

MAINE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
8/04 * ME
Urban Campers: A New Population For CIA
Laurie Potier-Brown

Moderator: Our presenter will be Laurie Potier Brown. Laurie Potier-Brown is the community design manager for the Tampa office of PBS & J. Don't ask me what it stands for. Ms. Potier-Brown is a graduate of the University of Florida, where she earned a masters in landscape architecture. Laurie's undergraduate degree is from the University of South Florida, in Psychology. Good one!

Ms. Potier-Brown is a State of Florida registered landscape architect -- also known as an RLA -- a certified planner, an AICP, and a certified consensus-builder. Recent notable projects that Ms. Potier-Brown has worked on include the new Tampa Boulevard bridge aesthetics design, and the current Florida high-speed rail PD & E study for the Tampa-to-Orlando section.

With her psychology, landscape architecture and planning experience, Ms. Potier-Brown focuses extend across aesthetics and design opportunities, to community impact issues, and all facets of community involvement. Let's welcome Laurie with a round of applause!

Audience: [applause]

Laurie Potier-Brown: Can you hear me? Now I'm on. Hi. We were walking through the woods, looking for gopher tortoises or things of that sort. What did we find? We found people. A whole new community of people that we'd not planned on bumping into. The urban camper community. I'm going to tell you a little bit about them, today.

Up here on the screen, you'll see a tent. It's a solo tent in the woods. It's very hard to see, isn't it? That's intentional on the camper's part. Please note, on the top of his tent is a flag. This picture was taken about a year after 9/11. Is he a veteran? Most likely. Definitely, he's a patriot. And he's an urban camper.

The team -- the CIA team -- the two major players on this project -- were Gwen [Pitkin] who cannot be here today. She's FDOT District 1, the environmental manager. I did eat her lobster, though. So I took care of it. And then myself, from PBS & J.

The project was a simple, road-widening project -- one of Florida's favorites. The project started in downtown Sarasota, in the yellow segment -- segment 1 -- a very rural area. It extended 5 miles north to segment 3, the blue area -- fairly rural and very urban in downtown. The project was very straightforward, as Gwen was doing her environmental analysis -- until she ran into the urban campers. She was doing this because she was identifying potential pond sites in the wooded areas.

The railroad crossing on the bottom image is a picture of one of the sites where she found urban campers. While Gwen was doing this, I was identifying the traditional community impacts along this US301 corridor. I was researching characteristics of the existing traditional communities. I was identifying the parks, the churches, the schools, the regular facilities. Gwen, on the other side, found a lot more than the traditional communities. She found a lot more than the gopher tortoises. She found humans. And she found humans who had a need.

She found a single tent as well as 100 tents. There was one group of woods that had 100 tents -- in a very organized community. Now, in Florida, we are warm year-round. Because of that, we see a lot of homeless

people, as we call them. I am a Floridian. I had never really given much thought to where they go at night. So we found out.

I'd like to take a moment to differentiate between what I call a "homeless" and what we're talking about here today -- which we can call "urban campers." The homeless have no stable home. They may work with the urban campers through the labor pools, the low-wage jobs -- but they really don't have a place to go. They sleep in the doorways. You'll see them on the park benches, in the culverts. Under the bridges. You'll see them in a new site every night. They really don't have a social structure. They may have a single person that they reach out to periodically -- a family member. But typically, they use facilities that are available to them through social service agencies on an opportunistic basis. They really don't have a "connection." They wander. They don't have a place to go.

Urban campers, on the other hand, go home. They go home to a place that we don't understand. It's a place that's not made of wood and brick like we know it. It's a place like a tent. And it's not an LL Bean tent like we know. It may be a tent with a tarp, comprised of leftover materials of wood. It's all leftover materials for leftover people. It's an organized place. They have a hierarchy in these camps. There's a camp leader. There's a camp community of a pot of food. If they're working, if they have money -- income of any sort -- they're required to contribute to that pot of food. And this whole camp is a very structured environment where they can be safe. They can go home every night to the same place. It's a more stable life than the homeless life.

Once we'd identified our new urban communities, the question became, "What do we do with them?" Because of my psychology degree -- and my firm was already working on this project -- Gwen came to me and said, "What do we do with them? How do we handle this?"

