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Subject: Westminster Senior Center - Venice - Please attach to CF 15-1138-S8

Date: May 19, 2016 at 3:42:07 PM PDT

To: councilmember Ofarrell <councilmember.ofarrell@lacity.org>, councilmember Harris-Dawson <councilmember.harris-dawson@lacity.org>

Council Members O'Farrell and Harris-Dawson:

Please read the following letter I wrote and distributed that outlines exactly why those of us who live near the Westminster Senior Center in Venice are so against the idea of repurposing it for storage for the homeless. I hope you'll take away that we're not against helping but we are against a program that will cause destruction to a residential neighborhood without any evidence it will help. Truly, this idea is a "lose-lose" for all involved.

Please print this letter out and attach it to CF-15-1138-S8.

Hi All -

I am a resident of Venice and am keenly interested in ending homelessness. After witnessing the same people rotting on the streets for 14 years, I invested a significant chunk of time to study, understand and support solutions that were truly effective at shifting people from the misery of the streets to a more promising future under a real roof. I helped Bill Rosendahl gain community support for the Streets to Homes program - with the condition that people were actually moved into housing rather than parking lots. Once I saw how effective PATH was at housing people rather than sustaining them on the streets, I then volunteered to work at PATH's Hollywood center. Essentially, I created my own internship to learn from both PATH and the people they helped - those who were on the streets, those transitioning off the streets and those who had successfully re-booted their lives. It was during this time that I also became a member of Hollywood 4WRD and witnessed the power that commitment and collaboration against a common goal had to actually END HOMELESSNESS. With that experience and insight under my belt, I began to dig into what was different about Venice. How could Venice learn from a similar Los Angeles community that was doing it right?

I learned that millions of dollars were being raised and funneled to Venice social service organizations (predominantly St. Joseph's and Venice Community Housing) but that those organizations were not housing people with success commensurate with their funding. Rather, their homeless support strategy was to offer services that accommodated living on the streets and made it more comfortable. While generous in spirit, it seemed to me that this strategy only makes it more difficult to shift people off the streets and uses an immense amount of valuable city and community resources to sustain homelessness, prolonging the misery.

This perspective drove my thinking when Mike Bonin asked me and a small group of community and business members to recommend solutions on homelessness in Venice to him. We willingly and enthusiastically took on the challenge. After months of research and planning, we recommended that we recreate the successful Hollywood 4RWD model here in Venice and work to align all service homeless organizations against a single and focused mission: END HOMELESS IN VENICE. The strategies we recommended were very much aligned with the Housing First model and the United Way's Home for Good initiative - shared housing and small space housing with wrap-around supportive services in lieu of support in place. Our recommendation was far more efficient than status quo and far more effective at getting people off the streets. Our recommendation was to change the system, but unfortunately, the system ended up taking over our recommendation to justify, promote and celebrate more of the same.

Fast forward a year and a half. While Venice Forward is up and running, it has not replicated either the spirit or success Hollywood 4WRD. Venice Forward has not managed to shift the mission of its participants to ending homelessness and therefore, has not worked to implement coordinated solutions that shift people off the streets. In fact, homelessness and its impact in Venice has only been exacerbated since its formation and millions of dollars continue to be spent on funding more street services that have never proven effective. To be blunt, just more of the same. The collective focus on sustaining life on the streets is a tragedy for all, the homeless and Venice residents alike.

With that background, I'll share with you why so many residents (me included) are against converting the Westminster Senior Center into storage and intake services for the homeless. Wherever a service

organization sets up shop in Venice, the immediate residential community suffers greatly. And as history has proven time and time again, the residential community has no one to turn to for help. The communities surrounding St. Joseph's three outposts in Venice are permanent encampments - they're dangerous and tragic for all. When neighborhood residents call LAPD for help and support, they're informed that the LAPD is no longer guided by the LAMC (Municipal Code) but rather, is hamstrung by the City Attorney's office. They shrug their collective shoulders and do nothing to help. And when we ask questions or for support from the council office, we get no response. It is this dilemma that causes people like me to withhold our support for yet another inefficient and ineffective service to move into the heart of a Venice residential neighborhood. It's not that we don't want to help the homeless, it's that we don't want to support services that don't work to end homelessness. And since the City and LAPD have proven that they're unwilling to help protect us from the negative impact of homeless encampments in residential neighborhoods, why on earth would we look forward to importing one more? It's as simple as that.

If the City and LAPD were willing and able to assure and prove to their citizens that they could and would actively protect them from the very real and present dangers, you'd see more optimism and acceptance. And if social service organizations would shift their missions to end homelessness rather than maintain, sustain and nurture it, you would witness more support. Fix both problems and you've got a solution. Without these two critical elements, you will continue to see resistance, anger and frustration.

It's critical that you all understand that we residents are resisting status quo - we are not resisting positive effort to create change. We in Venice are realists with twenty years of evidence to prove that the City's failure to implement solutions that truly work to end homelessness (as have been successfully implemented in other cities throughout the country) is not working. It's a fundamental truth that more of the same simply creates more of the same.

I have contributed years of work, an immense amount of energy and abundant enthusiasm to help end homelessness in Venice and I would really appreciate someone from the City responding to me. I continue to welcome the exchange of innovative ideas and solutions that have the potential to work for all and will continue to fight against the adoption of social services that only serve to prolong and magnify the tragedy of homelessness in my community.

Heidi Roberts