

*The First Amendment
of the United States Constitution:*

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."

Our View

Homeless center coalition bears burden

Proponents will have to build trust along with new building

A proposal to build a 10,000-square-foot Housing Services Center in Fort Collins for homeless people has revealed a genuine need, deep-rooted bias and some understandable concerns.

A coalition of governments and nonprofits is planning to build the center at the northwest corner of Conifer and Blue Spruce Drive in north Fort Collins. The facility will provide counseling, job and housing resources, and networking opportunities for Larimer County's homeless population.

Simply rejecting the homeless facility out of hand because it serves people who have no homes is unreasonable, inhumane and unfair. But it is just as unwise to dismiss residents' concerns about the project.

Compassion and understanding on the many perspectives of this issue are sorely needed.

Gordan Thibedeau, executive director of the United Way of Larimer County, explained that the homeless population has no place to find much-needed services to improve their situation.

While the need is obvious, so, too, is the opposition to the project, as voiced by nearly 60 residents and business owners who attended a public meeting last week.

North Fort Collins residents and business owners have a valid concern in noting that so many service-related programs for homeless and low-income residents have been located in their part of town. That "service hub," created to increase convenience for those in need as well as efficiency among nonprofits, could also have an unintended consequence of identifying North Fort Collins and nearby businesses with a negative image.

Other less-than-positive perceptions about the project are earned from previous facilities that have not been well managed, leaving neighbors and local businesses with messes to clean up and little power to respond. Yet other opinions about the homeless facility are more difficult to address because they emit from deep-rooted discrimination, bigotry and a not-in-my-back-yard attitude.

Simply rejecting the homeless facility out of hand because it serves people who have no homes is unreasonable and unfair. Compassion, understanding and respect for the human condition are sorely needed.

If this project proceeds, proponents must understand that the burden of making this situation work will be placed upon them. Some people will never accept the center on its merits, but others will if the coalition follows through on its promises.

United Way of Larimer County, CARE Housing, the Fort Collins Housing Authority and the cities of Loveland and Fort Collins have united in this noble effort. Ensuring that concerns about night-time loitering, security, cleanliness, etc., are adequately addressed is essential. The center will not be a success unless it is accepted not just by those who will

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