Since they have no property rights or tenant rights, we could've pretended not to see them. In Florida, traditionally, about a day before construction and the bulldozers arrive, they put an orange tag on the tree in the middle of the campsite. Gwen said she wanted to do something gentler -- something more humane. The orange tag process is very effective, but it's not as humane as what she wanted to do. So that was our effort.

There were a few people along the way that we talked to -- both within the city and the county -- that were a bit frustrated by our efforts to reach out and be nice to these people. They said, "You know they don't pay taxes. We don't have to do this." It turns out, once we started looking into it, they do pay taxes. They buy goods. They are surviving. They buy milk. They buy bread. They're paying tax. Payroll tax. Sales tax. Many of them work. Many of them owned homes. Many of them rented. It turns out, many of them have had life crash down around them.

So what was our legal responsibility to these folks? NEPA addresses both the environmental and the social issues. State law and city and county law was very much less clear. After much discussion to do the right thing, that's what we decided to do. But no formal policy at this point in our process. So through NEPA, we are being kind to the gopher tortoises, and we thought as a team, "How could we be any less kind to the human? Especially the humans with tough times."

Once we decided to then include them formally in our CIA document -- in our process -- an interesting fact emerged. When the urban camper community leaves their woods, their bridge, their culvert -- wherever their campsite is set up -- how do they get where they're going? They had a pedestrian transportation needs, just as well as any of the traditional communities that I interviewed along that part of the roadway. So it turned out that segment 3 of our project length had more needs in those areas than the previous 2 segments.

We ended up not having to deal with the urban camper transportation issues. By the time our PD&E study was winding down, Gwen and I went back to these wooded sites as a team, to get more photos. Lo and behold, there was not a single tent left. The hundred campsites were gone!

Our focus for the CIA plan became one of identifying the time site of the construction, and notifying the urban campers well in advance, so that they could relocate themselves in a timely manner, and in a calm manner -- rather than less than 24 hours notice. You may ask why self-relocate. After talking with the city and the county, they felt that by identifying a site for the campers to relocate to, they became liable. They became liable for the process of moving. They became liable for the indirect effect that may occur as a result of them moving. What about fires? An increase in fires to a new site? Increase in theft? All sort so things that may occur if they didn't want to take on that responsibility. At this point in time, though they were aware that they had urban campers, they tended to do this. "Let's just sort of not directly talk about it." So we did produce a standalone CIA document. I have a copy of it here with me with all of the supporting addenda. If you would like to take a look at it after the presentation, please come and do so. If you want a copy, I can e-mail you. Just bring me your card.

Let's take a moment and go back to the traditional CIA, and what we did along this corridor. We held our regular community meetings with the traditional minority neighborhoods that were located along this part of 301. There were three primary issues that arose. Of those three, the primary issue was safety -- especially child safety -- in crossing 301. The CIA document also addresses trying to maintain the community identity on both sides of this roadway, as the traditional minority community has split into, each time US 301 has widened. This was going to impact them once again. They begged us to help keep their friends, families and community together.

Then the third was a context-sensitive issue. Talking about landscape. What was the appearance of their community before the widening? They wanted to maintain that. And here's an opportunity to maybe enhance that. They were also talking about visual buffering and noise-buffering through landscape materials. We addressed all of these and the solutions in our CIA document. The FDOT has promised to provide solutions in the design process, to accommodate all of those. What does the urban camper CIA document include? Well, our focus has been to encourage the timely relocation. We met with the city and county staff, and we wanted to discuss the solutions.

The picture that you'll see up there is an urban camper that's an image we picked up off the Internet. I did not get this, myself. But it's a true image. We also met with many of the organizations that specialize in the needs of the homeless. We also met with the Hillsborough County Salvation Army. Hillsborough County has more than 5,000 homeless or urban campers. Sarasota County, we met with the Parks & Rec Department to talk about their wooded sites, nearby. We talked to the Health & Human Services and Social Services to understand what type of services were available that they knew of that were functioning, to contact the homeless and urban campers. We also met with City of Sarasota, of course, through the District Commissioner, Neighborhood Development Department.

