

Linda Momborquette <ldm@portlandmaine.gov>

Fwd: Homeless shelter site proposal

1 message

Dawn Stiles <dcs@portlandmaine.gov>
To: "Momborquette, Linda" <ldm@portlandmaine.gov>

Tue, Jul 10, 2018 at 2:04 PM

Director, Health & Human Services
City of Portland
389 Congress Street
Portland, Maine 04101
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dcs@portlandmaine.gov

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Kristine Trogner** <krtrogner@gmail.com>
Date: Tue, Jul 10, 2018 at 12:00 PM
Subject: Homeless shelter site proposal
To: PALI@portlandmaine.gov, bsr@portlandmaine.gov, **Brian Batson** <bbatson@portlandmaine.gov>
Cc: dcs@portlandmaine.gov, rwp@portlandmaine.gov

Dear Councilors Ali, Batson and Ray:

My name is Kristine Trogner. I'm a Nason's Corner resident and have been working closely alongside Maya Lena on the Nason's Corner Neighborhood Association. Over the past few weeks I've been reading and discussing neighbor comments/concerns about the proposed homeless shelter site on Brighton and Holm.

I worry that the city missed a valuable opportunity to present this proposal in a more positive light on the forefront with respect to the quiet neighborhood being asked to take on this huge and permanent change. This is not a three story multi-unit building being built on someone's property line with a controversial carport on street level. This plan is for 200 people to be rehomed to one residential neighborhood of primarily owner occupied single-family homes on the outskirts of the city surrounded by large wooded areas, trails and strip malls. I commend the city for its efforts in planning the new shelter and feel that the services to be provided are desperately needed and will be a positive change for this vulnerable group regardless of the location. Bayside needs a solution but I have concerns about the proposal.

My concerns about neighborhood impact are closely linked with the site's proximity to the almost 200 unit low income Sagamore Village, and the 40 unit low-income Avesta senior housing project that is in the works for Brighton Ave, just a few blocks away and set to break ground in the spring of 2019. I worry about clustering residents from one socioeconomic group into one neighborhood and the impact one will have on the other in addition to surrounding Nason's Corner neighbors. 200 new people is a significant number, and I cannot believe that the same problematic people who prey on the clients of the Oxford Street shelter will not be drawn to this area as well. I can envision how another Bayside could occur here and have concern for my Sagamore neighbors specifically, who already deal with some drug issues, crime and bad actors but have seen improvement in recent years. I fear that the city will be aiding one vulnerable group at the expense/risk of another.

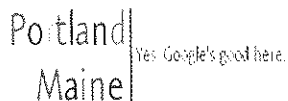
I have further concern about the proximity to the Barron Center residents, some living out their last days enjoying the side lawn, and the Loring house. A loved one of mine who passed away recently was a resident there until his passing and I can image the distress it could cause to residents, staff and family navigating the property to have the state's largest homeless shelter abutting the property. I was particularly moved by a Loring House neighbor who spoke at our neighborhood meeting about her concerns for first floor residents in her building, some elderly or disabled, and security. The Loring house is currently a 100% smoke free community,

which includes the grounds. I don't believe it's reasonable to assume that there would be no change at all for Barron Center and Loring House residents.

I appreciate the opportunity to connect and hear more. Very few concrete answers have been provided with respect to Nason's Corner impact. The site was abruptly announced, initially given an alarmingly short timeline to move this through, and neighbors felt desperate to be heard. I believe/hope that city is invested in a plan that is best for the entire city of Portland. Neighborhood impact must be a part of this process and done in a way that does not dismiss neighborhood residents' concerns.

Thank you,

Kristine Trogner



Linda Momborquette <ldm@portlandmaine.gov>

Fwd: Citizen-Sponsored Homeless Shelter Proposal (District Road)

1 message

Dawn Stiles <dcs@portlandmaine.gov>

Tue, Jul 10, 2018 at 1:59 PM

To: "Momborquette, Linda" <ldm@portlandmaine.gov>, Robert Parritt <rwp@portlandmaine.gov>, "MacLean, David" <dem@portlandmaine.gov>

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From: **Casey McCormack** <jcdmccormack@gmail.com>

Date: Tue, Jul 10, 2018 at 1:50 PM

Subject: Citizen-Sponsored Homeless Shelter Proposal (District Road)

To: bsr@portlandmaine.gov, Spencer Thibodeau <sthibodeau@portlandmaine.gov>, Brian Batson <bbatson@portlandmaine.gov>, Justin Costa <jcosta@portlandmaine.gov>, kcook@portlandmaine.gov, Pious Ali <pali@portlandmaine.gov>, nmm@portlandmaine.gov, jduson@portlandmaine.gov, estrimling@portlandmaine.gov
 Cc: jpj@portlandmaine.gov, rwp@portlandmaine.gov, dcs@portlandmaine.gov, sgo@portlandmaine.gov

Dear City Councilors and Mayor Strimling,

I hope this e-mail finds you well.

