

University Area Community Council
Federation of Community Councils 1057 W Fireweed Ln, Anchorage, AK 99503

Draft 7-6-21

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3 Dear Mr. Mayor and Assembly Members,

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5 Re: Proposed Homeless Shelter/Navigation Center SE of Tudor Rd and Elmore Rd

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7 The University Area Community Council fully acknowledges that more homeless
8 services are needed in Anchorage. We commend Mayor-Elect Bronson for
9 addressing the issue, but many of our members have expressed legitimate concerns
10 with his proposed facility. We agree with Vice-Chairman Chris Constant's view at
11 the 6/23/21 Assembly's mtg on Homeless Issues: Every area of Anchorage has
12 homeless issues, and every area should do their part in resolving those issues. The
13 UACC is willing to continue doing our share, even increase our share, and we hope
14 other parts of Anchorage do likewise. However, this huge, proposed facility
15 appears very problematic and not viable in its present form for several reasons.

16
17 Timing

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19 We see no realistic, affordable way this \$15 million+ facility could be even close
20 to fully operational when cold weather arrives in a few months. We have seen a
21 colorful slide show, but few hard facts. The public needs to see detailed cost
22 estimates and plans, from design, permits (land use, building and 404), and project
23 approval, to purchase, construction, staffing, access and parking and start of full-
24 time operations. Each of these steps is time consuming.

25
26 For example, under current Title 21 regulations, shelters are conditional use in the
27 PLI zoning district. The typical timeframe for completing the conditional use
28 process is at least 90 days. However, this permitting process usually requires more
29 time, upwards of 120-180 days.

30
31 This lack of clarity makes it difficult to imagine timely project completion. If the
32 proposal is approved in July 2021, it would require an exceedingly diligent effort
33 to be operating, even by Winter 2022, because the great majority of work occurs
34 after the building is erected. The lack of clarity also makes it difficult for the
35 UACC to make more detailed comments on the proposal and compare it to
36 proposals developed by the previous administration and provided to the Mayor.

37

38 What is the new administration’s Plan B? How will homeless people be housed
39 and provided meals and services if this proposed facility doesn’t work out in time.
40 Any Plan B should be distinct and separate from this proposal.

41
42 The Mayor indicated he will requesting \$15 million from the Assembly before the
43 public has seen his detailed “concrete” proposal. We strongly request that the
44 Mayor immediately request or even purchase an extension of the option to buy the
45 former mid-town Alaska Club (set to expire 7/9/21) as the best realistic alternative
46 option that meets the need for the un-housed population in the shortest timeframe.
47 The Muni professional staff indicated, if purchased, the Alaska Club facility could
48 be made ready for full-time use in fall 2021, as testimony to the Assembly on
49 6/23/21 made clear. Nothing close to that has been said about this Homeless
50 Shelter/Navigation Facility.

51
52 Too Big a Shelter/Navigation Facility

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54 On 6/20/21, the ADN quoted Lisa Aquino, CEO of Catholic Social Services in
55 reference to the huge, proposed facility: “. . . smaller shelters are better. The Brother
56 Francis Shelter has cut its capacity in part due to Covid-19 but also to mitigate its
57 impact and provide better services.” We understand that the lower capacity will be
58 maintained post-Covid-19. Everyone experienced on homeless issues with whom
59 we have spoken, also said smaller is better, as do the UACC area residents who
60 commented. We understand smaller means 100 or 150 beds.

61
62 This proposed huge facility has a capacity of 1000 people, but Dr. John Morris
63 indicates that it would actually house about 400. That is exceedingly difficult to
64 believe. If such a large homeless facility/navigation center is built and works as
65 well as he says, more homeless people would come. He states the facility would be
66 very low barrier (i.e., few turned away), so more would have to be admitted and
67 housed, perhaps nearing the 1000-person capacity.

68
69 This facility (whether it is permanent or temporary is unclear), is under one roof
70 and described by Dr. Morris as having sound-proof walls, smaller spaces for
71 engagement, dignity and quiet, co-locating the full menu of wrap around services,
72 with easy separation of persons based on the type of care they need. Again, we find
73 this ideal very difficult to believe without sufficient evidence of the efficacy of
74 such a proposal. The large congregate setting has a high potential to create serious
75 health and safety risks. A low barrier facility implies minimum paperwork, no
76 curfews or background checks, few or no restriction on possessions, accompanying
77 family members and pets, minimum restraint to entry and exit, etc. Given that

78 locked gates seem inconsistent with the concept of a low barrier facility, homeless
79 people would be able to come and go at will 24/7 and have minimum restrictions
80 on their movements within the facility.

81 Unfortunately, among homeless people, are those with mental health challenges,
82 sex offenders and substance abusers. A major concern is whether women and
83 children in the facility can be adequately protected when there is no reasoning with
84 clients who are under the influence. It is likely with the facility's inherent
85 anonymity, size and easy access, that some of those who have been sexually
86 assaulted would come in contact with their molester. That is unacceptable.

