

UACC Position on the Proposed Tudor Elmore Homeless Shelter and Navigation Center, 4/6/2022

On March 15, the Anchorage Assembly appropriated \$800,000 to advance the design of a 330-bed capacity homeless shelter and navigation center near Tudor and Elmore Roads. In a related action, the Assembly approved another \$7 million in mass care shelter operations. The actions are part of the Assembly and Bronson administration's strategy to stand down temporary shelters put in place by June 30, including the Sullivan Arena that currently serves as a 500-bed temporary homeless shelter.

The only way to meet the exit strategy timeframe is to ignore or bypass Municipal code that requires a Public Facility Site Selection and Conditional Use Permit in advance of obtaining a building permit. These processes are critical to ensuring the safety and dignity of the ultimate users of the facility, as well as the involvement of neighbors and UMED area institutions.

A public facility site selection is required when a "facility has the potential for significant impacts on surrounding properties." At a capacity of 330-beds, the proposed homeless shelter is significantly larger than the size of the Brother Francis Shelter's approved 240-bed capacity. To date, no formal public site selection process has been undertaken, nor is one planned.

Further circumventing Municipal code requirements, the administration seeks to obtain a Conditional Use Permit concurrent with a building permit. However, a Conditional Use Permit is granted prior to a building permit - the Planning and Zoning Commission must find the proposed use meets the conditional use criteria. When questioned, the administration responded they would permit the structure as a temporary structure allowed in the zoning district, and subsequently pursue conditional use approval.

A building for an undisclosed temporary use does not require a Conditional Use Permit, but a homeless shelter does. In short, the only way for the administration to meet the proposed schedule and obtain a building permit is to obscure the intended purpose of the facility while sidestepping policy compliance.

The first step is to provide a thorough application that details the physical design, planning objectives, facility staffing, ongoing operating plan, and how the facility operations intend to drive positive outcomes for clients and mitigate impacts to surrounding areas. At this time, the University Area Community cannot take a position on the proposed facility as no proposal to specifically detail the Municipality's commitments to the success of shelter operations has been presented.

If done properly, the conditions of approval will be clearly documented and captured in the public record. For a publicly owned and operated project, such a step is prudent prior to committing tens of millions of public dollars to build it and millions of annual operating dollars in future costs. Those commitments will be with us long after one-time capital funding is exhausted and the Mayor and Assembly members have completed their terms in office.

The University Area Community Council urges the Assembly and the administration to follow the municipal procedures in place so that the proposed Tudor and Elmore facility and long-term operating plan can be properly evaluated.