

## Volunteers of America Chesapeake look to aid suburban homeless

By: Adam Bednar Daily Record Business Writer August 19, 2016

Volunteers of America Chesapeake does have volunteers, but its name is a bit of a misnomer.

The faith-based nonprofit, which provides health and human services, has 750 employees and costs more than \$89,000 a day locally to operate. In large part the organization has turned to work as a developer to help continue its operations.

"The bottom line is we have to make a profit or we can't exist," said D. Dusky Holman, vice president and general counsel for Volunteers of America Chesapeake.

Much of the group's profit comes from developer fees for projects it builds that are eligible for incentives, such as low-income housing tax credits or new market tax credits.

A major difference between the nonprofit and a traditional developer is the fee the group receives is invested back in the business to help pay for the wraparound services offers residents.

One of the nonprofit's highest profile projects right now is the Leola Dorsey Community Resource Center, a more than \$11 million project in Jessup in Howard County that is being constructed in part to provide permanent supportive housing for formerly chronically homeless residents.

The development will provide 35 apartments to single homeless men and women who will have a lease and be expected to pay some level of rent. The three-story building will also include a day resource center on the first floor that will provide services, such as substance abuse treatment, medical care and vocational or skills-building.

The organization is also preparing for an overhaul of its Paca House development in Baltimore, which is expected to cost more than \$20 million. The project, which is dependent on receiving low-income housing tax credits, would add 92 units split evenly between one-bedroom and efficiency units.

The initial renovations at Paca House, at 116 N. Paca St., involved restoring two historic buildings and one piece of new construction, which was finished in 1996. The development includes 76 single-room-only units with shared kitchen, bathroom and recreation areas, and 30 efficiency units.

Volunteers of America Chesapeake, which has long developed projects in Baltimore, is hoping to continue investing in suburban counties that are also dealing with homeless issues.

Holman, who was a partner in the Towson-based and politically connected law firm Smith, Gildea & Schmidt, said the organization would like to start doing more work in Baltimore County.

He argues that there's a homeless population in Baltimore County but that it's often ignored outside of a few speeches from political candidates in election years. Trying to help the county tackle the problem, even in the face of pushback from not-in-my-backyard activists, is something Holman believes Volunteers for America Chesapeake can help do.

"It's almost talked about as a dirty word, or it's not talked about at all," Holman said.



A rendering of housing planned for the chronically homeless in Howard County to be built by Volunteers of America Chesapeake. (Wiencek & Associates)

