

In tough times, people count on nonprofits

VIEWPOINT

DANIEL K. MAYERS

In November, The Current reported in these pages that “The ‘Great Recession’ may be winding down, but times are still tough for many D.C. residents.”

Seven months later, the crisis is far from over. Many fiscal forecasters believe economic relief will not come until 2013, or later. History reminds us that vulnerable populations are the first to feel the impact of a recession and the last to recover.

Having lived, worked and volunteered in this area for 50 years, I’ve never seen anything like this. Unemployment rates in some parts of the District are as high as 30 percent, one in two children in the District is at risk of hunger, many of our neighbors are using food stamps for the first time, and, in December, 34,200 loans in the region were in foreclosure.

While the budget process in D.C. resulted in the restoration of some human services funds, in other instances spending cuts will have a devastating effect on low-income residents already hit hard by the recession. As governments continue to grapple with daunting deficits over the next couple of years, initiatives such as the Community Foundation for the National Capital Region’s Neighbors in Need Fund — though not a substitute for government programs — play a critical role in helping local families struggling to make ends meet.

In recent months, the Neighbors in Need Fund has helped safety-net providers such as Bread for the City, DC Central Kitchen, Martha’s Table, N Street Village, So Others Might Eat and other nonprofits keep their doors open and meet the acute increase in demand for emergency services. Funds so far have provided 70 grantee organizations with

increased visibility and helped leverage additional funds from other sources. Funding has prevented hundreds of people from being evicted through emergency financial assistance for rent, mortgage and utilities. And funds have supported the first-ever coordination of safety-net budget advocacy on a jurisdictional and regional level among nonprofits and community residents.

Not surprisingly, the Community Foundation recently experienced an 89 percent increase in applications to the Neighbors in Need Fund over this time last year. Requests from safety-net providers to the fund have reached \$8.4 million, more than two times the \$3.6 million contributed to date.

Since its founding 36 years ago, the Community Foundation has helped its neighbors in need by promoting and supporting effective giving. The foundation works with thousands of individuals, families and companies in the Washington region, managing their charitable funds and connecting them with strong nonprofits.

A “community of givers,” the foundation is the largest funder of nonprofits in the region. As the community’s permanent source of giving, the Community Foundation connects people and resources to tackle the region’s toughest issues, from drug-related violence of the 1980s to the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, to the current economic recession.

One valuable lesson I’ve learned in the past five decades is that, in times of crisis, the worst thing you can do is nothing. Yet, with the need so great, it’s hard to know how to help. The Neighbors in Need Fund provides a safe, simple and trusted way to help neighbors who are hurting now.

Daniel K. Mayers, a Northwest resident, is immediate past chair of the board of trustees of the Community Foundation for the National Capital Region.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Klingle Road plan has major flaws

The Current’s June 16 article “City unveils possible paths for Klingle Valley project” notes that in 2003 the D.C. Council enacted legislation requiring repair and reopening of Klingle Road for motor vehicle traffic. The article states that the road was not repaired because the city did not receive federal funds and that, once the proposed hike/bike trail becomes “official,” it will be eligible for federal funds. These two statements require clarification.

After enactment of the 2003 road repair and reopening statute, the Federal Highway Administration and D.C. Department of Transportation extensively assessed the environmental impact and, in June 2005, issued a preliminary environmental impact statement identifying reconstruction of Klingle Road in its original two-lane configuration as the “preferred environmental option.”

Normally, Federal Highway

Administration and state transportation agencies finalize a preliminary environmental impact statement within 12 to 15 months of issuing the preliminary report. For example, federal and Maryland authorities completed the entire environmental impact process for the nearby \$2.6 billion, 18-mile InterCounty Connector project in less than 24 months. Yet, for the 0.7-mile Klingle repair job, three years after issuing the 2005 preliminary report, the federal and District agencies were trading messages blaming each other for delays in finalizing the document.

Like the governmental failure that caused Klingle Road to collapse from clogged storm-water drains in 1991, the flow of money for road repair was clogged by bureaucratic ineptitude. In contrast, the June 2010 environmental assessment, issued by the Federal Highway Administration and D.C. Department of Transportation, clearly states that federal money is not available for the hike/bike trail unless and until the District complies with the Street and Alley Closing and Acquisition Act of 1982 and with federal policies governing

removal of a local street from the D.C. functional classification map. That compliance will jeopardize D.C. property rights in Klingle Road, received under an 1885 grant for use as a public highway forever.

Your article trivializes the issue by saying Transportation Department spokesperson John Lisle said that the city will be able to maneuver around the issue because it will merely “reclassify — not close — the road.” That’s a pretty low standard for the so-called “progressive government” in D.C.

When the D.C. Council holds the public hearing required under the Street and Alley Closing Act, major flaws in the proposed hike/bike project initiated by Ward 3 D.C. Council member Mary Cheh will be exposed. These include perpetuation of storm-water flooding conditions by selecting a permeable surface for the steep terrain of Klingle Road, as well as the District’s inability to recoup property and income taxes from high-end residences that would have been accessed from Klingle Road.

Laurie Collins
Washington, D.C.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Current publishes letters representing all points of view. Because of space limitations, submissions should be no more than 400 words and are subject to editing. Letters intended for publication should be addressed to Letters to the Editor, The Current, Post Office Box 40400, Washington, D.C. 20016-0400. You may send e-mail to letters@currentnewspapers.com.

KWAME for CHAIR

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- Better Public Schools
- Safer Streets
- Helping Small Business

I humbly ask for your vote on Primary Day, September 14, 2010. Together, we can make a difference.

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