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*City of Ashland, Wisconsin*

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## **City of Ashland – Plan Commission Meeting Minutes**

A meeting of the Ashland Plan Commission was held on  
**Tuesday, September 21, 2021 at 6:30 p.m.** via  
GoToMeeting.

**Committee Members Present:** David Mettille, Mayor Lewis, Laurie Gregor,  
Eric Lindell, John Beirl, Katie Gellatly, Ana Tochterman

**Committee Members Absent:**

**Staff Present:** Megan McBride

Mayor Lewis opened the meeting at 6:30 p.m.

### **Agenda**

#### **1) Approval of Agenda**

Motion to approve the agenda with item 5b tabled for a future meeting by Eric Lindell. Seconded by John Beirl. Passed unanimously.

#### **2) Consent Agenda**

a) Approval of minutes from the August 17th, 2021 Plan Commission meeting

Motion to approve minutes from the August 17th, 2021 Plan Commission meeting by Eric Lindell. Seconded by David Mettille. Passed unanimously.

#### **3) Public Comment (non-agenda items)**

None.

#### **4) Action Items**

- a. Public Hearing and vote on a request for a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) to operate an emergency residential facility at 2300 Lake Shore Drive W, parcel #201-04745-0000, zoned Regional Commercial (RC), Waterfront-Overlay (W-O), Gateway-Overlay (GTWY-O), and Wetland-Overlay (WET-O). Applicant: Northwest Wisconsin Community Services Agency (NWCSA)

Motion to go into public hearing by Eric Lindell. Seconded by David Mettille. Passed unanimously.

Megan McBride explained the Class 2 public hearing notice which was issued, and that public hearing notices were sent to all property owners within 200 feet of the proposed development. Additionally, flyers were made to inform neighbors about both the Plan Commission public hearing and hybrid public hearing which will be held by the City Council at their September 28, 2021 meeting, and these flyers were distributed door to door for all surrounding properties as well. She then went through the review criteria for the item outlined in the staff report, and associated recommendation for approval with conditions.

City Attorney Max Lindsey provided an overview of Conditional Use Permit (CUP) legislation in Wisconsin, which was changed in 2017 and greatly limited the discretion of communities in deciding whether or not to grant CUP's. He explained that all conditions must be reasonable, and to the maximum extent feasible shall be measurable and based in fact. The role of the municipality is then to evaluate conditions which can address compatibility and neighbor concerns, and if the applicant is willing to meet all conditions then the CUP must be granted.

John Beirl asked if the Plan Commission and City Council can legally deny the CUP request, and if so what the appeal process would be.

Max Lindsey said that the applicant would need to appeal the decision in circuit court within 30 days of denial, and demonstrate that the basis for denial does not meet City and state standards and/or that conditions imposed do not meet the criteria set in state statute. Max Lindsey also explained that if Plan Commission and City Council does not feel this is an appropriate use in the specified zoning district, then changes to the City ordinances would need to be made to reflect this. He also explained that there is not substantial evidence to demonstrate that the project would devalue surrounding homes, confirmed by City assessor Walt Hughes prior to the meeting. Therefore, this alone would likely not be sufficient grounds for denial of the CUP. Additionally, he explained that he has spoken with Bay Area Rural Transit (BART), who explained that the property at 2300 Lake Shore Dr W is not a designated stop but is considered an on-call stop. Therefore, they could provide transportation for individuals to and from the shelter with sufficient notice ahead of time.

Kevin Seefeldt (507 Beaser Avenue) expressed that he is supportive of having a homeless shelter in Ashland, as this is an urgent need for the community. He said that he does not feel the site identified is a sustainable or appropriate option, with concerns about the mix of individuals and families who will occupy the shelter and the feasibility of on-site staff being able to adequately manage the number of rooms available. He also expressed concerns regarding the eligibility criteria which will exclude certain populations, who will continue to be homeless and will not have access to services.