Next slide. After speaking with all those people, we realized our best advocate to contact the urban campers were through the churches, housing agencies, free clinics, emergency rooms, the Red Cross, specifically soup kitchens and outreach ministries. We felt that our best opportunity was to go through them -- let them be our intermediaries. We found out later that trying to walk in there with police -- trying to walk in there with DOT people -- they scattered. You can't do that.

Next slide. At this point, we realized we had some data on the urban campers. It's kind of stunning. In Sarasota County, the estimate was greater than 3,000. The national stats indicate that 1/3 have a substance abuse problem of their own. One third suffer from mental health problems. One third are economic problems.

An example of an economic problem is, let's say you have a worker that's working under the table. He's, say, a roofer. He takes a fall. He's out of work -- no pay. He's got a family. It takes about four weeks and he's being evicted. He's got a family; where does he go? You look at that next fact, and it's 40 percent women with

children. They say that's the fastest-growing community within the urban camper population -- women with children. So let's continue with our examples.

They're evicted. They move in with friends. Well, they can't take their furniture. Their friends have a small house or apartment. So they sell their furniture. So now they've given up their home possessions. Then they start looking around. She's trying to get a job working at McDonald's. She doesn't have an education. She discovers that the social service benefits are greater for women with children without a male as the head of the house. So they split up the family in order to survive.

Now she gets an apartment. She's trying to make it work. She ends up selling her car. She needs the money. Now she's trying to raise kids, work, just make ends meet using public transportation. Well, down in Florida in Tampa, in Sarasota, public transportation is still in the works. It's still not really effective -- especially if you're out in some of the rural areas.

So what does she do? She moves to the Salvation Army. The other fact that you see up there -- the average age is 9 years old. How does that happen? Well, she's living in the Salvation Army. The Army offers retraining, career programs, they'll help these women get back on their feet -- and men. They offer childcare for the kids. They offer transportation for the kids to school, so the women can get back on their feet. Then one night, she's cornered. Salvation Army is a structure. It's got hard walls. She's cornered. She gets out of there. She takes her family and she moves out. Where does she go? To an abandoned car -- with her kids. Average age -- 9 years. So eventually, she moves into an urban camper community. They're organized.

One other stat that I want to point out. If somebody is out of our social structure system and in the urban camper community for a year, there is a 90 percent chance that they won't come back in. You ask why. Because I did. The fringes of mainstream society typically is where the urban camper people -- homeless people -- have been living. It's easy for them to fall out. They're not far from sinking typically, anyway. Some of the urban camper communities are healthier than others. Oftentimes these women are able to find a good, stable environment. In general, when you get into a camper community, your economic demands are less. Your social structure is set for you. You fit in. There's much less judgment placed against you, so you feel better about being there. By the time a year has passed, you've learned how to cash a paycheck. You've learned how to get into the labor pools. They have taught you the system. It's an organized system out there.

At the Salvation Army, the lights go out at 9. There's no drinking or smoking. In the urban camper community, you can drink and smoke all night. There are rules, but you can maintain your own lifestyle within those rules. Knowing all this, what were we to do? We needed to ensure that the human values and concerns received proper attention during our project design. That was our goal. In putting our plan of action together, there were things we wanted to know. Where do folks go? They find other undeveloped sites and spaces. They're going to move further into the rural areas, typically, to find those.

The problem is that many of the social service agencies that provide the services that they need -- food and shelter -- are typically located in the urban areas. Another problem is that oftentimes if you have a job, you do need some public transportation to get to the job. If you have your kids enrolled in a school, which often is happening kind of under the direct level of eye contact, now you've got to relocate them and get them into another school.

What were some of the impacts on the surrounding community when they dispersed? Workers are gone. Right? They move out. What are the labor pools doing? They need those workers. Often if you have a low-wage job, those people need the workers. The local businesses lose customers. There goes your little grocery store where some of these urban campers were coming in for their food. They're out of there. Now the adjacent landowners may be happy. But there are other communities of folks that aren't so happy that they've moved on.

Can the urban campers safely relocate in advance of construction? They sure did for us. Well in advance. We're not sure why. When Gwen and I went back, as I said, to get photos, the 100 tents were gone in that one campsite that was so large. We intended to post flyers in several languages. We also intended to spread the word through those intermediaries -- at the churches and at the soup kitchens. But we never got a chance to do that because they were gone.