Please find attached a citizen-sponsored homeless shelter proposal that will be submitted to the Health & Human Services and Public Safety Committee at tonight's meeting. While not perfect, I do believe this proposal offers a compelling and thoughtful alternative to the Barron Center site. As such, I would very kindly request that you review the entire proposal when you have a chance (although I also realize you have many competing priorities as elected officials).

The proposed site is located off of District Road on 53 acres of largely vacant City-owned land near the Portland Jetport.**** Unlike the Barron Center proposal, the site complies with the amended zoning ordinance (subject to a conditional use analysis) and offers ample development opportunities and flexibility to accommodate the changing dynamics of homeless policy and best practices. It is also located adjacent to a Maine State Police facility, on an existing Metro line (Route 5), across the street from an opioid outpatient treatment clinic, and close to Spring Harbor Hospital, the new DHHS facility, and the Maine Mall commercial hub.

Please note that I have assumed, for the sake of argument, that Portland is determined to pursue a large intake shelter model, without passing judgment on same (i.e. as opposed to a scattered site model or what have you).

I look forward to a robust public dialogue regarding shelter siting in Portland and I would be more than happy to chat with any of you regarding this proposal. If nothing else, I firmly believe that the City Council should be presented with more than one proposal so that it can debate the merits of several competing proposals in a public setting.

Thanks,

Casey McCormack
 Capisic Street
 (207)-415-9158
 jcdmccormack@gmail.com

**** Please note that I am relying entirely on Portland's GIS Parcel Viewer as to acreage and title. I also spoke with Portland Public Works and they confirmed that District Road is a city street.