JoAnn Erickson (3300 City Heights Rd) expressed that it is a shame that the public was not more informed and involved in the process when the initial grant application was submitted for the project, and that it has been an unfair process for the community to provide input. She stated that the community has not had time to process this proposal, and that it is particularly unfair to the owners of El Dorado's and other surrounding property values which will be devalued. She asked what the enforcement mechanisms are for failure to comply with requirements, and stated that it would be difficult to enforce long-term. She also stated that it is located in a primary commercial corridor into the City, and this use has the potential to create an eyesore at one of the city's gateways.

Kevin Kegel (221 Prentice Heights Rd) expressed agreement with the previous comments made, and stated that the property is prime for development which will add to the community's tax base. He said that the building is in bad shape with mold being a major issue, and is also an eyesore in this area of the community. He does not feel this proposed use is sustainable, and that the city should focus on making the lakefront appealing to residents and visitors. He acknowledge that we have a local issue with homelessness, and that a shelter should be located closer to services that residents will need to access. He expressed concerns for how the property will be monitored for people coming and going, and that he feels this is the worst possible use for this particular property.

Anthony Jennings (owner of 315 Turner Rd) said that he has heard many comments in opposition to the project, but has not heard any good alternative proposed for a better location. He said that neighbors will likely be opposed no matter where a shelter would be located, and that he worked with the Homelessness Task force to evaluate alternative locations. He emphasized that the Ashland Motel is already being heavily utilized through local voucher programs, which does not offer any monitoring of the site. He acknowledged the concern about certain populations being ineligible to stay at the facility, but noted that this may be a positive if families are going to be staying there to ensure sex offenders and people with a record of violence in the past 5 years will not be sheltered in the same location. He said that perhaps a separate facility will need to be looked at to house individuals who do not qualify for this shelter, but that the current proposed sheltered is also not meant to be the single solution to homelessness in Ashland. He said that the grant application process was short because funds became available related to COVID, and that it would not have made sense to engage neighbors about a specific property without knowing if funds would be available for acquisition. He encouraged anyone who is worried about how the site will look to offer to volunteer, as he and his staff plan to. He also noted that while this lot may be prime for a hotel development, there are plenty of other properties along the highway that would also be good for this use and they cannot all be reserved until a private developer comes forward with desire to redevelop them.

Brett Beeksma (601 Prentice Heights Rd) expressed concerns as a nearby property owner for safety, and asked what other hotels have been utilized for vouchers and if any

issues have been experienced at these locations. He also asked what neighbors are supposed to do if issues do arise. He said that the condition to have a contact number be provided to properties within 200ft is insufficient.

Millie Rounsville clarified that a direct contact number can be provided to anyone who wants it, not just property owners within 200 feet. They would like to maintain clear lines of communication, so they can quickly respond to neighborhood questions and concerns. She provided additional background about the project, and clarified that NWCSA does not currently own the property so concerns about current management or operations would not be associated with oversight by their organization. There are approximately 20 rooms in the single-story hotel building, with the office space located in the center of U-shaped building. They would utilize all of the existing rooms, though they may lose one to two rooms when they improve 10% of the bedrooms to be ADA compliant. She explained that individuals staying at the site are checked in and out each time they leave the facility, and that their belongings are searched each time they check into the facility to ensure weapons, drugs and other prohibited items are not brought in. Residents are also not allowed to have any guests on the property who are not enrolled in the facility. All residents must work with a cases manager, and outside service agencies will come to the shelter to connect directly with residents as well. She said that they typically do a 30 day shelter, but if a resident is waiting to get into alternative stable housing then they are allowed to stay beyond the typical 30 days.

Alex Honstad (204 Prentice Heights Rd) said that she moved in after the period of time when the City allowed homeless individuals to camp in Prentice Park, and has heard about many issues from her neighbors of people knocking on doors to ask for money and food. She asked what measures will be put in place to prevent this from happening, and make neighbors feel safe.

Millie Rounsville explained that she has not had issues with any of her vouchers participants going door to door, and that panhandling anywhere in the community violates their rules for participants.

Katie Gellatly, owner of the Blue Wave Inn, Sandbar, and Solstice Outdoors located in the Northland College-owned building directly across the street from the proposed emergency residential facilities, shared her experiences with the property over the past two years. Since her building is open for guests 24 hours, they have experienced issues of people sleeping in her vestibule, harassing her staff when they come in to open the business in the morning, and there have been issues of needles along the waterfront in this and other areas. She said that it is challenging to think about this facility converting to an emergency residential facility long-term.