Where did they go? We don't know. In our planning, we looked at potential sites within a 5-mile radius. Not to tell the urban campers where to relocate, but to maybe notify the property owners of the impending dispersion, so that they could shore up their properties. If you owned a piece of wooded lot, maybe you needed to put some extra lighting out. We talked to the Parks Department and said if they dispersed, they'd probably need to clean up some of the shrub masses and just make it a more visual, open experience. Basically, to discourage the urban campers from moving in.

We still don't know where they went; we still don't know why they left. We asked several of the social service agencies. They didn't give us an answer. But the problem was solved, and it was solved in advance of the time that we needed, so we felt that it was a gentler fashion, for sure. I personally believe the fact that we were out there talking to the city and the county, poking around and asking questions, I think the word got back. I think they preferred to be left alone, they gathered up their people and moved on out.

What is the outcome? Well, for sure we're going to take care of the context-sensitive features that we wanted to do. We're going to provide the pedestrian amenities that the traditional communities requested. The images that were up there were typical of that area. Then of course, we will try to provide direct notification if in case there are campers that relocate back into those wooded sites before they get ready to do construction. We'll keep our eye out, there.

Conclusions. People were quite happy that we were out there trying to do this. They wanted to keep it at a lower profile. They did not want a lot of publicity. They don't want to know directly what's going on. But they did support us. The social service agencies really appreciated our using the existing connections, rather than enforcing or forcing something onto people. Many people couldn't believe the FDOT was asking these questions and trying to do this. It really raised the bar for them. And we really believe it's a much better way to do business.

One of the things I want to say is that they are out there. The reason they're out there is an economic and social reason. It's nothing that any of us or all of us in this room together can solve. So they're out there. What are we going to do to help them? You'll bump into them, I'm sure. So take care of them.

I'd like to open for questions, but before I do that, I want to ask -- in the room, who has bumped into homeless in their projects? May I see a show of hands? And who's bumped into urban camping communities in their projects? So it's happening. Let's open it for some questions and discussion, as well. It's a fascinating topic. Anything?

Speaker: Are urban campers native Americans, or are they immigrants?

Laurie Potier-Brown: Yes. Down in Florida, we have many Hispanics from the Miami area, from Cuba. That's why we were going to print our flyers in numerous languages.

Speaker: How would you [inaudible]

Laurie Potier-Brown: All the interviewing we did. We met with numerous -- the Salvation Army was just a wonderful wealth of information, and a lot of hands-on. Daily hands-on. We met with metropolitan ministries and different organizations -- but the Salvation Army really was helpful.

Speaker: [inaudible]

Laurie Potier-Brown: No. Not off the top of my head. I could go back to my notes and see what else I have. Yes?

Speaker: [inaudible]

Laurie Potier-Brown: Yes. Yes. That's what Sarasota was like. "We're not going to relocate them! Then we become liable."

Speaker: [inaudible]

Laurie Potier-Brown: When we were doing our interviews, Health & Human Services had a whole list of people. You're right. It's all a very tight community. Everybody seems to know everybody. The thing they really warned us about though, was you can't just walk in to them. I think we actually spooked them. The word probably got out that we'd nosed them out, and though we were trying to do something good, the word got out. That really reinforces using those existing systems, and just... I mean it's a very simple process. Just spread the word through those systems and work with your county and city officials to see if they can somehow try to come up with some unique way. Yes.

Speaker: I'm wondering if the police probably know that they're there.

Laurie Potier-Brown: Oh, they do.

Speaker: [inaudible]

Laurie Potier-Brown: It's one of these, Brenda.

Speaker: [inaudible]

Laurie Potier-Brown: No. It's one of those. They just prefer not to see.

Speaker: [inaudible]

Laurie Potier-Brown: And so many of them don't have a green card, down in Florida. I mean they don't want to be found.

Speaker: [inaudible]

Laurie Potier-Brown: Yes. It sure does.

Speaker: [inaudible]

Laurie Potier-Brown: Yes. I was trying to be polite when I said there were a "few" people who got freaked out, that were trying to be nice to these people -- and it was typically the police. They were like...

Speaker: [inaudible]

Laurie Potier-Brown: Yes. That'd be great.

