



TACOMA HOUSING AUTHORITY

RESOLUTION 2018-05-23 (5)

Date: May 23, 2018
To: THA Board of Commissioners
From: Michael Mirra, Executive Director
Re: Approval for up to 50 Project-Based Vouchers for the College Housing Assistance Program (CHAP)

THA's Board of Commissioners approved resolution 2017-06-28 which increased the number of rental subsidies available for the College Housing Assistance Program to 150 households. This resolution would approve the conversion for up to 50 College Housing Assistance Program tenant based vouchers to project-based vouchers, if necessary.

Background

The Tacoma Housing Authority (THA), in partnership with Tacoma Community College (TCC), administers the College Housing Assistance Program (CHAP). CHAP provides eligible TCC students who are homeless, or at-risk of becoming homeless, with rental assistance. The pilot program—which provided 25 vouchers to homeless students—has been expanded to 150; 25 of those vouchers are allocated to formerly incarcerated students who have participated in a postsecondary education program while incarcerated. Throughout this memo, CHAP participants who will enroll into the re-entry expansion will be referred to as Opening Doors participants.

The program model presumes that program participants with tenant based rental assistance can find housing reasonably close to the TCC campus. They can no longer do this in Tacoma's new housing market of higher rents and lower vacancies. Opening Door participants face even more challenges in finding housing because of their criminal history and incarceration.

In response, THA and TCC propose to project-based housing vouchers into rental housing in Tacoma that then would be dedicated to all participants in the TCC program. This resolution, if the Board approves it, would allow for that. In ways described below, THA and TCC consulted with community stakeholders to inform this proposal.

Here are the factors that support the need to shift this portion of the program from a tenant-based voucher to a project-based voucher model.

1. Tacoma faces a crisis shortage of affordable housing. The increases in rent are being driven by the growing number of people living in Pierce County, which—along with the

neighboring King and Snohomish counties—have seen the population grow to nearly 3.9 million residents.¹ In addition to population growth which makes the private rental market more competitive; there is a shortage of affordable homes with an average of 29 available affordable homes per 100 extremely low-income renter households². In Tacoma's current market, an annual income of \$49,177 is needed to afford a two-bedroom rental at Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Fair Market Rent; while the average earned income for current CHAP participants is \$8,638. The influx of new residents are driving rent increases and creating a shortage of affordable housing adversely impacting those who are often in the greatest need for safe and affordable housing.

2. This housing shortage affects TCC applicants to the CHAP. During the application process, 47% of CHAP applicants are withdrawn from the waiting list before they are even issued a voucher. In most cases, this is because the applicant is no longer enrolled in courses at TCC. While the data does not tell us why these students are dropping out, we do know that housing is fundamental in maintaining stability. To date, there have been 212 CHAP applicants. Of the CHAP applicants who have been issued vouchers nearly a quarter of them were unable to utilize their voucher. CHAP applicants who have successfully utilized their voucher do so with an average time between voucher issuance and lease up being 54 days. This may be skewed to represent shorter shopping times as several CHAP applicants already had a place of residence. Taking a look at CHAP applicants that are currently shopping, the average shopper has been looking for 105 days. The data shows that CHAP applicants are struggling to not only lease up, but for those who have leased up are shopping for housing for three months or more.
3. Formerly incarcerated students face additional challenges because of their criminal justice system involvement. These challenges show in several ways. **First**, a recent of THA landlords assessed their screening practices. So far, the survey resulted in 88 responses. The results show that 64 percent of landlords always conduct criminal background screenings with 30 percent looking back indefinitely. Only 18 percent of landlords reported that they do not conduct criminal background screenings. All other screening qualifications aside, future Opening Doors participants who will have just exited prison, are already disqualified from many rentals in Tacoma. This survey also asked if a landlord has ever rented to someone with a criminal background, and if so, what led them to approve the application for tenancy; and many responded that applicants had enough time between their conviction and the time of application (as well as demonstrated rehabilitation). Applicants just exiting prison have not had the opportunity to build credibility by these standards.

Second, in addition to the criminal background barrier, all program participants would need to demonstrate their suitability as a tenant just as any renter would be required. Those who are just being released from incarceration or attempting to exit homelessness may not have rental history, credit history, and/or employment. Participation in CHAP is

¹ <http://www.thenewstribune.com/news/business/article206326214.html>

² National Low Income Housing Coalition – 2018 Washington Housing Profile – February 26, 2018

actually an opportunity for participants to demonstrate rehabilitation and build positive rental history.

Third, “(s)erving [prison] time also seems to have a detrimental impact on the quality of housing as those recently returned home often report living in less healthy conditions than before their imprisonment.”³ Since housing choice is limited, those without support will often be left with taking whatever they can find. Safe, healthy housing is important for personal development and provides an environment where an individual can focus on self-improvement.