Joel Langholz (1114 6<sup>th</sup> Ave W) said that he has experience working with homeless folks through a volunteer capacity, and also when he was a business owner of Salmagundi on West Main Street. When his business was located directly next to Menard Park, they did

have issues of homeless people sleeping in the park, so he sympathizes with the concerns of business owners. He acknowledged that there will be challenges and issues associated with the property, but that he is confident that Millie Rounsville knows what she is doing and how to manage the property appropriately. He agreed with previous comments that volunteers will be important to the success of this project, and that perhaps there will be opportunities for the El Dorado's building to convert to a positive associated use in the future. He overall expressed support for the project, and said that while it will not be the end all solution to homelessness in our area it will be an improvement for oversight of the property and as a single point of intervention to connect residents with local resources.

Kaas Baichtal, who served on the homelessness task force as a landlord representative, commented that the perception of short notice to the community is subjective. She explained that the task force has been working on this project for approximately a year, and that these meetings were all open to the public and publicly noticed. She said that the grant process went remarkably quickly, only because the funds available were left over COVID money which the state approached the City to encourage them to apply for. The committee considered multiple locations, and decided to partner with NWCSA because of their experience and demonstrated ability to effectively run shelters in Superior.

Gina Beeksma (601 Prentice Heights Rd) expressed that her biggest concern is related to people who are denied access to the shelter because they do not meet eligible criteria. She is worried that people will be loitering and will make their way to neighboring residential properties.

**Megan McBride shared the following comments received prior to the meeting:**

Larry Cicero provided the following comments prior to the meeting: "This location is bad because it has individual exits or entrances which is not secure or feasible to be monitored by one on-site staff person. This location is also a gateway to the community, and this proposed use does not reflect the comp plan's recommendations for the waterfront. This location is also across from the Sandbar and a very nice beach used by children. Having this location be a shelter will also make devalue El Dorado's building, making it worthless. This will also take the land off the tax roll, remove room tax dollars, and further limit the already tight market for hotel rooms during peak tourism season."

Clair Helsper at 109 Prentice Heights Road provided the following comments prior to the meeting: "I am opposed to the project, we have small children on that block as well as several widows who live alone, so this is not a good place for a homeless shelter. This location is also a gateway to the city and a homeless shelter there is not a good representation of the city or the best use of this piece of property."

Meegan Gosseline at 223 Prentice Heights Road provided the following comments prior to the meeting: "Regarding the proposed emergency residential facility I am adamantly

opposed! I chose to invest in Ashland for my home and retirement, safety was my utmost concern. This facility is only trees away from my home! Reconsider please.

Clarence and Kathy Osmak provided the following comments prior to the meeting: "In regard to the Northwest Wisconsin Community Services Agency application for a conditional use permit to institute an emergency residential facility at 2300 Lake Shore Dr. W, I request that you vote NO on this application. Why is the meeting on September 21<sup>st</sup> only available for the public on GoTo Meeting? Why has this meeting been so secretive? What are you afraid of? The meeting on September 16<sup>th</sup> was open to the public to attend in person and this Plan Commission meeting is not. Here are some reasons why I am opposed to this project. First the location is right on a US Highway with a Lake Superior view. A homeless shelter is not the first thing that tourists want to see when they come into Ashland. Businesses will lose because tourists will just go through town and to another city to shop and eat. The beach will not be safe for our children.

Second, as a senior citizen who has recently moved into the Ashland area I worry about security. There is no way that any person can be controlled 24/7. We moved here for the security and do not want to have to worry about anyone coming onto our property. Also, our taxes have been raise with the last evaluation and with a homeless shelter a half mile away our property value will go down, even with rising taxes. The City will also be losing their tax base with this location.

Third, the motel is in bad condition and should be destroyed due to mold and other hazards. This facility will only attract more issues to our area. Vote no, we are absolutely against this facility being added.

