

## Explaining Article 18

### Prepared by the Former Amherst Committee on Homelessness

**1. *What is Article 18?***

Article 18 is an advisory article. By approving it, Town Meeting will be recommending to the Select Board that it establish a Committee on Homelessness that focuses on preventing and ending homelessness in Amherst.

**2. *Doesn't the Town already have a Committee on Homelessness working on those issues?***

The Select Board established a Committee on Homelessness in 2007. Following a change in its composition, the Select Board dissolved the Committee on Homelessness and the Housing Partnership/Fair Housing Committee last September.

**3. *Why did the Select Board dissolve these two Committees?***

The Select Board has stated that it would be a more efficient use of town resources, and more clear to the public, to have a single committee addressing the housing needs in Amherst, from those of the homeless (including emergency sheltering) to those of moderate income. (In 2011, moderate income for a one-person household in Hampshire county is considered to range from \$46,000-\$69,000.<sup>1</sup>)

**4. *Is it better to have a single committee dealing with the spectrum of sheltering and housing needs in Amherst?***

We don't believe so. The issues surrounding homelessness, particularly chronic homelessness, are complex, varied, and dissimilar to those related to the housing needs of those eligible for affordable housing (those of low to moderate income, or, for a one-person household in Hampshire County in 2011, individuals earning from \$28,750 to \$69,000<sup>1</sup>). The advantages of a focused approach to preventing and ending homelessness in Amherst are illustrated by the accomplishments of the former Committee on Homelessness, which are discussed in Article 18.

**5. *Shouldn't Town Meeting wait and see if the new Sheltering and Housing Committee established by the Select Board works before considering such a warrant article?***

Until September, the Town had a focused approach to preventing and ending homelessness in Amherst, which was the charge of the Committee on Homelessness, and a focused approach to addressing the housing needs of those of low and moderate income, which was the charge of the Housing Partnership/Fair Housing Committee. The proposal to reassign the work of both Committees to a single Sheltering and Housing Committee is akin to eliminating all medical specialties so that only general practitioners would be available to serve our health needs. Imagine that the responsibilities of cardiologists, neurologists, orthopedists, anesthesiologists, and gynecologists were all reassigned to the general practitioner. Would we get the health care we need?

**6. *How serious is the homeless problem in Amherst and the surrounding area?***

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<sup>1</sup> Massachusetts Housing Partnership, 2011 Income Limits for Affordable Units.

- A study commissioned by the Town in 2008 identified 16 to 20 individuals in Amherst as chronically homeless (individuals who have been homeless for a year or longer, or who have been homeless at least four times in three years);
- The 2010 annual report of the Amherst Survival Center indicates that 80 of its guests reported being residents of Amherst and homeless;
- According to the 2010-11 final report of the agency managing Amherst's homeless shelter, 84 individuals stayed at the shelter during the last sheltering season. With its state-mandated capacity of 16 beds, the shelter was full or nearly full during almost all of its 164 nights of operation;
- Eliot Homeless Services estimates that the number of chronically homeless individuals in Hampden, Hampshire, and Franklin counties rose from approximately 175 individuals in 2010 to 225 individuals in 2011;
- Approximately ¼ of Northampton households living in rental housing spend 50% or more of their incomes on rent. Available data suggests such precarious housing situations are at least as widespread in Amherst.

**7. *What is Amherst's share in meeting the housing needs of the chronically homeless and those of extremely low income (those earning less than 30% of the area's median income)?***

The 2008 report *All Roads Lead Home: The Pioneer Valley's Plan to End Homelessness* estimated a shortage of approximately 500 units of housing for chronically homeless individuals and families, and a shortage of approximately 20,000 units of housing for households of extremely low income in Hampden, Hampshire, and Franklin counties. At the time it was dissolved, the Committee on Homelessness was advocating for 20 supportive enhanced single room occupancy units in Amherst to meet the housing needs of our chronically homeless (and had worked with the Town to successfully secure \$450,000 in CDBG funding and \$500,000 in funding from the Interfaith Housing Corporation for that purpose), and for the addition of an average of 12 housing units per year to the Town's housing stock to meet the housing needs of those residents of extremely low income.

**8. *Should we be concerned that the more we do, the more homeless people will come to Amherst?***

Homelessness is a local, regional, state-wide, and national phenomena. Like all communities, Amherst should do what it has the resources to do to prevent and end homelessness in its midst.