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CITY TAKES ACTION ON HOMELESSNESS SUMMIT RECOMMENDATIONS

St. Petersburg, Fla. (February 28, 2007) – Today, city and community leaders released an immediate action plan to address the solutions proposed at last weekend's Neighborhood and Business Summit on Homelessness. The summit, called by Mayor Rick Baker, was co-chaired by Leslie Curran, St. Petersburg city council member, Don Shea, president & CEO of the St. Petersburg Downtown Partnership, Barbara Heck, president of the Council of Neighborhood Associations (CONA) and Ford Keyes, incoming president of the St. Petersburg Chamber of Commerce. Attended by 300 participants from a diverse cross-section of the community – neighborhoods, businesses, members of the homeless community, homeless activists, county representatives and city leaders – the purpose of the summit was to determine solutions to the growing concerns related to homelessness in St. Petersburg.

Following a series of informational presentations by the St. Petersburg Police Department, Catholic Charities and the Pinellas County Coalition for the Homeless, participants were assigned to break-out groups for brainstorming sessions meant to garner ideas and solutions. A "group leader" then presented the information to all summit participants. By the completion of the summit, consensus was reached on the following items: tents are not the solution to the issue of homelessness; housing, social services and employment opportunities for the homeless should continue to be pursued; and the public should be educated on homeless issues and services.

As a result of these recommendations, the following initiatives have been set into motion:

- 1) **Address the issue of tents being used to house the homeless.** City representatives, homeless activists, and community leaders have worked together to develop a plan to relocate the tent city located at 18th Street and Central Avenue (in the Grand Central district). A resolution will go before St. Petersburg City Council on Thursday, March 1st, recommending that the existing tents be moved, on a temporary basis, to a controlled setting near the St. Vincent de Paul facility. The move will be coordinated with Refuge Ministries, FLASH, Catholic Charities, the St. Petersburg Fire, Police and Sanitation Departments, the Homeless Leadership Network, St. Vincent de Paul and members of the homeless community. The resolution will allow for a 90-day codes exemption for the St. Vincent de Paul site and stipulate that no more tents will be added the location. Additionally, the summit participants recommended to close the loopholes in existing ordinances and propose a

new ordinance that addresses tents and sleeping in the right of way in St. Petersburg. "This is a rational, short-term solution that will alleviate the issues related to homeless encampments in the right of way, while we are working to develop a permanent solution in mid-county and other areas," said Don Shea, president & CEO of the St. Petersburg Downtown Partnership. "The Downtown Partnership will continue to offer its assistance and support."

2) Aggressively continue to develop a mid-county transition facility. Consistent with the Homeless Leadership Network's 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness, city, community and county leaders and organizations will continue to work toward the development of a mid-county facility (currently identified as the former PSTA site in Largo) to provide shelter, services and employment assistance for the homeless.

3) Educate the public on homelessness issues and services available to the homeless. A public awareness campaign will be coordinated by the city and the Homeless Leadership Network to provide information on homelessness statistics, what the community is doing to help and services available to members of the homeless community in St. Petersburg. Another element of the campaign will educate the public on how and where to make food and financial contributions.

As these action items are implemented, the work of the Homeless Leadership Network and other organizations continues. The financial support of the Catholic Diocese of St. Petersburg and Bishop Lynch allows representatives of Catholic Charities to maintain their daily work with homeless individuals to find housing, services and employment. St. Vincent de Paul has, for years, worked tirelessly to address the needs of the homeless in our community. The organization's gracious generosity and support in providing meals, clothing and other social services, specifically during the last several months, has been an enormous help to St. Petersburg. "Their willingness to once again step forward and provide more assistance is greatly appreciated by the city," said David Metz, deputy mayor of neighborhood services. Additionally, the congregation of Northwest Presbyterian Church in St. Petersburg recently voted to host members of the homeless community as guests and provide meals, showers, laundry and transportation services throughout the month of March. "In recent months, we have seen that it takes more than just government to alleviate the issue of homelessness – it takes the entire community," said Mayor Rick Baker. "We appreciate the assistance and support of all of the organizations that are working collaboratively to address the needs of our city and all of its residents."

"The Neighborhood and Business Summit on Homelessness was an important step in the community effort to alleviate homelessness in St. Petersburg and Pinellas County," said Barbara Heck, president of CONA. "The needs of businesses, residents, and members of the homeless community have obviously been heard and immediate action is being taken to address these concerns."