Randy and Sue Spangle provided the following comments prior to the meeting: "We are Randy and Sue Spangle, we are lifetime residents of Ashland and are opposed to the current proposed location for the homeless shelter at the Ashland Motel site. We are not opposed to the need for a homeless shelter.

We feel that the proposed location is not a good option due to the stretch of highway that welcomes people to Ashland and seeing a homeless shelter will affect tourism and the other businesses on that stretch of highway. We feel with the beautiful views of lake superior that site should be developed commercially. It is also not congruent of our cities goals for tourism to make us a destination city to visit and not have people just drive through it.

Substance Abuse concerns are a key factor with homelessness. I know first hand the impact of alcoholism and substance abuse as I was the Director of the Ashland Area Council on AODA for 38 years, from 2014-2017 I also was the Substance Clinical Supervisor for North Lakes Clinic. At the time of my retirement I was the most senior substance abuse counselor and clinical Supervisor in the State of Wisconsin. According to the National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA) 30- 40 percent of the homeless are alcohol or drug dependent.

At the informational meeting held at the Vaughn library stories of Drug paraphernalia and needles of IV drug users have been a documented problem with the businesses along that stretch.

It is also my understanding that the Ashland Motel proposed homeless shelter cost is using all of the \$700,000 in COVID funds to purchase a building with very little \$ for services. As an addiction professional if you don't treat the addiction of the 40% or more who will be using the shelter no long term results will occur. I urge the committee to NOT grant the conditional release permit and continue to look for a better location options.

Terri Zivic of Bayfield County provided the following comments prior to the meeting: "I am a resident of Bayfield County and I attended the public information session on 9/16/21. Over the past winter I volunteered with the not for profit organization Ashland Homeless Help to provide resources to keep clients sheltered and out of living in their cars. I was aware that there was a task force looking at this for the city but I had no idea that it was comprised of such a large and diverse group of professionals and individuals from various backgrounds all working together to come up with a solution. It appears to me that task force recommendations meet all of its stated goals.

I listened to the questions and comments from individuals and specifically business owners and homeowners concerns. I can certainly understand those viewpoints. This is a complicated issue and it affects many. I do believe though that the benefits of having this property managed by a human services organization that can provide supervision and structure for residents a vast improvement over the current situation. I see the benefit of using the grant money when it is available.

This will only be a first step but I believe it is important to use the resources that the city has available in this case to move forward with this recommendation for the approval of a conditional use permit. I am hopeful that with the continued support of the task force and the community many of the concerns about the project's location can be more fully responded to in time."

Stan Schrock provided the following comments prior to the meeting: Happy Tuesday! I'd like to share some comments and pose a couple questions for the Planning Commission and City Council regarding the proposed emergency homeless shelter.

First, what a great service that I think will help a lot of people and families who truly need and deserve it. Well done on finally making this a reality! I volunteered and worked at a shelter for roughly two years; I've seen how important a shelter like this can be for many folks. I agree that the current voucher program is unsustainable and does very little to spark true change. The shelter model and stipulations all make sense to me:

Participants must be enrolled in a program; no drugs, weapons, sex offenders etc are eligible; 24-hour staff on site. 1. How will these stipulations be enforced to ensure participants and staff remain in a safe environment, and ensure that there are no drugs, weapons etc brought into the shelter? 2. It is inevitable that individuals or groups will go to the shelter thinking/hoping to be accepted on a drop-in basis. What happens when those folks are turned away? Is there a plan for providing information to those folks on where they can go after they're turned away? A service or transportation to get them to a

new location? Is there a plan or at least increased awareness from Ashland PD for the surrounding residential neighborhoods? Those who are turned away due to drug or weapon possession / sex offender status will likely make their way to the nearest homes, garages, and businesses... Thanks for your time and for working to help those in need!

An anonymous resident provided the following comments prior to the meeting: I am a tax payer who does not want my taxes going towards housing homeless people staying in the hotel. I feel if you do this it will encourage more homeless to come to our area. Also, as people drive through Ashland it has the potential to be an eyesore to our community. Please do not let this happen in Ashland.

