

MONTGOMERY

EXTRA

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MONTGOMERY NEWS

Report Stresses Need For Affordable Housing

HOUSING, From Page 3

the county's homeless are working families with children. "It's only going to get worse," he said. "The only thing we can do is increase the supply of housing."

Silverman said that county officials are developing a list of county-owned properties such as parking lots that developers could turn into affordable housing.

In 1997, the council approved controversial legislation that allows private landowners to develop "personal living quarters," housing units similar to small apartments with shared kitchens and bathrooms. To allay concerns about the proliferation of such buildings, the council voted to limit the number of facilities to six. To date, none has been built. A county housing task force is currently working on forming private-public partnerships with developers to build affordable housing.

"What we can do is step up to the plate with county-owned land," Silverman said.

County Executive Douglas M. Duncan (D) said there has been some success in helping working families, such as putting in place a local earned income tax credit and expanding transit. Last year, the County Council approved Duncan's proposal to double the amount of money in the county's Housing Initiative Fund to \$15 million. The fund is primarily a revolving loan fund that allows the county to use low-interest loans and tax breaks to entice for-profit and nonprofit developers into building and rehabilitating affordable housing.

"Obviously, the coalition's report makes it clear we have more to do," Duncan said.

Sharan London, executive director of the homeless coalition, said that public education about the homeless problem in Montgomery, which the group plans to begin in July, would be a key to new housing initiatives. Sometimes, she said, residents may not support a project for affordable housing in their neighborhood because of stereotypes about people who are homeless.

"It's pretty compelling to see the numbers of children who are homeless in Montgomery County," she said. "People don't realize the extent of it. It's better to support people in housing than to have them living in the street."

Other recommendations from the report, released last week, include:

■ Form partnerships between housing advocates and planners from jails, hospitals, the child welfare system and mental health facilities to ensure that people are not discharged into homelessness.

■ Develop an early warning system for people at risk of losing housing by working with landlords to contact social service agencies before eviction.

■ Encourage more development of housing for people with mental health needs.

■ Increase job training programs that provide skills to earn a livable wage and support programs that provide health care to low-wage workers.

■ Identify and advocate for changes in zoning laws and policies that impede development of affordable or subsidized housing.

Report Urges Steps to Reduce Homelessness

By PHUONG LY
Washington Post Staff Writer

Montgomery County needs to develop 100 new housing units per year, improve wages, help prevent evictions and collect better data on people who need affordable housing, according to a report by the Montgomery County Coalition for the Homeless.

About 1,250 people are homeless in the county, including 325 children, according to a one-day annual survey of people conducted in January. Throughout the year, more than 3,000 people receive services from providers who work with the homeless, the coalition said.

While homelessness is a problem everywhere, it is especially embarrassing for Montgomery County, one of the nation's wealthiest counties where initiatives for low-income families often receive broad political support. The county's wealth is linked to its housing problems: The average apartment rent jumped 11 percent over the past year to \$1,180 a month, and the waiting list for rent subsidies has more than doubled since 1999. The rental market has a vacancy rate of just 1.8 percent.

County Council President Steven A. Silverman (D-At Large) said it is "inexcusable" that many of

See HOUSING, Page 18