

## **Bobbie Walthall**

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**To:** David L. Corliss  
**Subject:** RE: Tuesday's Consent Agenda

Commissioner,

At this year's Planning Commission annual visionary sessions, it was stated that the elected city and county commissioners looked to the PC for leadership in defining ideas and ways for the city to grow and prosper. It is with this direction, compounded with my time working at the LDCHA as a board commissioner, that I have taken a keen interest in the local homeless industry which continues to call for additional services and expansion of facilities.

This petition is to request that Tuesday's consent agenda item regarding the CDBG-R summary for the acquisition of property for the Community Shelter, be removed from the consent agenda and postponed to November's regular agenda in order for the public to address concerns regarding such policy. I have heard from several concerned stake holders regarding this particular issue who feel that their voices are being heard but then immediately and unfairly being buried by the planning and city staff.

I myself have several questions and apprehensions with any expansion of the homeless shelter services in that the policies and management tend to reflect a lack of vision and operational cooperation with other similar agencies. I think it best to investigate and research in a public format, prior to approving any funding for the homeless shelter's continued operations within our city.

As a housing authority commissioner, I have requested that a comprehensive report be created by the LDCHA staff, regarding application and usage of city/county facilities, which work with LDCHA and that are supported by Douglas County taxpayers, yet the services provided to non-county residents.

In our preliminary research, we find duplication of efforts within various social agencies, as well as a some agency's systematic refusal to establish, require and enforce county residency requirements.

The taxpayers of our city and county deserve a comprehensive understanding of the "homeless tax" that we currently have; and, the invert relationship between an increased financial liability brought on by further growth of the homeless population, as it is effected by the increased proposed size and services of the homeless shelter. Our downtown area is currently distressed economically, and to a large part due to the panhandling and congregation of the homeless along the shopping area's sidewalks. I have on numerous occasions witnessed incidences between homeless panhandlers and shoppers, that have me shaking my head with realization that another shopping patron may be lost. Yet it is now proposed, to move the shelter from one effected retail center (downtown area) and place it in another newer retail area, that by the way is also one of the entry ways to our city.

As Chief of Police, Ron Olin stated at one of our mid-month planning commission meetings, regarding the expansion of the homeless shelter, "if you build it, they will come". More panhandling, more park vagrancy, more criminal activity, is what makes our downtown less inviting to our own citizens, much less the shopping visitors.

It is time to take a stand and face Lawrence's "homeless industry" and evaluate the long-term and direct cost of homelessness against the indirect cost of budgetary constraints effecting the city's inability to adequately invest in its citizens. Be it a better sidewalk renewal program or a hiking and biking trail that directly affect the physical and mental health of our own citizenry, as well, the ability to utilize resources for river front development, library expansion, pool fee increases, and the list goes on.

As visionary leaders, I know you will agree that Lawrencians need to invest in our own treasure, the children of today that will lead our community tomorrow. I encourage you to pull the CDBG funding option off the consent agenda and postpone the agenda item until November which will provide time needed so that the LDCHA report findings can be finalized.

Respectfully submitted.

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