

October 6, 2009

City council members(each will receive a copy of letter)
202 C St.
San Diego, Ca. 92101

Dear Councilmember:

As legislative chair of the Regional Continuum of Care Council, I have been asked to mail a letter to all members of the City Council of San Diego endorsing a downtown site for the winter shelter program.

It is clear from the Point in Time Count conducted by the Regional Task Force on the Homeless on January 30, 2009 that twice as many street individuals were counted in District Two, Councilmember Kevin Faulconer's district, than in any other council district. More than half of the street homeless in the city are in District Two. Here is the street homeless count by council district:

- District 1(48)
- District 2(1,098)
- District 3(455)
- District 4(3)
- District 5(66)
- District 6(111)
- District 7(11)
- District 8(115)

Because the street population is not distributed evenly throughout the city, it is not logical, efficient, or effective to place shelters or services in districts with a very low homeless population. The issue of access to services is very important and compounded by the lack of convenient access to public transportation throughout the city. There would be substantial additional costs required to transport homeless individuals to and from a shelter site outside of downtown.

Shelters must also operate at a certain economy of scale, because each shelter site has to be staffed with a certain number of individuals trained to work in shelters, and each site would need to have security available 24/7. So it is not financially feasible to operate smaller shelter sites in each council district.

It should be noted that the homeless populations and the programs that serve them were located in the downtown area prior to the redevelopment of the downtown area and the subsequent increase in the downtown residential population. No mitigating allowances were made for this population when Petco Park was built nor when the Downtown Community Plan Update was approved.

The longer the city council remains indecisive regarding the location of a winter site, the longer it will take to begin preparations to be able to open December 1[The Alpha Project would like to open before Thanksgiving], when the weather will warrant the need for the type of shelter and services provided by the city's winter shelter program. In addition, it should be noted that it will be more expensive for Veterans Village of San Diego to rent essential equipment to erect the shelter tents twice if they cannot erect the veterans' tent and the tent for single men and women on a 'back to back' schedule.

The shelter site cannot reasonably be located anywhere in the central city because many of the services needed by those who stay there are within walking distance. Some medical services are available, but most of the services provided consist of assessment and referral to off-site agencies and programs, and they are not available on a daily basis, for the most part. The Alpha Project provides showers, toilet facilities, security, dinner, 24/7 security and monitoring, a continental breakfast, outreach workers for

other Alpha Project programs, blankets, and distribution of public in-kind donations that can vary widely in quantity and quality throughout the shelter season. A centrally located facility allows these services to be provided in a cost-effective manner. A more remote shelter location would, again, increase the cost of service.

Among the services tent participants access in the downtown area are lunch at St. Vincent de Paul Village, services such as a mailing address and birth certificate assistance offered at Neil Good Day Center, services provided at Senior Community Centers (please note that a growing proportion of winter shelter participants are 60 or older and increasingly frail), AA and NA meetings, county services such as food stamps and general relief, Social Security programs such as SSI and SSDI, case management at nearby agencies, and assistance for those with physical disabilities. These agencies are not able to send staff somewhere else in the city if the shelter participants cannot come to them, and the shelter participants will not have convenient access if the shelter is placed outside of the downtown area. With local, state, and federal funding cutbacks, it is likely that some of these services could be less available even for walk-in traffic at their sites.

Further delays could also imperil the planning involved for Project Homeless Connect, the one day service and resource fair for homeless individuals and families, scheduled for December 2 at Golden Hall. It is not possible to change the date for this event, which always occurs after the opening of the city's winter shelter program. Last year, more than 750 homeless people benefitted from the services and resources offered there.

Obviously, the existence of winter shelters is not a long term solution for the challenges facing the mostly chronic homeless population who participate in the city's winter shelter program. But until adequate permanent supportive housing and a year-round shelter and homeless services site is operational, it is better than doing nothing. We urge you to approve a downtown shelter site at your October 13 council hearing without further delay.

Sincerely,

Rosemary Johnston
Legislative chair, Regional Continuum of Care Council