87 Also, this large a facility could promote transmission of disease and allergens,
88 including those from pets and pet waste. Bites from pets could easily become an
89 issue.

90

91 We are concerned homeless people will have a bad choice:
92 a) arrest or b) living in a place that may not be safe and sanitary.

93

94 We support a smaller facility (100-150 beds max) because it would have less
95 anonymity and the potential for far fewer negative incidents while individuals
96 could get more one-on one care and services.

97

98 Conflicts in the neighborhoods, crimes, dangerous campfires and overloaded
99 emergency rooms

100

101 Chris Constant, who is highly knowledgeable on homeless issues, is quoted in the
102 6/11/21 ADN: "Putting 1000 people in one site costs that neighborhood their
103 integrity." One resident in our area said, "another forested part of Anchorage
104 [could become] a place where garbage and human waste accumulate."

105

106 Multiple thefts have been reported by neighbors near the well-run, high barrier
107 Rescue Mission on the north side of Tudor Rd. in the UACC area.

108

109 A multi-use trail closely parallels the proposed shelter site on the south side of
110 Tudor before crossing the Tudor bridge and going north toward UAA and APU
111 campuses, including student housing. It also forks east, then north, paralleling the
112 backyards of the homes on the west side of Wesleyan Drive in the College Gate
113 neighborhood.

114

115 In a few minutes, the clients of the newly proposed Shelter/Navigation facility
116 would have easy access to other neighborhoods within a mile or so (U-Med
117 Gateway and Castle Heights) as well as the Greenbriar Apartment Complex
118 (directly across Tudor). A number of businesses and a convenient Liquor store are
119 less than ½ away. A subsequent increase in petty thief would be expected.

120
121 Has the transition team or new administration studied or taken into account the
122 impact on these areas and potential conflicts with the hundreds, perhaps thousands
123 of daily users of the multi-use trails, including dog walkers, hikers, bikers and
124 skiers? We would like to see results of such a study. We have already seen an
125 impact on the multi-use trail and neighborhoods bordering the Sullivan Arena, with
126 groups of people congregating and some camping in nearby wooded areas.

127
128 We feel the larger the facility at Tudor and Elmore, the more homeless people
129 would camp outdoors in nearby wooded areas. If requested by police to move, they
130 could easily take their camping gear into the facility for a day or two and later re-
131 set their camps.

132
133 We are concerned that risk of fire would increase substantially. We agree with
134 Samantha Emerson’s Letter to the ADN Editor of 6/23/21: The proposal puts this
135 huge facility “ into the most densely forested area in the City. This will inevitably
136 result in a mass influx of camps, and dangerous costly fires, into these immense
137 green spaces . . . We already have numerous wildfires in this area each year, started
138 by such camps. Just two years ago, a fire started near the same corner as the
139 proposed site, tore through the woods, forced evacuations and threatened lives.”

140
141 If people can come for meals only, many will congregate, and likely roam around
142 as was seen frequently at Beans Café.

143
144 The site is close to Providence Emergency Room and even closer to ANMC’s,
145 both of which are at capacity essentially 24/day. At first this may appear to be a
146 benefit, but Dr. David Tarby, a nearby College Gate resident with experience
147 working at both said, “When a shelter is placed within walking distance [to an ER]
148 without the opportunity to have pre-screening by EMS or other health personnel
149 these non-emergen[t]cy visits will greatly increase.”

150
151 Another UACC neighbor said: “Placing additional strain on the hospitals while
152 moving the primary shelter away from all other support services is a recipe for
153 failure and financial ruin. Attempting to concentrate a large portion of Anchorage's
154 homeless population in one place compounds the problems associated with

155 homelessness.... It creates an environment in which housing insecurity, substance
156 abuse, and petty crime are the standards; there is no driving force for positive
157 change. We know this because Anchorage has attempted it twice already.”

158

159 Additional Missing Information

160

161 We request clear statements of sources of public and private funds. What percent
162 of the \$15+ million will be from NGOs? What construction and operations costs
163 are not in the estimate?

164

165 Have the Mayor and his advisors made a thorough assessment of the data and
166 analysis that the Muni funded for Site 27 as a possible new location for the Bus
167 Barn? If not, we urge you to do so. It’s the same site proposed for the Homeless
168 Shelter/Navigation Center.

169 We request detailed plans for meals, sleeping, child care, pet care, laundry, medical
170 and mental health services, a multiple-person de-tox unit, counselling, case
171 management, job-placement, sanitation and security for this facility.