District Road Shelter Proposal 07.10.18 FINAL.pdf
225K

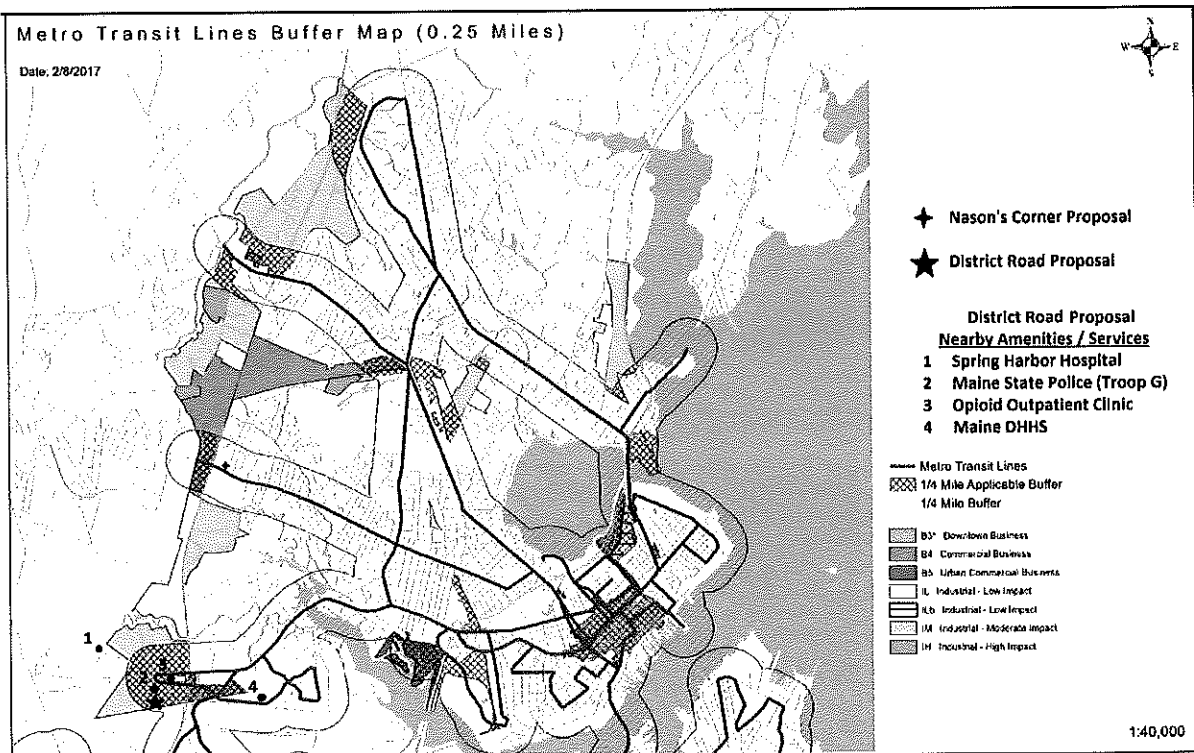
District Road Homeless Shelter Proposal

A Citizens' Proposal

The District Road Homeless Shelter Proposal is a citizen-sponsored proposal for siting a 200-bed emergency homeless shelter on a 53 acre City-owned parcel of land on District Road in Portland, Maine. The choice of location is modeled after Hope House in Bangor, which has been recognized as a "best practice" shelter by the City of Portland.

The District Road Proposal: (1) complies with Portland's comprehensive plan; (2) complies with Portland's zoning ordinance (as specifically amended by the Planning Board and City Council to accommodate homeless shelters); (3) mirrors "best practice" shelter sites cited favorably during Portland's multi-year analysis; and (4) is not located in a residential zone adjacent to a large low-density residential neighborhood. In our view, the Nason's Corner Homeless Shelter Proposal fails all four threshold issues.

The map below depicts the District Road Proposal in relation to some of the significant services and amenities nearby. The underlying map was approved by the City Council and shows where shelters may be sited based on the amended zoning ordinance. Shelters must be located within a permitted zone and within ¼ mile from a Metro Transit Line. The District Road Proposal complies; the Nason's Corner Proposal does not.



Why Not the Nason's Corner Proposal?

It Violates Portland's Comprehensive Plan

Portland's Comprehensive Plan states as follows:

"The benefits and costs of our city will be born fairly across the entire city."

Siting the largest shelter in Maine adjacent to one of Portland's largest low-density residential neighborhoods will unfairly burden the Nason's Corner community.

It Violates Portland's Amended Zoning Ordinance

Portland amended its zoning ordinance to contemplate off-peninsula homeless shelters in 2017, after several years of research and analysis. The Planning Board Report to the City Council clearly sought to prohibit shelters in residential zones and notes as follows:

"In preparing the draft amendments, staff considered whether it made sense to simply permit emergency shelters as conditional uses City-wide. However, in looking at the urban design and fabric of the other zones in the City, and the likely design of any new emergency shelter, it did not seem appropriate to site emergency shelters in other residential zones. However, group homes and other smaller-scale facilities similar in character to shelters continue to be permitted in those zones."

The Nason's Corner Proposal is located in an existing residential zone, at the gateway to one of Portland's largest single family residential neighborhoods. It is plainly in violation of the amended zoning ordinance and the spirit of the Planning Board Report.

It Bears No Resemblance to the "Best Practice" Sites Reviewed

On June 10, 2015, Maine State Housing Authority provided the Shelter Planning Task Force with 3 "best practice" shelter models. They were as follows:

Committee on Temporary Shelter (COTS), Burlington, Vermont

- Scattered site high-barrier shelter system located in Downtown Burlington with the largest shelter having 36 beds

The Road Home, Salt Lake City, Utah¹

- Large low-barrier single shelter located in Downtown Salt Lake City with 1,100 beds

Hope House (Penobscot County Health Center), Bangor, Maine

- A 54-bed, low barrier shelter located next to the Bangor International Airport, with an additional 48 SRO transitional housing beds and a medical clinic on-site

The Nason's Corner Proposal bears no resemblance to these sites. We understand that shelters in Boston have been reviewed as well but, to our knowledge, none of those shelters have been publicly identified. We also question whether any are in residential zones, on residential streets, or next to large low-density residential neighborhoods.

¹ Since the presentation, The Road Home has come under severe scrutiny for escalating crime and disorder in the neighborhood.

Why Not the Nason's Corner Proposal? (Cont.)

