

Notes from the May 11, 2005 Disability Commission Housing Work Group meeting:

Members present: Bill Fuller (VHDA), Diana Thorpe (DMAS), Basil Gooden (DHCD), Teri Baker-Morgan (VBPD), Anne Davis (HUD), Barry Merchant (VHDA), Skip Stanley (CSB), Michael Shank (DMHMRSAS), Jeff Gore (DLS-staff)

Legislative Update / Secretary Woods housing study

The meeting began with a brief review of relevant legislation from the 2005 General Assembly Session. HB 2407 requiring localities to add certain provisions for the elderly and persons with disabilities to the comprehensive plan highlighted the successful legislation, while the Secretary of Health and Human Resources study on housing opportunities for persons with disabilities highlighted successful budget proposals. Bill Fuller of VHDA updated the group on the status of the Secretary's study, and indicated that a meeting, chaired by DRS Commissioner Jim Rothrock, would be held on May 20.

Universal Design

Next, a discussion on Universal Design followed. Bill Fuller explained that DRS, VHDA and others are working together on a multi-media video presentation on the requirements and affordability of universal design featuring Billy Howell, a developer and member of the Disability Commission. The video is targeted to homebuilders and is slated to be available at the Governor's Housing Conference on September 16, 2005. Teri Barker-Morgan, from the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities mentioned the "Access is for Everyone" certification program being promoted by Concrete Changes in Georgia. This is a voluntary certification program focusing on educating builders and realtors on universal design, including the relatively low costs of implementation in new construction, and the market advantage to be gained by those certified in universal design. The group discussed the possibility of implementing such a program in Virginia, and Bill and Teri agreed to brief the work group on this issue at the next meeting.

Housing Vouchers / Community Development Block Grants

No more vouchers. No more money. There was a brief discussion of the prioritization of vouchers and the authority (or lack thereof) of the state to impose such requirements when the program involves federal funds going directly to the local housing authorities. Basil Gooden addressed the CDBG issue. The "Strengthening Americans Communities Act" in Congress would effectively reduce these funds by \$1 billion, transfer authority over the program to the U.S. Department of Commerce, and likely narrow the uses for which the money can be spent. DHCD is communicating their opposition to these changes to the Virginia congressional delegation. Members noted that as pressure for these programs is pushed down from the federal to the local level, and funds are cut, it looks like the pressure will increase on the state to deal more effectively with housing issues. Virginia's Olmstead obligations only add to the significance of this developing situation.

Member Discussion / Future Direction of Work Group

Finally, the members discussed the best direction for the work group to go, in light of the emergence of other entities (Olmstead Implementation Team, Housing Commission, etc.) devoting much time and resources to many of the same issues. The discussion covered various substantive topics, but the general consensus was that it would be useful for the group to establish a niche - a specific framework through which the group could add to the policy goals of the Disability Commission and work productively with the other groups studying the same or similar issues. Of the specific items discussed, one that appears promising is approaching disability concerns through zoning ordinances like SRO (Single Room Occupancy), which Fairfax and Montgomery (MD) Counties are implementing. It was noted, however that this may be better addressed by the Housing Study Commission, and that perhaps this group should focus more on income support and "safety net" issues. Barry Merchant noted that, while there aren't many resources available now, we should start preparing for when there are funds available. A comprehensive look at all sources of income (auxiliary grants, Medicaid, food stamps, housing, etc.) could yield a better understanding of the needs of persons with disabilities versus the resources available to them.

Future Meetings/Other

***The next meeting will be at VHDA on Monday, June 20 at 2 p.m.**

***No future meeting date has been set for the Disability Commission.**