172 Alexis St. Juliana, a College Gate resident, took the time to spell out the kind of
173 homeless shelter assessment that is needed by the Mayor and the Assembly. We
174 would like to see thoughtful, candid, complete responses to her questions. **See**
175 **Attachment A.**

176 Without this and our other requested information, we cannot make a reasoned
177 judgement of the merits, quality and efficacy of the facility and its operations. No
178 one can.

179 Is this proposal the right solution for Anchorage?

180 The slide show states a number of conclusions. What is the basis for these
181 conclusions? Who did the assessment that led to them? We need comprehensive
182 analyses.

183 An assemblage of many organizational logos appears in the Administration’s slide
184 show. It implies that these organizations endorse this proposal. Do they think this
185 is the optimal solution for Anchorage? If this is the case, we would like to see a
186 detailed statement of support from each of them.

187

188

189 An Assessment of the experience gained by the use of the Sullivan Arena should
190 be conducted and distributed to the public as soon as possible.

191
192 We would like to see a thorough evaluation of how the Sullivan Arena functioned
193 as a Homeless Shelter and Navigation Center? Was it effective in getting people
194 into housing, and what was the impact on the adjacent greenbelt and surrounding
195 neighborhoods? We want a candid description of the lessons learned from using
196 the Sullivan as a large homeless congregate facility. What worked well, what
197 didn't and why? It appears that the Navigation site concept may be useful in
198 addressing some of the homeless issues, but we feel that having a least a couple of
199 sites could be more successful and better address the inherent difficulties that large
200 congregate facilities have in providing a) services in a dignified manner, b) health
201 and safety of the homeless population and c) better outcomes in retaining the safety
202 and inherent values of the communities adjacent to the facilities.

203
204 Request that the Assembly and the Mayor Consider all Viable Alternatives

205
206 We understand that the new administration has or will soon present the Assembly
207 with a formal concrete version of their proposed plan. We respectfully request that
208 the UACC be given a copy this proposed plan, as it would have a tremendous
209 effect on our community. While we understand the urgency of addressing
210 homeless issues with the impending closure of the Sullivan Arena, we are
211 concerned that trying to rush to a "new" solution may create a new big problem
212 that the University Area, adjacent communities and Anchorage as a whole will
213 have to live with for decades to come. We urge the Mayor and the Assembly to
214 look at all viable alternatives, such as the previously mentioned Midtown Alaska
215 Club, perhaps in combination with a 100-150 bed facility located at the
216 Tudor/Elmore site, and/or other sites in Anchorage.

217
218 Homelessness in Anchorage will not be "solved" by a new big facility or a
219 combination of smaller facilities without substantially more local, state and federal
220 long-term funding of the medical and social services necessary to get at and treat
221 its root causes.

222
223 A Detailed Milestone Schedule for selecting, developing, constructing, staffing and
224 operating any new homeless is urgently needed.

225
226 As we said at the Assembly meeting on June 23, 2021, we request all Project
227 information be shared publicly on a MUNI website that is updated weekly. We

228 request the new issue a detailed schedule as soon as possible, so stakeholders can
229 fully understand this proposal and any others being considered.

230

231 Summary

232 The UACC strongly supports efforts to reduce homelessness in the municipality.
233 We commend Mayor Bronson for addressing the issue, but believe the proposed
234 facility is far too large. Smaller shelters are better. Insufficient time remains to
235 complete this facility by the onset of colder weather in Fall 2021. The proposal is
236 ill-defined and there is no Plan B. We see no statements of support from any of the
237 organizations in Dr. Morris' Power Point slides. The 24/7 low barrier to entrance
238 invites safety and security issues and acceptance of pets increases sanitary issues.
239 Serious conflicts with neighbors and an increase in petty theft appear inevitable.
240 The risk of forest fires from nearby camps is likely to be very high. Further
241 overloading of Providence and ANMC emergency rooms would be expected. We
242 would like a thorough, candid, independent assessment of the experience gained by
243 use of the Sullivan Arena. The Mayor/Assembly should immediately seek an
244 extension of the option to buy the midtown Alaska Club that expires 7/9/21. We
245 need a detailed schedule of critical milestones about the proposal from the new
246 administration straightaway. Failure of this endeavor is likely without developing
247 and meeting such milestones. Without the information we requested, the UACC
248 cannot make a reasoned judgement of the merits, quality and efficacy of the
249 facility and its operations. No one can.

250

251 The UACC already has a well-managed homeless facility about a half mile from
252 Site 27. We would consider support for an additional 100-150 bed facility because
253 it would have less anonymity and the potential for far fewer negative incidents
254 while individuals could get more one-on-one care and services.

255

256 We look forward to assisting the new administration in finding an effective and
257 equitable Anchorage-wide solution to this difficult problem.

258

259 Vote on sending this letter to the Anchorage Mayor and Assembly:

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261 In favor _____ Against _____ Abstain _____

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263

264 Paul Stang, President, UACC