Speaker: [inaudible]

Laurie Potier-Brown: I must say that part of the concern about approaching these people is, 1/3 have mental health problems. My husband here is a PhD psychologist. He can tell you, it's a little spooky. You don't want to confront them. It's just way dangerous. Yes.

Speaker: Do people take advantage of them? Go in and beat them up or take their things?

Laurie Potier-Brown: I think the loners -- the homeless loners -- are assaulted frequently. I think when you go into one of those camps where there's a hierarchy, that's what the purpose is -- it's to protect one another. It's a looser environment than we know socially, but it's an assurance that you've got some protection. Especially if you have kids. But the homeless are assaulted frequently. We know that. Yes, in the back?

Speaker: [inaudible]

Laurie Potier-Brown: It's established. Yes.

Speaker: [inaudible]

Laurie Potier-Brown: Yes. There they are.

Speaker: [inaudible]

Laurie Potier-Brown: One little sidebar. We were talking [inaudible] -- is there anybody here from Miami to help me speak about this? In Miami Florida, there is a huge cluster living along the Miami River. Beautiful! All the beautiful parks in Miami. They've spent all this money -- the City of Miami -- to attract the tourists, the sunshine -- and there are all these homeless that have taken up residence under a lot of the bridges that go over these parks and cross over to the islands. I think it was at the Olympics or a ballgame, they were having some national -- they were having Super Bowl. The City of Miami decided, "Heck. We're going to move these people. Because we don't want to have to have them seen by all the tourists that are going to come to Miami." So they shipped buses over there and literally helped all the people on the bus and took them to some holding pen or place. Then they bulldozed all their little homes. I don't know what happened, but something legal -- somebody legal stepped in and said that they have rights to those homes. Now these people have electricity back under those bridges. They're established. Is that right?

Speaker: Yes. The legal aid folks got involved and said, "Wait a minute. If you're going to do something with these people as a legal entity -- if you've got the right to push them around, you also have the responsibility to take care of them and warn them and provide them with [inaudible]." So it ended up backfiring [inaudible] because now the issue came from under the radar screen [inaudible] It was in the newspapers. It was on TV. Now the legal sector's going around. There were court orders basically the City of Miami couldn't force any of those people out unless they were given a place to go. So all of a sudden the community started getting larger and larger. You've got a city that's now stuck. They can't get them out. Yes. It was a mess.

Laurie Potier-Brown: Now they have rights.

Speaker: Right. So the whole idea that happened here in Sarasota was a social issue. But keeping it under the radar screen. The cities and counties are going to want to keep it there. [inaudible] They don't want the publicity, and 2 -- the minute you start doing something formally by a government entity, you start incurring responsibility, and boy what a mess that can turn into.

Speaker: [inaudible]

Laurie Potier-Brown: I don't know; that's why.

Speaker: There's no statute. There are no statutes. But they went to the county court, and the county court put out [inaudible] it was not a law of the state, but it was a county court order that stopped the city. It has not yet made it into Florida legislative law. Local. It's local.

Speaker: In Seattle when the Alaskan [inaudible] I've heard a lot of is that the State DOT folks were saying homeless were there illegally and therefore we don't have to do anything about it. Because they're there illegally to begin with.

Laurie Potier-Brown: Yes.

Speaker: That's why I was curious about that.

Laurie Potier-Brown: Yes.

Speaker: [inaudible]

Laurie Potier-Brown: Oh, great.

Speaker: [inaudible]

Laurie Potier-Brown: Florida person, here.

Speaker: Elizabeth Rockwell is the [inaudible] manager for Miami-Dade MPO. She might be able to help you. Or David Corros, who's with the MPO. He might be a liaison for the DOT.

Laurie Potier-Brown: Great. Thank you.

Speaker: What was the name [inaudible]?

Speaker: David Corros. C O R R O S

Laurie Potier-Brown: Thanks. Any other questions? Comments? Yes.

Speaker: [inaudible] Sort of a random remark. I wanted to come to your session, but I didn't think it was going to be about this. I thought it was going to be about these parks that have formal camping that fill up with people for two weeks at a time because they want to get work in a big city. In some of these outlying parks, they can camp there. They camp for two weeks and then they move to the next park. Like Flat Hills in Washington, DC. Like regional parks. They can camp there and get a decent job in Washington DC with big salaries, but no way could they afford to live there. So they stay for two weeks and then move on.

