



## Oregon Housing and Community Services



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Date: May 8, 2009  
To: Employees and Partners of Oregon Housing and  
Community Services  
From: Victor Merced  
Re: Director's Bulletin – Stimulus Guidance, Ways and Means

**Analysis underway.** OHCS policy analysts are now pouring over guidelines emanating this week from federal agencies to give clarity on the Tax Credit Assistance Program and the Tax Credit Exchange Program created by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

The guidance is complex, and it is important that OHCS staff members fully understand the details, given that millions of stimulus dollars are at stake. Further, the guideline announcement has triggered a decision on the structure of the OHCS [Consolidated Funding Cycles](#) going forward.

**Budget hearings.** Ways and Means has been a great success for Oregon Housing and Community Services during the presentation phase. Monday and Tuesday focused on delivery by department staff of key elements of the \$1.9 billion governor's recommended budget for OHCS.

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The public testimony was particularly gratifying on Wednesday. As indicated in the following summary, our partners drove the point home of the need for services and adequate financing to support the development and preservation of affordable housing.

**Partner collaboration.** Still, the universal good words on our behalf tell us that in spite of a tanking economy, OHCS employees – all of us – have pulled out the stops to deliver the best home financing and community services funding possible. Our partners recognize it, and so do legislators.

“This is the mother of all public-private partnerships,” said Sen. **Betsy Johnson**, co-chair of the Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development, which heard the OHCS budget this week.

Sen. Johnson was referring to the extraordinary relationships that OHCS has built with various foundations, which have contributed to the preservation of federally subsidized rental housing.

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Clackamas County Commissioner **Ann Lininger**, who is my former colleague at Meyer Memorial Trust, told the committee that Meyer, the Collins Foundation, and the MacArthur Foundation, together had pumped \$14.5 million into protecting Section 8 rental housing in Oregon from being converted to market-rate apartments.

“This is the cheapest, most efficient method of financing affordable housing – far cheaper than building new housing,” **Jeana Woolley**, State Housing Council member, said of the OHCS preservation work. She pointed out that the department has preserved more than 3,000 units and has more than 5,000 to save before the end of 2015.

**DHS approbation.** My colleague **Dr. Bruce Goldberg**, director of the Department of Human Resources, did not mince words. “I’m really proud,” he said, “to be here in support of the OHCS budget...because of the work we do together.”

OHCS couldn’t ask for a better advocate than Dr. Goldberg. There is no substitute for his gravitas in the halls of the Capitol. And when he told the committee that people with addictions and people in poverty and people slammed by the crashing economy “need affordable housing,” he pretty much said it all.

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The DHS director covered a litany of services provided by his department, concluding with the fact that its work would not be complete without the housing provided by OHCS.

A grateful DHS client, whose family receives public assistance, addressed the Ways and Means subcommittee, also applauding services available through the OHCS-funded community action agency in Vernonia. The December 2007 flood, along with her husband's disability, has left her family impoverished.

**Alicia Hansen's** professional demeanor moved committee member **Rep. Mike Schaufler** to comment that he had confused her for an OHCS staff person, suggesting that homelessness can strike anyone.

Ms. Hansen told the committee that her children have nightmares for fear of homelessness and that the local CAP agency "is a real lifeline for families like mine," saving us from living in our car.

**Advocates speak out. John VanLandingham**, Lane County Legal Aid attorney and one of the most articulate and respected fair-housing promoters at the Capitol, plugged OHCS financing of manufactured home cooperatives.

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“The goal here is to make this affordable to low-income people,” John said of the OHCS financing tool to create co-ops in Oregon that allow residents of manufactured home communities to keep their modest dwellings.

He touted the New Hampshire model that has seen enormous success in creating cooperatives. It prevents redevelopment of manufactured parks into dense, high-cost housing when land prices escalate.

Our longtime partner **Janet Byrd**, executive director of the Oregon Housing Alliance and a valued colleague in promoting legislative passage of the document recording fee for affordable housing, was short of message but powerfully clear: “The needs are huge and growing.”

Janet knows so very well the troubling trends of homelessness and poverty in Oregon, and she continues to be among our most powerful advocates. So too is **Rachel Bristol**, executive director of the Oregon Food Bank, funded in part by Oregon Housing and Community Services.

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Rachel told the Ways and Means subcommittee that a “great surge” in food need has occurred during the last nine months in Oregon, noting that many former food donors have become food recipients, requesting sustenance from her warehouses around the state.

She indicated the Food Bank is well on its way to delivering a million food boxes to Oregonians in a 12-month period. Her unsettling conclusion: “We see no signs of the crisis declining.”

To this, committee member **Rep. Brad Witt** told the story of grocery workers who have had their work hours drastically reduced by the recession and forced to go to food banks. He said they often can’t buy the food they sell.

Driving home the point, **Patti Whitney-Wise**, executive director of the Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force, reminded the committee that the state’s food need has bounced back into the danger zone. Oregon is now No. 3 in hunger need in the nation, she said.

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Farmworker advocate **Roberto Jimenez** took center stage to applaud the OHCS role in keeping housing affordable. The need for housing is great, reported Jimenez, who represents the Farmworker Housing Development Corp., concerned with the interests of farmworkers, a vital economic force in our state.

He captured serious attention in the hearing room when he said some farmers take advantage of the high demand for housing by lodging farmworkers in unsanitary, crowded, probably illegal conditions. Sen. Johnson agreed but clarified that most farmers care about the wellbeing of their workers and are “not rapacious weasels.”

**Sandy Halonen**, executive director, Neighborhood Economic Development Corporation, that works with OHCS to deliver homebuyer training, had horror stories to tell about the predations against good citizens by unethical, unlicensed real estate and mortgage brokers.

To this, **Rep. Schaufler** bluntly stated, you’re not talking about legitimate brokers, you’re talking about a “lying, cheating, no good thief.” That got everybody’s attention, which emphasized Sandy’s point about the need for homebuyer education, which OHCS strongly supports. More on that under old business.

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Advocating for people of color, **Deborah Turner**, was most persuasive in promoting the work of OHCS in promoting fair-housing practices. Representing the Portland Community Reinvestment Initiative, Deborah made it clear that the marketplace has a long way to go in removing barriers to discrimination against non-English speakers and people of color who are victims of “steering” and “redlining.”

**Old business.** As I privately predicted several weeks ago, desperate Oregonians, plagued with the shock of mortgage foreclosure, would attend in large numbers the Home Ownership Preservation Event, held in Portland last Saturday. And they did.

**Dona Lanterman**, OHCS single family programs manager, said 700 to 800 people showed up for advice about how to keep their homes in this recession. “I feel it was a success as did many of the folks we surveyed,” said Lanterman, referring to excellent poll results. She further suggests more such events may be in the offing.

In other news, the State Housing Council took action last Friday to acknowledge the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Federal Housing Administration.

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It's an event that might have slipped our notice were it not for the determined reminder put forth by **Tom Cusack**, retired director of Housing and Urban Development in Portland. He helped prepare the [proclamation](#), and we deeply appreciate Tom's work on behalf of affordable housing.

*We are extremely impressed with the creativity and collaboration of Oregon Housing.*

~ Dan Steffy, Guardian Management, May 6, 2009

*Oregon Housing needs to be able to retain talented people now more than ever. Affordable housing creates jobs, investment, as well as decades of affordability for hardworking families in our community.*

~ Anna Geller, Geller, Silvas & Assoc., May 6, 2009

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