people see.

"We'd like to get those people in apartments and linked up with case managers. That would show the community that there are ways to get them off the streets."

There was some discussion about the ongoing need to address housing and other services for the homeless, and how YIMBY could take advantage of the recently completed 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness. There also was some discussion about NIMBYism (Not In My Back Yard) in the city.

"There's one way to overcome NIMBY, and that's if everyone is involved in planning," Roberts said. "NIMBYism usually takes place when neighbors are not involved in the planning."

Joe Sopo, president of Neighborhoods First,

agreed. When asked why he and his group attended the meeting, he said it was to learn of efforts in Long Beach.

"We've always operated on the 'if you build it, they will come' approach," Sopo said. "But it sounds here as if you are looking to take care of Long Beach's problem. That's appropriate."

Jim Lewis, CEO of the Long Beach Rescue Mission, said some nonprofits can help with funding for centers and other costs, easing the city's financial burden. The key, he said, is to eliminate barriers.

"In my experience, if the city can say here's a good, appropriate place, nonprofits can be found who are willing to build," Lewis said. "But you need to make it possible. There has to be a way to get rid of the need to seek a full CUP (Conditional Use Permit) every time you try to do something."

Those are the types of issues YIMBY is designed to address, others said. A steering committee was formed to begin work on the long-term goals.

But the effort to help downtown homeless is a long-term goal that will require planning and resources. To get YIMBY off the ground, the group plans to help with the homeless count scheduled for Jan. 29.

That count is required every other year by the Department of Housing and Urban Development as a condition for money to serve the homeless population. The city receives more than \$3 million a year in grants from HUD for homeless services.

Connie Sziebl, field deputy for County Supervisor Don Knabe, said Long Beach is one of only three cities in the county that does its own count (Pasadena and Glendale are the others). All the other 88 cities rely on the county for an estimated homeless population — and expects the county to provide all of the homeless services.

Elsa Ramos, coordinator for the city's Multi-Service Center, said it will take more than 300 volunteers for the one-day count. People actually doing the counting go out in teams of threes, usually with one formerly homeless person as part of the team.

Those teams record gender, ethnicity and more information if the person agrees to provide it, but does not seek names.

In January 2007, the count found nearly 3,900 people. Based on the number of people seeking services recently, that number likely will go up, Ramos said.

A number of agencies at the meeting said they would seek volunteers for the count. For more information about volunteering, call the city at 570-4003.