Laurie Potier-Brown: Wow. That's interesting.

Speaker: That's sort of another dimension of the same problem.

Laurie Potier-Brown: So Brenda, that's another definition that needs to be explored. Yes. I mean this is really a new topic that we're discussing. There's so much to it that we hadn't even thought about or discovered.

Speaker: I heard from Kentucky that they needed to talk to each other. I know our right of way specialists are always saying if they're not there legally, they [inaudible]. That's where Washington is getting that.

Laurie Potier-Brown: Yes.

Speaker: From right of way specialists.

Laurie Potier-Brown: Yes.

Speaker: Somehow we need to deal with that issue, too.

Laurie Potier-Brown: Yes, we do. FDOT said, "We're going to do it gentler." You know? That was a choice they made. The city and county were going, "Whoa! We're not so sure! Don't get it in the paper." You know?

Speaker: If they are moved on, where do they move to? They move to another jurisdiction? I mean the problem hasn't been eliminated. It's been moved on.

Laurie Potier-Brown: Yes. It's just been shifted.

Speaker: Yes.

Laurie Potier-Brown: Yes.

Moderator: Any other questions? Well, thank you very much.

Speaker: I would think there might be sanitation issues?

Laurie Potier-Brown: Oh, yes.

Speaker: And lack of water service for people.

Laurie Potier-Brown: Yes.

Speaker: I don't see how... It's pretty dangerous for cities to ignore this under their nose.

Laurie Potier-Brown: Yes.

Speaker: I guess it's understandable, but I don't see how we can use this as social policy. This is a pretty terrible thing. Pretty awful situation.

Laurie Potier-Brown: Yes. And it's throughout the US. It's not just warm states. Understand...

Speaker: But you can see the dollar signs coming up, though, and the things they're doing. The politicians are[n't] going to say, "Well can we ask people to increase their taxes?"

Speaker: [inaudible]

Laurie Potier-Brown: Yes.

Speaker: Homelessness has been on the rise tremendously. It's from the economic hardships we're having. It's from the social policies and things of that nature. It's a bigger problem than it has been. It's a much bigger

problem. I can tell you that just in North Carolina, the numbers of homeless have doubled. The money that is there to help them find housing has been hacked. That means you've got twice the number of people and you've got 25 percent the amount of money that you had to work with. It's something to keep in mind, that this issue is going to be a growing one.

Laurie Potier-Brown: It's a growing one. And the women with children is the fastest-growing population.

Speaker: Absolutely.

Laurie Potier-Brown: How sad.

Moderator: To kind of add on to what Leigh said, one of the things we found in the identification of low-literacy and stuff -- as the individual states keep increasing the bar of what it takes in order to exit high school, more and more people are not graduating from high school. In the rural counties of South Carolina right now, 60 percent of those who start the first grade do not graduate from high school. So you are creating an under-educated group of people who therefore have lower incomes and are going to have more and more trouble trying to exist in the world. The difference between those who have technical skills -- technology skills -- and those who do not -- there's really going to be a huge gap.

One of the questions I wanted to ask was, "EJ. Are these people considered EJ? Are campers considered EJ?"

Laurie Potier-Brown: That, I don't know. I would assume you could.

Speaker: [inaudible]

Speaker: Therefore, since you've moved all of them, did you disproportionately impact EJ population?

Laurie Potier-Brown: They just melted away, Anne.

[laughter]

Speaker: This is an issue I think we're going to have to deal with.

Laurie Potier-Brown: Yes.

Speaker: As we displace people like this.

Laurie Potier-Brown: I think as Leigh was saying, it's not a homeless issue any more. It's now grown into urban camper communities. They're growing, and they're looking for some structure to survive in. Unfortunately, the Salvation Army provides the hard walls, and it's a dangerous environment.

Speaker: That's the part that I heard, also. The stirrings of actual social structure there -- they have rules and everybody has a job. You need to take care of those things. So they're a community in the sense that they're a group of people living under the same conditions.

Speaker: It's a new community.

