

Community-wide investments totaling \$8.8 million

SPECIAL TO
THE CHRONICLE

United Way of Forsyth County has awarded \$8,821,257 to social service organizations in Forsyth County as part of the 2016-2017 community-wide investment cycle, which runs from July 2016 to June 2017.

As in the past, the focus of the funded programs is on United Way's priority impact areas: health, education, financial stability and basic needs. This year, however, strategic shifts were made to United Way's investments to achieve greater impact.

Sallye Liner, United Way Board Chair, says "We have a history of funding good programs with long-term partners and have seen positive results in the lives of individuals and families. At the same time, the county's poverty rate continues to rise, food insecurity is a growing concern, and health issues continue to escalate. United Way believes these challenges demand that we evolve from operating simply as a fundraiser and distributor of grants to specific partners, to focusing on developing and executing integrated and long-term solutions that address the root causes of our community's challenges."

"Using this approach, we have seen success with increasing the community's



high school graduation rate and eliminating veteran homelessness. We have the opportunity to achieve similar results in the areas of health and financial stability, but that will require new, creative thinking by us and all of our partners – new and traditional."

A three-year funding comparison is provided at <http://www.forsythunitedway.org/3-year-funding-comparison/>.

Strategic shifts made during this grant cycle include the following:

*Developing new population-level

metrics for health and financial stability, in addition to those that exist for education. *Encouraging potential partners to work together to create and propose comprehensive, integrated programs to address our community's needs – recognizing that an individual's or family's issues are interconnected and that such solutions will better address their needs. Partners were encouraged to submit as many proposals as they liked.

*Pursuing a place-based strategy ("Place Matters") in thirteen neighborhoods in northeast Winston-Salem and working with residents to develop and implement a focused, integrated plan to strengthen their neighborhoods.

*Evaluating proposals in two separate funding cycles – the first for community-wide investments and the second for Place Matters specifically.

The 2016-2017 community-wide investments went to the programs and collaborations that have the potential to move the needle most quickly and sustainably with measurable effects. The programs selected align best with United Way's defined priorities and show promise in achieving significant impact in the areas of health (21 percent of funds), education (31

percent of funds), financial stability (11 percent of funds) and basic needs (30 percent of funds). A transition fund of \$450,000 has been established to help those partners who experienced a decrease in funding over 20 percent.

In addition to the funds granted as part of the community-wide investment process, another \$2,841,314 has been reserved for United Way's Place Matters initiative. Those grants will be announced in March 2016. Although the funding is being handled in two waves this year, the total amount being invested in the community is expected to remain the same. More specific detail on the programs funded as part of the community-wide investment process is available on United Way's website at <http://www.forsythunitedway.org/our-impact/positive-change-2/>.

"Where United Way invests the community's dollars is never an easy decision and, unfortunately, the need always outpaces the available resources. Investments are targeted to the programs that promise the best results on the issues that are most pressing for our residents," says Cindy Gordineer, president and CEO of United Way of Forsyth County.

Targeted?

from page A1

West Fifth Street downtown headquarters to elsewhere, or cease to exist entirely.

And with the United Way now seemingly assuming the role of fighting poverty, among other issues, observers note the justification for the Urban League's demise seems almost built in with the defunding.

"You know, when you look at the funding ... it does seem pretty strange that the only black organization downtown would be cut to that extreme," remarked a concerned community observer who asked not to be named.

The area the Urban League headquarters occupies has seen key redevelopment in recent years with the Mast General Store, the Village Loft 48-unit apartment complex, and \$14.2 million dollars in total construction permits for the coming redevelopment of the historic 22-story R. J. Reynolds building into offices, apartments and Kimpton Cardinal Hotel.

Mindful of the sensitive and delicate position they're now in, officials with the Urban League that The Chronicle contacted for this story would not offer comment, but sources close to the UL made it clear that they fully expect another shoe to drop, with the ultimate goal being to move the marginalized black people the UL serves away from that prime area for future revitalization.

"What's on that corner that's not new?" another community observer asked rhetorically, suggesting that too much redevelopment is happening for the Urban League

address to be ignored.

One suggested to not be surprised if the bus transit depot across the street, which brings poor people from impoverished areas across the city to Fifth Street, seeking the job training/placement services UL provides, is closed and moved. Doing so would eliminate the primary reason for the Urban League to continue to operate in a spot where revitalization is happening all around it.

"It's a prime piece of real estate," confirmed another community observer.

Indeed, The Chronicle has learned that several years ago, the Urban League signed over its building airspace rights for an undisclosed amount to neighbor Mast General Store, prohibiting the UL from expanding upwards during the course of that agreement.

Now that its funding has been drastically cut, there's no way the UL could even consider expansion once that agreement runs out. Indeed it may have to sell.

The Chronicle did check with both the city manager's office and the city Planning Dept., and both indicated that there are currently no plans to move the bus station.

With the United Way changing its mission from just being a funder for those doing the community work, to now actually undertaking some of the challenge itself, there are questions about its Carver School Road Place Matters Initiative.

Last fall the United Way announced that in conjunction with Neighbors for Better Neighborhood, it would invest over \$1 million to work with residents of 13 surrounding Carver School Road neighborhoods in improv-

ing their quality of life conditions. Indeed, Alana James, the director of the United Way's Community-based Collaborations, was quoted in a Sept. 10, 2015 Chronicle story as admitting that those 13 neighborhoods "... are actually not the most challenged part of the community" ... "though they did have "significant and complex issues."

But those residents are, for the most part, middle-class stable black families, critics told The Chronicle, compared to the poor populations the Urban League works with daily in administering job training skills, and then helping in job placement so that they are able to independently lift themselves up and out of gripping poverty.

Those critics question whether the United Way's Carver School Road initiative is simply a way to claim a quick victory over an area where the problems of homelessness and poverty are nowhere as acute as in some of the city's more challenging harder-hit communities.

With United Way effectively being the center-source for community funding in Winston-Salem, that limits the Urban League and the other local nonprofits who also saw their grants slashed, from making up the difference, sources say. Companies that already give to the United Way are now least likely to also give to these agencies individually, which now makes providing services, let alone keeping their doors open, even harder.

That means James Perry, who just took over as CEO of the Winston-Salem Urban League, is going to have his work cut out for him, as the prospects for his agency's survival just got tougher.

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In February, The Chronicle will produce a special section for Black History Month. We want to know your stories about living in historically black neighborhoods in Winston-Salem & Forsyth County now or in the past.

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-You send your brief story to us in 500 WORDS or less.

-You type your story or write it LEGIBLY in a document that is NOT jpeg format.

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