

## **Homeless advocates support real estate transfer tax changes to fund state's affordable housing trust**

*By THERESA CHURCHILL - H&R Senior Writer*

DECATUR - Housing Action Illinois will have the support of the Decatur-Macon County Homeless Council Continuum of Care in its attempt to raise more funds for affordable housing by reforming the state's real estate transfer tax.

Council members expressed their approval Thursday to Bob Palmer, policy director for Housing Action, who in turn sought volunteers willing to advocate for change in meetings this fall with state legislators.

Palmer's organization plans to work with lawmakers to introduce legislation next year that would:

- reduce the real estate transfer tax from 50 cents to 30 cents per \$500 on properties valued at less than \$500,000, which are involved in 95 percent of all transactions;
- increase the tax from 50 cents to \$1 per \$500 on properties valued between \$500,000 and \$1 million, involved in 4 percent of all transactions;
- increase the tax from 50 cents to \$2.50 per \$500 on properties valued at more than \$1 million, involved in 1 percent of all transactions.

Commenting on the council's support for the idea, Mary Beth Moeller, administrative specialist for Homeward Bound, said, "I guess no one in the room has a \$500,000 property to sell."

Palmer said the reform would generate \$77 million in new funding, \$38.5 million of which would go to the state's Affordable Housing Trust Fund, whose revenues build and preserve affordable housing throughout Illinois.

He added that since some of the fund's revenues are now used for homeless prevention, unlike in the past, the need to boost the fund is particularly pressing.

Palmer also said he expected support for transfer tax reform to come primarily from downstate, whereas the support base for Housing Action Illinois traditionally has been the Chicago area.

In other business, Moeller announced that Homeward Bound has hired two new part-time employees, Sue Hemp as job developer and Linda Reed-Thompson as job trainer to help the agencies clients find employment as well as housing.

Judy Gibbs, maternal child health special projects coordinator for the Macon County Health Department, also said she is continuing to pursue grant funding to provide a home for girls younger than 18. She said an increasing number of young mothers choose to live on the street because their homes are unsafe for children.

Moeller said Homeward Bound can serve only clients who are 18 or older.

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