Fourth, it can take a long time for even the average CHAP participant to acquire all the necessary documents to ensure program eligibility, in addition to the long time that will inevitably be spent shopping for housing. The time all this takes is exhausting and critical for any homeless student. It can be particularly daunting for Opening Doors participants. They commonly must have housing as a part of their DOC/court ordered obligations. To help ensure a successful transition from release into housing and education, Opening Doors participants need immediate access to housing. Taking a note from the challenges seen with CHAP applicants generally, early housing interventions are important to the program success of Opening Door participants.

Benefits of Project-Basing Vouchers

A project based housing unit can help to quickly house all CHAP students. Such a unit offers a solution in terms of timing, stability and affordability. This eliminates the struggle of spending three months or more shopping to find a suitable unit; and also guarantees a secured unit. A project-based voucher also ensures the participants have an affordable unit throughout the duration of their education.

Project-base housing also makes it easier to incorporate supportive services into the model, especially for Opening Doors participants who will need support. THA and TCC hope to arrange these services with community-based organizations that offer supportive services (i.e., counseling, employment training) to house formerly incarcerated students will aid in the successful transition from incarceration back into the community.

There is an additional possible benefit of project-basing these vouchers. Property managers and landlords who agree to project-base vouchers for CHAP participants may also become interested in further project-basing units for all THA clients beyond the CHAP program.

Community Consultation

THA conducted conversations with different stakeholders, including the Washington Department of Corrections, currently incarcerated students, and community corrections staff. The stakeholders confirmed the challenges that formerly incarcerated people face when attempting to secure housing after exiting the criminal justice system.

³ Lebel, T. P. (2017). Housing as the Tip of the Iceberg in Successfully Navigating Prisoner Reentry. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 16(3), 891-908.

THA visited Washington Correction Center for Women (WCCW) to talk to women currently enrolled in educational programs in the facility. The intent of the visit was to gauge the needs and opinions of potential future applicants. THA created a presentation which introduced the CHAP program and also explained the differences between a tenant-based voucher and a project-based voucher. There were about 15 women in attendance and all were surveyed. In addition to the on-site visit, an additional 42 were given paper surveys to document the need/opinions of women enrolled in educational programs at WCCW. During the site visit, the women unanimously voted on the project-based model. Having immediate access to housing seemed to be the women's highest priority when they exit. Below are some notable findings from the WCCW surveys (57 total) and site visit:

26%	54%	25%	23%	53%	11%
will not have a place of residence to exit to	indicated 'housing' as one of their top five concerns	have an eviction on their record	do not have funds for application fees, deposits, etc.	will not have income at exit	will not have support from friends/family/community

One woman talked about the opportunity and saw it as a transitional period to be used to secure immediate housing and then work towards becoming more self-sufficient, which would allow the women to then seek housing according to their preferences. Further consultation will be conducted and considered.

Recommendation

THA and TCC staff request to the THA Board of Commissioners to authorize up to 50 College Housing Assistance Vouchers to be project based for all CHAP participants.

The initial request would have asked for project-based vouchers only for Opening Door participants; however, for two reasons the request has expanded to include all CHAP participants. The **first** is that THA and TCC are unable to determine exactly how many Opening Door participants we can expect at any given time. It would be unreasonable to hold project-based units specifically for Opening Door students while many CHAP participants lose out on this housing opportunity because they were unable to lease up successfully in the private market. The **second** is all CHAP students, not just Opening Doors participants, need the benefit of project-based housing. They are all having trouble finding housing.

If the Board approves this recommendation, THA would issue a Request for Proposal to elicit interest from potential housing and service providers.

Based on this information, staff recommend adopting resolution 2018-5-23 (5).



TACOMA HOUSING AUTHORITY

RESOLUTION 2018-05-25 (5)

(Conversion of CHAP tenant based vouchers to project based vouchers)

A **RESOLUTION** of the Board of Commissioners of the Housing Authority of the City of Tacoma

WHEREAS, THA has been providing tenant based voucher assistance to College Housing Assistance Program (CHAP) participants; and

WHEREAS, CHAP tenant based vouchers provides rental assistance to homeless and near-homeless TCC students, and is expanding to also serve recently incarcerated students; and

WHEREAS, Converting tenant-based vouchers to project based vouchers for CHAP participants would guarantee access to housing; and

WHEREAS, THA is committed to increasing access to housing for TCC students, including individuals with convictions histories; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Board of Commissioners of the Housing Authority of the City of Tacoma, Washington as follows:

Authorizes Tacoma Housing Authority to convert up to 50 HOP vouchers for the College Housing Assistance Program to be project based.

Approved: May 23, 2018


Janis Flauding, Chair