Melissa Martinez, Director of the Washburn Chamber, expressed opposition to the proposed use in this location for several reasons. She is opposed to it because it would take room tax away from the Ashland Area Chamber of Commerce, and is not an appropriate location for this use. She expressed concerns that the property is not located near critical services for the individuals who will be served, and she would rather see more funds be spent on a location that will meet the needs of residents and ensure accessibility to services. She said that if we care about addressing homelessness in our area, we also need to care that they can access services to help address underlying causes of homelessness as well.

Ana Tochterman shared comments from Pat Ondarko, who contacted her to express support for the project because it is a need for the community.

Millie Rounsville addressed concerns around people wandering off the property, and said that this is not an issue they experience with their current shelter in Superior which is located directly within a residential neighborhood. She also said that there will be cameras on the front and back of the building, and always a minimum of 2 staff people at all times to ensure that the cameras can be constantly monitored for people coming and going from the property. She said that this facility is just intended to be one tool in the toolbox, and that they will partner closely with the warming shelter in Bad River which does not have the same eligibility criteria so they can refer people in the winter time who do not qualify to stay at the emergency shelter. She said that they are happy to give tours of the facility to anyone interested, and they want to continue to receive input to ensure the facility can best serve the community and be compatible with surrounding uses.

Kevin Kegel (221 Prentice Heights Rd) asked for clarification regarding the process for checking in and out. He asked if residents are confined to their rooms, and need to be let out by shelter staff in order to leave. He also asked if people's belongings are checked each time they reenter the facility, or only during their initial check in.

Millie Rounsville explained that people are able to leave their rooms, but will not have keys to get back into their rooms without a shelter staff person. Each time somebody

leaves the facility they will need to check back in, and they will have their belongings searched. She said they will also always have 2 people on site for safety, and so that if one person is checking residents in the other person will still be able to monitor the office and cameras. They may have additional volunteers on site, but will always minimally have 2 staff people.

JoAnn Erickson asked how long vouchers are currently good for.

Millie Rounsville explained that vouchers are typically between 3 days and one week, but can be extended if somebody is waiting to get into another form of housing.

JoAnn Erickson asked how many people are served at one time in their shelter in Superior, and how can we ensure that the facility will really serve people from our area and not people coming in from other communities once the shelter is established.

Millie Rounsville said that their current shelter is only for men, and serves 20 men at a given time. She said that based on demographic data of residents, only 5 people between all of the counties that NWSCA serves were documented as people who came from outside of the area in which they are being served.

Kevin Seefeldt shared that he has been contacted by several property owners, including Lakeshore Sales and Service who is opposed to the project. The owner of the Crest Motel also expressed opposition because the property is located within the commercial gateway. The owner of Hometown Auto also expressed opposition because of the loss of tax base to the community.

Kaas Baichtal commented on the concerns related to mold, and pointed out that mold remediation and future prevention could be included within the overall renovation of the building.

Millie Rounsville explained that they did have the building inspected by a certified Building Inspector, and the primary issues identified were the wiring and that there is no vapor barrier or insulation on the bottom of the building leading to heat loss. She said that they were only able to inspect about 50% of the rooms at that time, and that any mold identified was in a bathroom which only utilized a window for ventilation. The installation of proper ventilation should also help address mold concerns.

Anthony Jennings pointed out that any building that is used for a homeless shelter will inevitably remove it from the tax roll, so this would not be an issue unique to this location. He said that if there are issues with the site, he will be the first to help address them. He encouraged others to volunteer to help be a positive part of the solution.

Ana Tochtermann shared comments received from Kim Brye, who expressed concerns about the loss in tax revenue. She asked if the current property owner has tried to sell

the property for a private commercial use, and asked who will be responsible for costs in fixing the parking lot.

Millie Rounsville said that the current owner has only owned in since January so she could not say if he has made any other attempts to market to sell it. She said that they do have funds available for fixing up both the building and parking area, so NWCSA will be responsible for those costs.

Herb Mauritz said that the property is currently a rundown motel, and is an eyesore. The new use will fix the building up, beautify the property, and will look better than what we have now. He currently lives next to the Bayview Motel which also serves homeless individuals on a regular basis, and he has experienced no issues related to this.