Speaker: Just to be clear on that issue of "hard walls" versus "soft walls." When Laurie said some of these women will move out of the Salvation or other shelters because they get cornered, that means they get sexually threatened, or actually sexually assaulted. You may have people with a tie and good folks working there during the day, organizing the place and running it. In the evening, those folks go home and usually the quality of

people running the shelter decreases significantly. So some of the women will leave the shelter, even though it's a better roof to go find a community where they are safer and have other people around to protect them and sometime their daughters or sons from sexual assault. Certainly, some of the urban camper communities are more structured and more healthy than others. Some are pretty horrible. Some are moderately well-evolved communities with structure and safety and long-term stable relationships, and the kids leave the woods in the morning and go to school, and the people leave the woods in the morning, get on a bus and go to work.

[tape turn]

Speaker: ...in our place in Tampa, we're in a mixed community. I will sometimes be in the laundry getting my starched shirt out, next to somebody who came out of the woods, and the people in the laundry know they came out of the woods. And they're getting their starched shirts, so they can go down and work someplace else. It's wow.

Speaker: That's a [hip] community.

Speaker: [inaudible]

Speaker: Yes. When the parents split or the parents can't afford, or the mother can no longer afford to put a roof over their heads and she needs help, or the parents -- and I'll talk about single mothers -- because as Laurie said, there are more benefits such as Medicaid available for a split family. So if the single mother now needs a safe place for her kids, and if she's going to work, she may need daycare. She can't afford daycare. That would take most of her minimum-wage income. Within the community, there's built-in daycare. There are people that know, "We can go," and this dentist or this pediatrician visits this social service agency on this day, and will take your child. It is a community with mutual support. The kids are usually safer there than they are living in a car. The school district knows a number of the kids that come to school are coming out of the woods. But again, that's sort of under the radar scope.

What we're talking about here is a real can of worms for public policy. But for you folks who are charged with making things go better, that's part of your job. I applaud you for doing it, because those of us down in the trenches helping those folks or doing the healthcare for these folks -- often they are better off in an urban camper community than they are when they first come to our attention.

But yes, the kids are there. They've got aunts and uncles and mothers, and the healthier the community, the better the place it is to be a kid. Yes, there are some unhealthy communities.

Speaker: Like any community. [inaudible]

Speaker: Sobering.

Speaker: Earlier, you had mentioned about finding the urban communities. The urban campers. You had gone back to take pictures, only to find out that they were gone. What were some of the things that you were going to do in working with that community of people, if that was the preferred alternative in the end? What was going to be done to try to get them to move on? And how would they be helped? What were some of those things?

Laurie Potier-Brown: What we were planning to do was to provide -- and our plan is written up according to this... To provide the flyers -- the typical flyers -- in the various languages that we had heard that they spoke. Also to use the social service agencies -- the soup kitchens, the ministries -- all of the existing social service agencies -- use that and get the word out to them that the bulldozers were going to arrive June 1st. The important thing there was to say that if you said, "Bulldozers are coming in June 1st," they need to be there June

1st. If you don't follow through, you're going to lose any power that you had in using this system, and they won't believe you. They don't believe it's happening. But anyway, we were going to notify them through those agencies, word of mouth. Because we can't walk in there with the police. That's not going to happen. You can't send a psychologist in there. That's not going to work.

What's in place is what we tried to find. What are the contacts that are in place that are not threatening to them so that we can get the word out to them well in advance, so they can relocate themselves. Because as we said, the city and the county did not want to be responsible. They had some very strong members on their county commission that were representative of some of the people in the urban camper community or these communities. They said, "We just are not ready to address that formally, yet. We know they exist. We just don't really want to see it that boldly. So please just do what you're doing." They moved on. I think they sniffed it out and heard we were coming.

It's not a fancy plan. It's using the existing infrastructure. But trying to make sure that you communicate both visually, verbally, and through whatever means was already in place. Very non-threatening.

Speaker: [inaudible]

Laurie Potier-Brown: If you look at this, you can see the tent tucked back in the woods. Gwen and I took this picture together. Here we are, two women wandering down a railroad track with woods on either side. We knew the large camps had left, but we went back out just to see if we could catch something. There's the solo tent. I'll tell you what -- the hair went up on my arms, because this was a year after 9/11, and he's flying his flag. He's very proud. Yes. How do we not help them? Thank you.

Moderator: Thank you, Laurie.

Laurie Potier-Brown: Thank you.

Audience: [applause]

[session ends]