Shelters Should Not Be Sited Near Elementary Schools

The Nason's Corner Proposal is sited less than 500 feet from the Boys and Girls Club at Sagamore Village, just over 1,000 feet from the wooded areas of the Amanda C. Rowe Elementary School (formerly Hall Elementary School), and approximately ½ mile from the Breakwater School, which is another school with elementary-age children.

In the most recent year analyzed (2016), 84% of shelter clients reported substance abuse issues (which would equate to ~168 individuals based on a 200-bed shelter). As such, the opening of a 200-bed homeless shelter in Nason's Corner would create one of the largest illicit drug marketplaces in the State of Maine practically overnight. Siting this facility so close to a public elementary school is simply inappropriate, no matter where in Portland that may be. We acknowledge that some residents of Bayside are quick to note that some Bayside schools suffer from similar issues.² We agree. They should not.

Please note that our primary concern is not with the shelter clients themselves, but with the criminal opportunists that prey on the ~168 individuals suffering from various substance abuse issues. Nason's Corner is a diverse urban/suburban landscape with many dimly-lit residential streets, retail back-alleys, receiving docks, woods, trails, and other difficult-to-police nooks, crannies, and dark corners. It is naïve to think that there will be no meaningful increase in neighborhood criminal activity – and there are several studies that indicate that homeless shelters generate a sustained increase of localized crime. It is inappropriate to site a low-barrier shelter next to an elementary school, especially when there are more compelling alternatives like the District Road Proposal.

Shelter Clients Should be Protected, Not Tempted

The last place one would site a sober house would be next to a liquor store. Similarly, the last place we would expect to site a shelter with ~168 clients suffering from substance abuse and opiate addiction issues would be in Nason's Corner, which is a urban/suburban landscape that is incredibly difficult to police – so difficult, in fact, that for a long time it was home to the largest homeless tent encampment in Portland.

Accordingly, we believe Nason's Corner provides the kind of access and cover that will make it a paradise for drug dealers and a nightmare for those ~168 shelter clients fighting the temptation to use. At the end of the day, someone who is addicted and needs to satisfy that craving will go to great lengths to do so. We believe that Portland has a responsibility to make it more difficult for those ~168 individuals to connect with the criminals who seek to prey on them. As such, the shelter should be located in an environment that is easy to police and monitor, which Nason's Corner is plainly not.

² We note that elementary-age children at Hall are much more vulnerable than the high school students at Portland High. However, the Boys and Girls Club of Portland is located in Bayside, which does attract young children and we agree is a cause for concern.

Why the District Road Proposal?³



Issue	District Road Proposal	Nason's Corner Proposal
Complies with Comprehensive Plan?	X	-
Complies with Existing Zoning Ordinance?	X*	-
Modeled After a "Best Practice" Shelter?	X	-
Ample Room for Future Development?	X	-
Not Located within ½ Mile of Schools/Daycare?	X	-
Not Located within a Residential Zone?	X	-
Not Located Next to Residential Neighborhood?	X	-
Safe, Easy to Monitor Location?	X	-
Single Point of Access?	X	-
Located Near Existing Law Enforcement?	X	-

* Complies with Portland's Zoning Ordinance as a conditional use

³ We are not necessarily convinced that a single, large, intake shelter is the right policy for Portland. However, for purposes of formulating a proposal, generating discussion, and ensuring that the City Council is provided with at least two competing shelter proposals, we have assumed that a single, large, intake shelter is the direction Portland would like to take. Our proposal is not perfect, but we do believe it is quite compelling – and significantly more compelling than the Nason's Corner Proposal.

Why the District Road Proposal? (Cont.)

District Road Proposal Summary

The District Road Proposal calls for siting the new emergency homeless shelter on 53 acres of City-owned land located off of Congress Street near Skyway Drive. The site complies with Portland's amended zoning ordinance, parallels the Hope House in Bangor, is not located within or near a residential neighborhood, advances Portland's "Housing First" initiative, and, in our view, complies with the Comprehensive Plan.

