

Timeline of St. Vincent de Paul Park April 2009

- 1732 - Jonestown founded across the Jones Falls River from Baltimore Town. Townhouses (including current church rectory) constructed along Front Street for Baltimore's well-to-do. St. Vincent de Paul Church built 1840; Church purchases rectory and additional buildings 1888.
- 1870s-1930s Neighborhood demographics shift with successive waves of immigration. Affluent residents of Jonestown move to other areas of the city and county.
- 1960-63 As a part of an urban renewal project, City acquires all land and demolishes all property except the church and rectory on the west side of Front Street from Fayette to Lexington. City sells the property immediately north of the rectory to St. Vincent's for a parking lot. City establishes a park south of St. Vincent's to Fayette St. and north of St. Vincent's parking lot to Lexington St. The south park, which has benches, quickly becomes a favored hangout for the homeless and marginally homeless, and becomes known as "wino park."
- 1988 Church purchases the north park for use as plaza and additional parking lot.
- 1990-2005 Homeless begin sleeping in St. Vincent's park. They are occasionally arrested by police enforcing park rules, which include sunset to sunrise curfews.
- 2000 St. Vincent de Paul Church acquires the south park from the City. When homeless are arrested for loitering, Pastor intervenes in their defense, challenging the applicability of public park rules on private property.
- 2004 City clears all homeless persons from City Hall Plaza area. Park population expands.
- 2005 Health Care for the Homeless, in a Housing first pilot project, houses 28 individuals from the park. Several months later, two people housed from the park are killed in their apartment as a result of drug activity. The project has otherwise continued successfully. Additional clients have been added for a current total of 36.
- City officials approach Fr. Lawrence at St. Vincent's, and ask that all homeless persons be forbidden from loitering and sleeping in the park. City threatens criminal prosecution of the Pastor if the homeless are not moved.
- 2006 Officer Sharon Talley from Baltimore City Police Department begins a dialogue with Fr. Lawrence, with an aim towards reducing illegal activity

in the park and improving quality of life and access to services for park residents.

- 2007, Spring St. Vincent's parish convenes a Town Meeting to talk about the particular challenges to parish life which are presented by having a homeless encampment on the property. Parishioners put concerns and questions in writing for review by the Parish Council.
- 2007, Fall St. Vincent's Parish Council releases a letter to the parish, which details the options for action on the question of the park as discussed and decided upon by Parish Council consensus. Parish Council supports allowing the homeless to stay in the park, and also supports parishioners' hope of a more engaged ministry to the park residents. Parishioners are invited to respond to the letter and to form an advocacy group.
- 2008, Jan. Baltimore Homeless Services (BHS) invites St. Vincent de Paul Church to be a part of a training session in the "Street to Home" project. This is a Housing First program, which BHS intends to implement as a part of the city's ten year plan to end homelessness. Audrey Rogers and Colleen McCahill attend for St. Vincent's.

Following the training, Audrey and Colleen inform St. Vincent's Parish Council about the City's desire to target the residents of St. Vincent's park for housing. The Parish Council determines that St. Vincent's should be in dialogue with BHS on this issue.

Representatives from BHS and other city agencies meet with Fr. Lawrence, Deacon Bill Pearson, Audrey, and Colleen. It is agreed that there will be a Memorandum of Understanding between BHS and St. Vincent de Paul Church with respect to the following points:

1. BHS will begin offering housing to park residents and other homeless in the park.
2. St. Vincent's will not forbid any homeless person from sleeping in the park.
3. No homeless person residing in the park will be forced to relocate.
4. In the interest of continued dialogue, St. Vincent de Paul Church will send a delegate to BHS planning meetings.

- 2008, Feb. St. Vincent's submits a Letter of Intention to the Weinberg Foundation, as the first step in a grant proposal process. If funded, a grant would provide some training for the homeless sleeping in our church park to assume stipend-rewarded park management duties, and funding to hire a part-time manager to monitor this process, and to assist in engaging the homeless in a "resident council" to develop park rules and use group solidarity to enforce them.

- 2008, Spring Weinberg funding denied. Application is submitted to the Abell Foundation and denied. Application, supported by Archbishop O'Brien and Bishop Madden, submitted to the Knott Foundation. This, too, is denied. Audrey requests parish support to implement the program: Fr. Dick allows voluntary donations to the park fund through bulletin appeal only. The Park Working Group is formed and the position of park manager is defined and advertised. A candidate is selected and archdiocesan approval process is initiated. BHS and the PWG begin monthly meetings at St. Vincent's.
- 2008, May: Baltimore Homeless Services conducts vulnerability evaluations in the park whose results are reported in the Sun. The city again strongly recommends that the park be closed; Fr. Dick refuses. Winter structures in the park are disassembled.
- 2008, July St Vincent begins maintaining census records in the park. The city poisons all rat burrows throughout the park and property around St. Vincent's. Sixteen dead or dying trees are removed from the park. The PWG undertakes the interception and identification of the multitudes of donors.
- 2008, Sept. A six month evaluation of the PWG program is undertaken and the efforts are considered unsatisfactory in most program indicators. The city reports difficulty in locating many of the persons targeted for housing from the May evaluation.
- 2008, Oct: The Park Working Group is reformed and new members are recruited. Clean and Clear volunteer teams are formed. First persons are housed from the park.
- 2009, Jan. The city tells us at the January Meeting that they are terminating the *Street to Home* Project in the park. We subsequently query them through a memo about whether we understand correctly that all housing offers will be through the shelter system only. If they intended to continue to offer housing to unsheltered homeless, we question why that could not be through the park. BHS responds that they will continue to house unsheltered homeless but they consider the park to be an unacceptable and unworkable venue for their efforts due to the "...transience of the population, its culture, and unsanitary conditions. BHS makes it clear that they will not consider the park as any sort of gateway to housing for homeless people in Baltimore City. They indicate their commitment to maintaining a relationship with the church based on the mutual interest of serving the homeless.