

## LANDLORDS ENLISTED

### HOMELESS: Section 8 vouchers being offered

With aid from the state, owners could help the homeless

BY MIKE PATRICK

REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

WATERBURY — Chronic homelessness in Waterbury may become a thing of the past as early as the end of this year, thanks to a coordinated effort by social service agencies and dozens of Section 8 housing vouchers from the state.

Landlords gathered in City Hall on Thursday to learn more about how they could both help the effort and earn a steady rental income by housing the subsidized tenants.

“Landlords are integral to ending chronic homelessness,” Cindy Dubuque, of the Hartford-based housing advocacy group Partnership for Strong Communities, told the crowd. “We can have all the housing vouchers, we can have all the money in the world, but if we don’t have places for people to live, to maintain their housing, then they’ll end up back on the streets.”

Along with the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness, Partnership for Strong Communities is the local organizer of “Zero: 2016,” a national effort to end veteran and chronic homelessness by the end of this year, begun by the New York-based Community Solutions, which helps local communities address the homelessness issue.

To be considered chronically homeless under the terms of this effort, an individual must have been homeless, or repeatedly so, for a long time, usually a year, and must have a severe disability.

Lori Welling, of the Center for Human Development, which operates the CHD Hospitality Center for the homeless on East Main Street, told the landlords *See HOMELESS , Page 4B*



**Landlord John Emanuel, center, talks with Sofia Swaby, left, shelter manager for the St. Vincent dePaul Mission of Waterbury, and JoAnn Reynolds Balanda, right, vice president of community impact for United Way of Greater Waterbury, during a gathering of homeless advocates and landlords at Veterans Memorial Hall in Waterbury. The informational meeting was held Thursday to inform and encourage landlords to take Section 8 vouchers and help end homelessness in Waterbury.**

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gathered that attached to the Section 8 vouchers is a provision that guarantees the tenant will have a host of medical and social services available to them.

“We don’t just work with the client,” she said. We work with the landlord, we work with other medical providers, we work with anybody that that person needs to help them be successful in their housing.”

It was also noted at the meeting that those kinds of services also help to discourage and prevent tenant damage to landlords’ properties.

Leigh Shields-Church, of the state Department of Housing, said both state and federal dollars supported the new housing vouchers devoted to Waterbury’s homeless.

“I’ve been in the housing business for about 15 years or so, and I don’t think there’s been a point in time we’ve actually had enough housing resources in terms of rental subsidies to actually meet the goal that we’ve set,” she said.

“There’s really a push now, certainly, by the providers in the room; there’s really an urgency to get people into housing. The money is there; we just need all of you in the room to start to develop these partnerships to provide the actual rental units,” she told the landlords. “So we are really in a unique and wonderful time for the state because the resources are there through all the partnerships that have been formed.”

One of those partner agencies is the St. Vincent De Paul homeless shelter on Benedict Street. Its director, Sofia Swaby, is also head of the local Coordinated Access Network. The state is divided into eight such networks that provide a streamlined way for the homeless to receive services.

“The CAN has become the central point for individuals experiencing a housing crisis,” she told the landlords. “St. Vincent De Paul works with eight different partnering agencies here in Waterbury, assesses these individuals and supports them with services throughout their crisis until they get placed.”

Robert Dorr, whose Credo Housing owns 37 rental properties across the city, said he hopes the plan will help him expand from the seven units he already has dedicated to the chronically homeless.

“I think we have a responsibility to see that those people who are less fortunate than us are housed in clean, safe affordable housing, that’s my interest,” he said. “These are people in need and they need help.”

Connecticut is one of just four states across the country to commit resources to the Zero: 2016 effort. A total of about 1,000 Section 8 vouchers have been devoted to the cause, officials said.

JoAnn Reynolds-Balanda, the United Way of Greater Waterbury’s vice president of community impact, said the state is well poised to achieve the Zero: 2016 goal.

“I think we work together well. We’re a small enough state where the players have been engaged in the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness, with our 10year plans to end homelessness,” she said. “We’ve had a lot of synergy going on, so we we’re ready to take this on.”

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**Leigh Shields-Church, of the state Department of Housing, listens to guests during a gathering of homeless advocates and landlords Thursday at Veterans Memorial Hall in Waterbury. The informational meeting was held to inform and encourage landlords to take advantage of the 1,000 Section 8 vouchers being made available to help end homelessness.**

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