Katie Gellatly asked if there will be no signage for the shelter, how it will be distinguished from other nearby motels. She also asked how it will appear on Google Maps.

Millie Rounsville said that the signage will simply say NWCSA rather than identifying the property specifically as a shelter.

Ana Tochterman agreed that the issue of Google Maps and how the site will be identified is important, and asked if a condition could be created around this. She also asked if an annual report could be provided by NWCSA to ensure ongoing transparency in addressing neighbor concerns.

Laurie Gregor asked if the current roles and procedures are governed by state regulations, or by the NWCSA board. She also asked how flexible these regulations are to changing in the future.

Millie Rounsville explained that some standards are based on their funding sources, including the inspection requirements for the building, and that they must have insurance for the building. The requirements for background checks come from their insurance company. She said that they do ongoing reporting for the City of Superior related to shelter operations, and that they would also do a community notification if any regulations would substantively change in the future.

Eric Lindell asked about the staff to client ratio at the facility, which Millie explained would always have a minimum of 2 staff people on site.

Eric Lindell asked what the consequences for people who break the rules for the shelter would be. He also asked what will be done to ensure that the facility does not become a drop-in site, and that people do not show up to the facility with the misconception that it is.

Millie Rounsville explained that they have a 3 strike policy for people who break facility rules, unless the offense is severe enough to warrant immediate removal. She said that there will be no signage up for the shelter, so this should limit the number of people who drop-in without proper screening first. They will provide information on other area resources for people who do not qualify to stay at the shelter to connect them other other local providers.

Eric Lindell asked if wrap around services will be offered, and how will the issue of public transportation be addressed.

Millie Rounsville explained that residents will have access to a computer, internet and phone. They will have services on site, and will partner with other area providers to increase over time. They have reached out to BART and would like to have a bus stop, but none of their current facilities are located along a bus route and they have utilized the Ashland Motel building for their voucher program to date without issue. Many services are still within walking distance, so they have not seen this as a strong need at other shelters they manage.

Motion to go out of public hearing by John Beirl, seconded by Eric Lindell. Passed unanimously.

Motion to approve the request with recommended conditions by David Mettille, seconded by Eric Lindell.

John Beirl said that he agrees there is a need for a shelter in our community, but does not feel this is an appropriate location. He expressed frustration with the process, the staff report's review and recommendations for conditions, and the role of the Plan Commission in reviewing CUP's if they do not have discretion to make decisions based on the best use of the land. He said that he does not feel this is an appropriate location, or that the use is compatible with Comprehensive Plan goals for the area. He feels the conditions for landscaping are inadequate and do not offer neighbor protections, and does not feel this location is conducive to being a secure homeless shelter. He said that the building is being sold for \$700,000, so clearly there is value in the property and it could be utilized for a more compatible development. He also expressed concerns for safety, as families will be staying at the motel as well and children will have to cross U.S. Highway 2 to access the beach and waterfront.

Katie Gellatly agreed that she does not feel that landscaping is a sufficient neighborhood protection. As a business owner, she stated that she could move her businesses out of the facility she currently rents, as could other surrounding businesses, creating broader negative impacts on surrounding tax values. She thinks the sale of the property represents a great opportunity to improve this corridor, and feels the proposed use is not the best use of this site.

Laurie Gregor said that she supports the need for a shelter, and appreciates all of the work that has gone into this proposal. She also expressed concerns about the regulations for the facility, which she currently supports but could be changed in the future if there should be turnover in the NWCSA board and leadership. She also acknowledged that the Plan Commission's vote is

ultimately a recommendation to City Council, and she feels a “no” vote also gives voice to the community input received.

Ana Tochterman said she feels the proposed project is a pretty quick solution to a long-standing community problem, using limited resources to accomplish it. She appreciated the community input, and pointed out that many of the fears and concerns stem from some assumptions about who will be served by the facility and who homeless people are in our community. She pointed out that an important population that has not been represented at the public hearing is people who are currently or have recently been homeless.

