COMMENTARY Submitted to ADN 10-18-21

**Smaller Homeless Facilities are Better for All**

Shelter for Anchorage people experiencing homelessness is a critical issue. The Assembly and Bronson Administration are jointly focused on finding structural and care options to replace and enhance services currently being administered at the Sullivan Arena. On October 5th, they posted [initial results](http://www.muni.org/departments/assembly/pages/committee%20on%20homelessness.aspx) of an excellent 2+ month Facilitated Collaborative Process.

We are pleased that some community requests for homeless care provisions and progression to independent living have been included in the plan. Also available is a Boutet Co. engineering report on the capacity and costs associated with large facilities (250 -1000+ beds) or land parcels capable of supporting such large facilities in Anchorage. We request comparable information for smaller facilities (100-175 beds). Fortunately, on 10-7-21, Muni Procurement issued a [Request For Interest](http://purchasing.muni.org/Web%20E-Bid/Open/rfp/2021RFI001%20Community%20Sites%20for%20Navigation%20%26%20Housing%20in%20the%20MOA/RFI%20Document/2021RFI001%20RFI%20for%20Land%20and%20NCS%20Sites.pdf) for homeless facilities that include this size range.

Anchorage’s top Homelessness experts clearly say smaller facilities are better for all. On 6/20/21, the ADN quoted Lisa Aquino, CEO of Catholic Social Services in reference to a 400-1000 bed facility proposed by the Administration, “. . . smaller shelters are better. The Brother Francis Shelter has cut its capacity in part due to Covid-19 but also to mitigate its impact and provide better services.”

Jasmine Boyle of Anchorage Coalition to End Homelessness, said “experts believe that smaller, focused shelters are better for both clients and neighborhoods.” (ADN 6/23/21) Most Assembly members “prefer smaller, multiple shelter sites.” (ADN 8/26/21) Michele Brown, Senior Rasmuson Fellow, said “The Rasmuson Foundation has been a strong supporter of and advocate for Anchored Home, the community’s plan to make homelessness rare, brief, and one time, and which is based upon the principles of housing first and deploying small, geographically distributed shelters as an effective pathway to stable housing.” (9/29/21 personal communication)

Our Community Councils agree and urge the Assembly and Administration to:

1) Steer away from large parcels/facilities costing several $10s of millions that the Boutet Co. was asked to analyze. Instead, focus on buying and/or renting a few existing, moderate-sized, buildings distributed across the community, each capable of supporting 100 to 175 people maximum. These would be less expensive and more conducive to Public/Private partnerships, while precluding disproportionate impacts of large facilities on nearby neighborhoods and parks.

Small facilities, licensed in B-3 Zones, should be located along transportation corridors. They are far preferable to the noise, anonymity and safety issues of a large one, which can easily be perceived as a warehouse for homeless people. Yet, small facilities could house an Emergency Medical Technician and provide navigation services for diverse populations such as substance misuse treatment and medical convalescence. They would also supplement existing facilities: Clare House, Covenant House, Brother Francis Shelter, Anchorage Gospel Rescue Mission, Hope Center, Salvation Army and Coordinated Shelter Intake, etc.

Importantly, this “smaller is better” strategy would be consistent with the wording of the Client/Community Focused Approach chosen by the Assembly/Administration. Large facilities would not.

2) Tap Anchorage’s homelessness experts to guide hiring professionals and support staff for necessary services.

3) Demonstrate that any decisions include full descriptive/ technical details and follow the recommendations in the Municipality’s 2018 report, “Anchored Home – Strategic Action Plan to Solve Homelessness” which engaged over 700 community members, businesses and agency representatives. This report urges continued extensive community dialogue/involvement and measurement of progress and success of any implemented solutions. We are hopeful that the Facilitated Collaborative Process heads that way.

We will continue to work with the Assembly and Bronson Administration as their discussions evolve. We believe our positions, outlined above, have the best potential for reducing the homelessness suffered by too many in our community while minimizing impacts on our neighborhoods and parks.

The Presidents/Chairs of the following Anchorage Community Councils:

Carolyn Ramsey, Airport Heights

Allen Kemplen, Fairview

Jody Sola, Government Hill

Ann Rappoport, Rabbit Creek

Kendra Kloster, Russian Jack

Karen Bronga, Scenic Foothills

Paul Stang, University Area