The current site consists of vacant land, a large, rarely used parking lot, and a Portland public works facility. It sits adjacent to the Maine Turnpike Authority building, which doubles as the headquarters for Troop G of the Maine State Police. It is situated close to regional transportation options (Route 5 of the Metro), and is otherwise located near DHHS, Spring Harbor Hospital, and an opioid outpatient treatment clinic (Health Care Resource Centers – Portland). It is close in proximity to the Maine Mall commercial hub, offers views of the Western Promenade over the Portland Jetport runway, and, with 53 acres of land, provides ample opportunities to add future services, transitional housing options, or other amenities to the site. Moreover, the site has a single point of access (off of Congress Street) next to a significant Maine State Police presence, which will deter criminal opportunists and make it easier to police, monitor, and manage.

Modeled After Hope House in Bangor (A "Best Practice" Shelter)

The District Road Proposal is modeled after Hope House in Bangor, Maine, which is located in a very similar commercial/industrial area adjacent to Bangor International Airport. Hope House consists of 54 emergency shelter beds and 48 (recently added) single room occupancy ("SRO") transitional beds. The District Road Proposal provides Portland with a tremendous amount of site control and flexibility in order to add or alter amenities, add or alter services, or diversify on-site housing options.

Advances and Prioritizes "Housing First" Principles

The only policy that has been shown to impact homelessness in any meaningful way is a "Housing First" policy whereby a shelter's primary focus is to transition shelter clients into permanent housing situations as quickly as possible. Once housing insecurities have been eliminated, the primary focus then turns to offering other supportive services.

As such, Portland's new shelter should be focusing on (1) providing a safe, temporary environment for shelter clients, (2) rapidly transitioning shelter clients out of the shelter and into permanent housing situations, and (3) minimizing distractions that might interfere with these simple points of focus. We believe that the District Road Proposal advances these "Housing First" principles by facilitating an overall safer shelter experience and reducing unnecessary monitoring / policing / disturbance issues that are unrelated to (and distract from) the stated "Housing First" policy embraced by Portland.

Why the District Road Proposal? (Cont.)

Minimal Impact on Residential Neighborhoods and School Children

As the crow flies, the District Road site is located approximately 1 mile away from the closest residential building and over 2 miles away from the nearest public school (which ironically, is still the Amanda C. Rowe Elementary School).⁴ While we do not believe that shelter clients are primarily bad actors, the vast majority of clients suffer from substance abuse issues, an attribute that will unfortunately attract bad actors and criminal opportunists. As such, the District Road Proposal will ensure minimal negative interactions between shelter clients, criminal opportunists, residential neighbors, and school children, thereby reducing unnecessary distractions for shelter staff.

Complies with the Zoning Ordinance and the Comprehensive Plan

As noted in the Summary section, the District Road site complies with Portland's amended zoning ordinance. We also believe that the District Road Proposal complies with the equitable requirements of the Comprehensive Plan since the shelter is sited in a manner that reduces the likelihood of adverse impacts to surrounding neighborhoods.

Site Control, Flexibility, and Future Development Potential

The 53 acre site provides a tremendous amount of flexibility for any modifications that might be warranted in the future – whether that is more green space, a transitional housing complex, or additional supportive services. In contrast, the Nason's Corner Proposal is limited significantly by lot size and existing on-site improvements.

Close to Amenities and Supportive Services

As noted in the Summary section, the District Road site is close to many amenities and services, including the Metro, DHHS, Spring Harbor Hospital, an opioid outpatient treatment facility, a Maine State Police facility, and the Maine Mall commercial hub.

Conclusion

We believe the District Road Proposal is incredibly compelling and offers Portland an unparalleled opportunity to initiate a "Housing First" policy that will substantially improve the effectiveness of the services it currently provides. We also want to ensure that the City Council will ultimately be presented with more than one proposal. We look forward to a robust, transparent, public dialogue regarding the future of Portland's next shelter.

⁴ In our review, we did identify two daycare facilities within a mile radius of the District Road site. As the crow flies, The Little Dolphin School is located ½ mile away from the District Road site and Bright Horizons is located a little under 1 mile away from the District Road site. Given the safer location, limited access points, and significant size of the buffer, we do not believe this is problematic.

Why Not the District Road Proposal?

Why Not the District Road Proposal?

In analyzing the District Road Proposal, we also sought to better understand why it was deemed by City staff to be less compelling than the Nason's Corner Proposal. Please find below criticism that we've identified, as well as counterpoints to said criticism.