David Mettillie agreed that the voices of people experiencing homelessness have not been heard, and this is partly because of the reason that homeless people have been spoken about during this meeting. He said it is a core value in Ashland to care about each other, and everyone agrees that we need a shelter somewhere if approved. He also said that while this is located in the gateway, and that many people have probably drove past a shelter facility in the past and didn't know it because they blend into the surrounding area.

Eric Lindell provided the following comments: “I want to begin by saying, for the record, I have received several (or many) emails from concerned members of the public regarding the proposed homeless shelter project. I also want it to be known that I did attend the hearing on September 16<sup>th</sup>.

Before that meeting, under the freedom of information, I requested all the records pertaining to the task force that was created to address the homeless issue here in Ashland. The following statement, while lengthy, is made in part from public comments and from those records. I should also note that I have advocated for several years now for the city to open a warming shelter to help those in need during the winter months. To be clear, I believe that our city needs this project. That is not the question. The question is whether this proposal is right for our city. I am deeply troubled tonight by the request from NWCSA. Again, not because Ashland does not need an emergency shelter, but with how this process has played out. If we can for a moment, let's rollback the clock to February of this year. At that time the committee started with a very long list of potential building opportunities. The Ashland Motel was **NOT** among them. In fact, there is no mention of the Ashland Motel until June, and again in August after the notice of the grant money was being awarded to the city.

In the mayor's original request for CDBGCV on 4-23-21 stated that the structure would assist 15 clients at any given time. And today we are looking at a 34, unit building. I'm not so much concerned with the size of the project expanding, but the fact that there is a lack of explanation within the task forces minutes. There is no record of what changed in their thinking.

This is demonstrated again when the subject of renovation is brought up. On April 19<sup>th</sup> the Mayor & Millie discussed the options of new construction or renovation of the current building in an email. On May 24<sup>th</sup> the Mayor received an email from Arnie Mackey Construction. They had reached out and offered to work with the city/NWCSA on the project. A day later, the mayor replied and said she would forward the offer on. There is no record of this being forwarded or further pursued.

I bring these issues up to show that there were other options. I am concerned that there is no record as to why these were taken off the table. What was the reasoning behind the sudden shifts? We need to strive to help as many people as possible. However, we need to be realistic in our planning, otherwise there could be negative effects and outcomes. With that being said, let's look at the proposed location. The first thing that myself and others have noticed is that it is not anywhere near the resources and services that those in need will most likely need to utilize.

This includes the BRICK, Northlakes, etc. Additionally, transportation is another issue that comes up when discussing this location. It is not a current BART stop, and it is unknown at this time if BART will arrange to have it become one.

There are still many questions that have been left unanswered. For example, what happens to people who arrive only to find themselves unable to utilize the shelter because it is at capacity? I believe the current plan allows occupants to stay up to six months. We all know that housing/apartment access is very limited at this time here in Ashland and I highly doubt this will change until the construction of the new housing development moves forward. What is the plan to find the occupants permanent housing? Additionally, what is the plan for those who are unable to access the shelter due to being on the sex offender registry, or due to their criminal records? They may not be able to access the shelter but might not know this upon arriving. The understanding is that this facility will not be a drop off spot. However, these things will happen, and the public has a right to know what the plan is or might be.

Finally, how do we know who we are serving and if they are from our area? It is not enough to turn the question around and ask, why would someone come here with no shelter available to them? There are services that we have that other communities do not. Take Duluth for example, it has a variety of shelters and for a number of reasons has seen a growing homeless population. I find it difficult to believe that anyone has accurate data for where they all are coming from. The public is concerned that "if you build it, they will come." How do we plan to deal with this, if in fact they do start to come from other places? This is an understandable concern, and no amount of data is going to calm the fear the community has.

Now, any these issues, concerns and examples, on their own, would not be a reason to say no to this project. However, when you put them all together and include the lack of public buy-in, we need to stop and take a serious look at what we are doing. The task force understood and discussed the need for public support from the very start. Unfortunately, we saw no public inclusion until August when ONE public education forum was held at the suggestion of the head librarian at the Vaughn Library! This is far too little too late.

