



April 23, 2014

Councilwoman Judy Montero
Via Email

Dear Councilwoman Montero:

I am writing to clarify the position of the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless regarding the proposed “courtyard project” known as the Lawrence Street Community Center. The Coalition was not asked to provide advice or input into the development of this project. Nor was the Homeless Commission, of which I am a member, asked to review or give its input. Thus, what I know about the project is only what I have gleaned from media reports or third hand accounts.

The Coalition does **not** oppose the project. We just wish it were more than it is and that it was part of a comprehensive effort to truly address the issue of adult homelessness, the inadequacy and quality of the emergency shelter system, and the need for expanded services and supportive housing in Denver.

We have advocated for years that Denver needed 24 hour emergency shelters for men and women that did not require residents to leave in the morning only to queue up for re-entry at night. The current way our shelters operate, primarily due to lack of space and inadequate funding, creates a negative impact on surrounding businesses and neighbors as it requires a congregating of persons seeking shelter around those facilities. Using overflow “beds” to meet the overwhelming need for shelter contributes to this impact, as well as causes many persons in need to refuse to use these facilities.

We believe that the Denver Rescue Mission is doing the best they can within available resources and zoning limitations to meet the needs of homeless men in our community.

We strongly supported the initial proposal by the Denver Rescue Mission to rebuild and expand the shelter at its current location and on the Capra property. We believe that this would have been the best solution to the problems the Ballpark neighbors complain about. Unfortunately, when this proposal was quashed, the resulting project was a half-measure addressing the symptom rather than the underlying problem. While it is better than doing nothing, it is extremely unfortunate that the significant funding being invested in this project couldn't have been used to create a more appropriate shelter facility that both met the needs of those on the streets and lessened the negative impact on the neighborhood.

While we have expressed reservations about the proposed project, we cannot state more strongly that we do not support the efforts of the Ballpark neighborhood to relocate the DRM or any other homeless service program located in the neighborhood. The DRM has been an anchor of the neighborhood and the community for 44 years and 125 years respectively. Not only do they have the right to remain there, we believe that it is critical that they do so. The city should support their efforts, and those of other facilities, to improve their facilities and programs to meet the increasing needs of Denver's homeless residents.

Nor do we support the recently stated commitment from the Mayor's office to enhance police patrols in the Ballpark neighborhood, particularly at a time that the number of nightly "beds" is being reduced at the area shelters. This will not solve the underlying problems of inadequate shelter and services – it will only exacerbate the sense of futility and fear on the streets. Where are these homeless persons who are unable to access the shelters to go? Jail? That is not a cost effective or lasting solution.

We have long advocated for a comprehensive solution to Denver's homelessness problem that includes strong street outreach; adequate, safe and sanitary emergency shelter; a robust and expanded Housing First initiative; expanded health, mental health and substance treatment services; and the creation of an adequate supply of supportive housing for both individuals and families. The current housing market is creating a crisis in our community – one that will not be met through day centers and police patrols. We need a continuum of housing and services.

We have appreciated the support that you, other members of City Council and the Mayor's office have provided to the Coalition to help create real solutions to homelessness. However, these efforts need to be expanded and funded at the level commensurate to the growing need. That is vital to the economic vitality of Denver as well as to the needs of those currently on the streets.

So, I reiterate that we do not oppose the Lawrence Street Community Center. We would just like to see these other needs being addressed by Council and the Mayor with the same sense of urgency. Otherwise, we will continue to fight a losing battle in our efforts to end homelessness.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J Parvensky". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter of the first name being a large, stylized capital 'J'.

John Parvensky, President

CC: Denver City Councilmembers
Mayor Hancock
Brad Mueli
Ballpark Neighborhood Association