



Brook Creek Neighborhood Association

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Lawrence City Commission
City Hall
6 East 6th Street
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re: LCS text amendment request, agenda item #6

Dear Mayor Dever & Commissioners:

To begin with, Brook Creek Neighborhood Association is in favor of relief services for our City's homeless population. But we find the current City approach to homelessness to be contradictory to both the City's own Task Force on Homeless Services Report of 2005, as well as the new Lawrence Development Code of 2007.

The Task Force on Homeless Services adopted as their primary goal “full time wrap-around programs of *relief services linked with rehabilitation services*”. But it has been City policy to separate these two components, isolating rehabilitation services in the Salvation Army (by approving their location in our neighborhood), and isolating relief services in the Lawrence Community Shelter (by considering this text amendment before you).

The Lawrence Community Shelter plans are for a facility handling only emergency relief services – also referred to as “no strings attached” – including a drop-in center, showers, meals, mail drops, and sleeping. This “relief only” plan would undermine the effectiveness of the Salvation Army rehab program, as is stated in our Homeless Task Force report, and is well known in other cities. But it would also be problematic for us neighbors of the drop-in center, and problematic for the users of the Burroughs Creek Trail (two of the more likely LCS locations are both directly adjacent to the trail).

Regarding zoning rights, the 2007 Lawrence Development Code made significant improvements to our zoning regulations, one of which was to remove homeless shelters and soup kitchens as “uses by right” from all commercial and industrial zones, and retain those uses only in RSO and RMO zones, and only with a Use Permit. Dropping the “uses by right” in commercial and industrial zones was a well considered change. Prior to 2002, homeless shelters did require a Use Permit. But when the Lawrence Athletic Club requested that “private recreation facilities” be excluded from Use Permits by text amendment TA-05-01-02, homeless shelters were inadvertently lumped into the exemption. So the new 2007 Development Code corrected that mistake.

Given the inherent and well recognized conflicts associated with emergency drop-in centers, and the controversy they give rise to in all neighborhoods including downtown, Brook Creek Neighborhood Association thinks it ill-advised to back peddle on our new Development Code. Where ever a homeless shelter might be located, the rights of a hearing and of protest must be available to the adjoining neighbors.

BCNA also thinks it a mistake for the City to even consider a text amendment granting homeless shelters rights of any sort in all industrial districts by blanket provisions. If considered at all, this request should be restricted to only one industrial zone (we would suggest IBP, Industrial/Business Park). Curiously, at your last meeting you forwarded to the Planning Commission a similar text amendment that could be a template for LCS. Free State Development requested that “Extended Care Facilities” be included as a “Special Use” in the IBP district. The IBP section presently includes “Health Care Office” and “Health Care Clinic”, and LCS wishes to be near to community health facilities, so the uses would be compatible. Free State Development requested the Special Use designation to prevent a “blanket” policy allowing all such uses by right in the IBP district. We concur.

Thank you,

Michael Almon
BCNA Land Use Chair