



August 15, 2014

Mayor Kevin L. Faulconer
City of San Diego
City Administration Building
202 C Street, 11th Floor
San Diego, CA 92101

Dear Mayor Faulconer,

The ACLU of San Diego and Imperial Counties respectfully submits this letter to urge the issuance of a Request for Proposal or negotiation for the sale of the City-owned parcel of land located at 2183-2193 National Avenue.

Our community partner, Family Health Centers of San Diego (FHCS), has expressed interest in bidding on a RFP or negotiating directly with the City to purchase this parcel. FHCS would use the parcel to expand their Family Counseling Center (FCC), which provides mental health counseling services to San Diego residents. The current FCC has reached maximum capacity, and the expansion would help alleviate outstanding demand for mental health counseling, including the five percent of the San Diego County population estimated to have serious mental illness.

The Real Estate Assets Department has confirmed that this parcel is entirely owned by the City and is not under lease. We understand the parcel currently operates as a mostly unused parking lot. Given the high need for mental health counseling services in underserved areas, expansion of the FCC to this parcel would produce a public benefit far surpassing the value to the City of the parcel's current use. Release of an RFP or direct negotiation with FHCS would be in accordance with City Council Policy 700-10, which states "The Mayor will review City-owned real estate not used for municipal purposes and determine the appropriate use of the property," and that sale or lease will be optimized by consideration of any special public benefits to be derived.

The public benefits that will accrue from expansion of the FCC are multiple. The City would realize revenue from the land sale and save significant money in the future due to reduced law enforcement costs. The expansion would allow FHCS to provide much needed mental health services to San Diego residents. This would ultimately save money and increase public safety. Without appropriate services, many individuals with mental illness utilize San Diego law enforcement resources. SANDAG recently reported a fifty-five percent increase in the number of calls to law enforcement for issues related to mental health between 2008 and 2013 (from 14,442 calls to 22,315 calls). These not only impose significant costs, but they also prevent law enforcement officers from responding to other emergencies.

An estimated twenty-nine percent of individuals booked in San Diego jails report a previous mental health diagnosis. Without community resources to address this need, the jails will remain the depository for individuals with mental illness. This wastes taxpayer money and does not increase public safety because many individuals will return to the criminal justice system without community support. If such support existed, many may never need to interact with the justice system.

Developing community based services is especially important in light of Public Safety Realignment, which has increased the populations of the local jails.

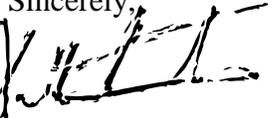
Both the California Board of State and Community Corrections (formerly the Corrections Standards Authority) and SANDAG have recognized that lack of community treatment resources contributes to the large amount of individuals with mental illness who enter the criminal justice system. It is imperative that we have community resources available to assist individuals instead of simply defaulting to arrest and incarceration. Expansion of mental health counseling services will reduce the City's costs associated with prosecuting and detaining people with mental illness and allow law enforcement to focus on serious crimes.

Furthermore, expanded mental health counseling will reduce the need for emergency department utilization and hospitalizations for mental-health related reasons. According to the Community Health Improvement Partners, there were 25,468 discharges from emergency departments and 22,871 hospitalizations in San Diego County with a primary diagnosis of mental disorder in 2008. If mental health services were more available to assist individuals before hospitalization is necessary, healthcare costs (including ambulatory services) could be reduced substantially. Expanded resources for mental health counseling are particularly important with the increased demand that will accompany healthcare reform and the increase in healthcare coverage options available to San Diego residents.

Releasing an RFP or negotiating with FHCS D would generate money for the City from the sale in addition to providing the benefits listed above. It would also remove liability for the parcel and costs for upkeep. FHCS D has already found support to expand the FCC, so no City funds are necessary. In fact, the City may ultimately see reduced costs due to fewer utilization of law enforcement and emergency response resources. The expansion is supported by a wide variety of community stakeholders, including Scripps, Sharp, and the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

The ACLU of San Diego and Imperial Counties strongly urges you to release an RFP or negotiate directly with FHCS D for the sale of the the parcel located at 2183-2193 National Avenue. This is an excellent opportunity to strengthen health in the Barrio Logan community and for all San Diegans while saving money and resources for the City.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions. Thank you.

Sincerely,


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