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City of Lexington Approves \$3.5 Million for Housing Trust Fund; Next Step: Dedicated Source Advocates Say

by Michael Anderson // Spring

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On March 18th, Lexington Mayor Jim Gray announced the city has a \$13 million surplus, the result of a stronger economy and efficient management. The Mayor recommended to Council that a portion of the surplus, \$3.5 million, be used for affordable housing and to address the needs of those who are experiencing homelessness. On March 20th the full Council passed the ordinance that set aside the funding for the fiscal year starting July 1st, 2014. [Read more here.](#)

Mayor Gray said the recommendation concerning affordable housing addresses a growing need. “Gandhi taught us that a society is best measured by how it treats the defenseless and vulnerable,” Gray said. “We know in our city there are too many who can’t find safe, affordable housing and too many who are homeless.”

For more than six years community organizations such as BUILD (Building a United Interfaith Lexington through Direct Action), Central Kentucky Housing and Homeless Initiative, Habitat for Humanity and many others have been tirelessly working to establish a dedicated revenue source for the Affordable Housing Trust Fund in Lexington.

Over the years there have been multiple taskforces on the issue of affordable housing all of which have recommended implementing an affordable housing trust fund. Most recently, in 2013, Mayor Gray commissioned another study. The firm that conducted the study, czb, reported in February that there are about 15,000 households that need assistance to rent a decent place to live in Lexington. Of those, only about 9,000 receive any kind of help, leaving 6,000 families in the community, most with at least one person working, that can’t find decent housing at an affordable rate.



Rev. Rick Smith, Kabby Akers, Rev. Adam Jones and Lexington Mayor

The firm calculated that rent subsidies or the cost of building new housing amount to about \$6,000 a year per household. And that, if you do the math, equals \$36 million a year. The report stated that the sticker shock can be softened by leveraging investment from private developers and non-profits, awards from federal and state sources, and developing policies that provide incentives for building or maintaining affordable housing. But it's a large, long-term commitment by the City that is needed...one that can't be fulfilled by hoping for a surplus each year. The report again found that a solution to Lexington's housing crisis is for the city to invest in an affordable housing trust fund.

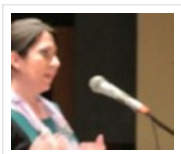
Jim Gray at BUILD's 2014 Nehemiah Action.

Another important part of the equation for securing the support of Council and the Mayor has been the increase and intensity of activity by advocates for affordable housing and those experiencing homelessness. **BUILD organized a meeting of stakeholders in January that galvanized the community.** The event brought many advocates and community members together to push a united demand for a dedicated revenue source for an Affordable Housing Trust Fund. At the meeting, many representatives spoke for the fund: pastors, doctors, fair housing advocates, homeless advocates, people experiencing housing crisis, service providers, Kentucky Utilities, Superintendent of Schools, Habitat for Humanity and others. This action along with testifying at hearings, prayer vigils and media events kept up the drum beat for an Affordable Housing Trust Fund.

Advocates were happy with what they are calling a good first step by Lexington's Mayor and City Council. The Rev. Adam Jones, co-chairman of BUILD, praised the council for passing the resolution, but called attention to the need to find dedicated revenue for the fund. "We wanted to make sure that the council and mayor knew that it is a step in the right direction," Jones said. "However, the full resolution of the affordable housing crisis must include an affordable housing trust fund with a dedicated revenue stream."

The immediate next step for advocates is to work with the city to set up the mechanisms needed to administer the Affordable Housing Trust Fund. However, advocates are also using the present momentum to push for more permanent solutions to the affordable housing crisis in Lexington. This April at their annual Nehemiah action, BUILD got the Mayor's commitment to propose and advocate for a dedicated funding source. [Read more here.](#) The Community Action Council, the Catholic Action Center and the Central Kentucky Council for Peace and Justice through a candidate forum continue to urge council members and candidates to authorize dedicated revenue source for the Affordable Housing Trust Fund. [Read more here.](#)

For more information on the Lexington campaign, please contact Dustin Pugel at dustin@dartcenter.org or David Christiansen at davidecky@gmail.com.



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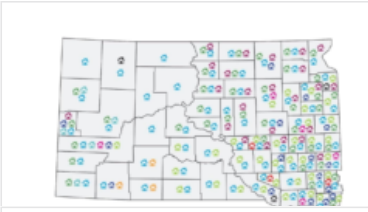
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