After identifying the District Road site, we addressed the proposal with the City Manager. He indicated that he was aware of the site and confirmed that it was owned by Portland without any restrictions. As to why it was not proposed to this Committee, the City Manager indicated that the only reason it was not considered as a recommended location was due to concerns that it would be seen as "hiding the homeless." When asked about the origins of such a directive, the City Manager indicated that it was guidance provided to City staff by the City Council.

After speaking to the City Manager, we discussed the matter at length with Councilor Ray, who noted that the Nason's Corner Proposal had two other advantages (as compared to the District Road Proposal) which were that the Barron Center contains (1) a commercial kitchen (thus eliminating the need for a shelter kitchen) and (2) Portland's laundry facilities (thereby reducing transportation costs to and from an off-site shelter).

On-Site Benefits of the Barron Center

Addressing Councilor Ray's points first, we would note that the existing shelter design includes a commercial kitchen, so it is unclear whether the kitchen at the Barron Center would actually replace the kitchen provided for in the current shelter design. In addition, we would note that the additional costs of policing all of the dark corners of Nason's Corner would be far in excess of the costs of transporting laundry back and forth from District Road to laundry facilities at the Barron Center. Similarly, we also suspect that the costs of policing Nason's Corner would quickly outweigh the costs of a kitchen.

The "Hiding the Homeless" Perception

After dispensing with those two perceived benefits, the single remaining issue that appears to be holding back the District Road Proposal is a perception that locating a shelter on the outskirts of Portland is primarily an attempt to "hide" or "shame" Portland's homeless population. In our view, nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, we would suggest that the "hiding the homeless" guidance is ultimately counterproductive and politicizes an issue that warrants honest dialogue, free from political catchphrases and hollow sound bites. We believe that such a concept ultimately ends up hurting shelter clients by forcing them into neighborhoods that are ill-prepared to accommodate them and related shelter services. Finally, we believe it is preventing Portland from implementing meaningful, comprehensive, and effective homeless policy.

Why Not the District Road Proposal? (Cont.)

“Hiding the Homeless” Counterpoints

First of all, the entire design of the proposed shelter is intended, in part, to provide homeless clients with a secluded space (i.e. interior courtyard) where they don't feel like they are being “put on display” (as is often the case in Bayside). As such, it makes no sense to try and force the shelter into a visible location simply for the sake of visibility - such an attempt plainly contradicts one of the apparent goals of the shelter design.

Second, Portland's number one priority should be to implement a successful “Housing First” policy. In other words, Portland should be concerned primarily with developing permanent affordable housing opportunities and moving folks as quickly as possible from intake shelters into permanent housing solutions. The “hiding the homeless” concerns ultimately force Portland to site shelters close to residential neighborhoods, schools, and difficult-to-police locations that are susceptible to criminal opportunists and unnecessarily cause friction between Portland communities and homeless advocates.

A more thoughtful approach would be to make sure that Portland (and all of Southern Maine, for that matter) is encouraging affordable urban infill projects that are designed to accommodate formerly homeless individuals – and to focus the “hiding the homeless” energy on those types of permanent housing solutions (not on temporary homeless shelters). Avesta's Bishop Street project is a prime example of what the end product of a successful “Housing First” initiative should look like. It also makes no sense to place such a large emphasis on the “hiding the homeless” concept at the shelter-level when the stated goal is for shelter clients to be located at the facility for only weeks at a time.

Third, we respectfully question whose needs are being met by insisting on not “hiding the homeless”? Is it truly the shelter clients – or are we meeting our own superficial needs? Does every shelter client want to spend their days in plain sight, on display for everyone to see – or do some clients value seclusion and privacy? Does every client want shelters to be sited in areas that are susceptible to criminal opportunists – or do the vast majority of clients simply want a safe, secure, temporary accommodation, away from the temptations of modern urban life? Does every shelter client want to temporarily live in an urban setting – or do some clients value green space and nature? We believe folks have been too quick to draw conclusions about what every shelter client wants.

For the reasons stated above, we believe that concerns about “hiding the homeless” are misplaced and counterproductive. As such, we respectfully ask the City Council (and this Committee) to rescind the supposed “hide the homeless” mandate and direct City staff to revisit the District Road Proposal, as well as the other 20 sites that were reportedly under consideration before the Nason's Corner Proposal was announced. If the City Council strongly believes that the “hiding the homeless” concept should apply at the shelter-level, they should do so by publicly debating the merits of several competing proposals in a public setting – and not by hamstringing this Committee and City staff.