We now have a situation. The concerns over being out bid, lead to some secrecy in the location of the emergency shelter. This has led the public, and I feel some members of this committee, to left out of the discussion. The first warning sign should have been when the mayor received an email from the Chamber of Commerce suggesting that the objections to the location of the property being used would be problematic.

If we put all that aside, which we should not, are we ready to move forward? The mayor stated that this project would be on the agenda at the next council meeting on the 28<sup>th</sup>. How is that even possible? Not all CPUs have been issued. The NWCSA has not agreed to anything yet either, or members of this committee may wish to add more to the agreement before it is finalized.

The public announcement that this will be on the next council meeting agenda also assumes that we may not wish to slow down the approval process, which this committee has every right to do on any project. Customary delays to this process should have been anticipated. Has the time needed for the city's attorney to review all the CPUs been considered? Had we had more than a meeting on this issue we may have at least had the opportunity to iron some of these things out. I understand the owner of the hotel has also put forth a deadline for negotiations. That is a business problem and should not be the primary concern of this committee. The primary concern of this committee is to ensure that this project does in fact meet the city's needs and is placed in area where it will do better than harm. The possibility that this location will negatively impacts-surrounding businesses is a cause for concern. Not to mention that it takes a

very key piece of property off the tax rolls in a time when we need to be maintaining our current revenue and finding new sources to meet the growing budgetary demands.

Nobody is saying this project is not needed in our community. I want to be sure to emphasize that point. What this all boils down to is, is this the right property for this project? I would argue it is not. This has nothing to do with anything other than what is best for the people this shelter will be working with, and what is best for our community.

If this is going to happen it should be put in a centrally located place, close to the services needed to help these individuals move forward. No matter where this ends up being located people would still object, but the selling points for being centrally located are greater than the current proposed location.

In conclusion, I am asking the task force to go back to the drawing board and get this right. Our failure to do so will have negative consequences for our city. I understand this will mean more paperwork and time. I also understand the desire to open this shelter before the winter months hit, but again it seems to me that other options did not receive fair consideration. Even if this was a good fit for the project city staff and this committee should have been given more time to review this proposal and to solicit public buy-in. Even though this is difficult to accept, it is the hard truth. I do not see how we can be asked to move this project forward when it appears that this location is not in the city's best long-term interest.

Millie Rounsville went over the other locations which were considered, which included:

- 1) The Chequamegon Clinic (415 Ellis Avenue) which would have cost \$3 million for acquisition alone, and therefore was outside of their feasible price range;
- 2) Private homes were considered which NWCSA already owns or could acquire, which were too small and offered inadequate parking; and
- 3) The buildings for sale by Arnie Mackey Construction (407 Lake Shore Dr E), which was too small and presented significant costs to renovate for residential use.

Millie Rounsville explained that if the proposed CUP is not approved, then they would not have funds for acquisition of a different facility. She expressed frustrations about the way that people experiencing homelessness are talked about, as if they are second class citizens rather than future tax payers, property owners and neighbors. She explained prevention strategies that NWCSA is also doing to try to keep people in their homes, which is another large component of addressing homelessness locally.

Mayor Lewis expressed gratitude for the people who came to speak at the hearing, and also attended the public information session on the 16<sup>th</sup> at the Vaughn Library. She explained that the task force was formed to address the long-standing issue of homelessness, and that she receives numerous calls every winter wondering what the City is doing to ensure homeless people have a place to stay. She said that this is a community problem, and that the task force was meant to connect expertise and resources to determine the best solution at this time. She apologized if the process felt rushed, and said that there was no intent to hide anything. She pointed out that funding to support the level of vouchers needed this past year will not be available this coming winter since funds were largely tied to COVID relief, so the proposed shelter is the only realistic solution to help for the upcoming winter.

Motion by Mayor Lewis to add the following conditions as recommendations to City Council, seconded by Ana Tochterman:

- 1) No signage shall be installed to identify the property as a shelter
- 2) Ensure online identification of the site in Google Maps generally identifies it as the community services agency, and does not specify that it is a shelter
- 3) The applicant shall hold an initial listening session to identify neighbor concerns and information that is of high importance to the community for ongoing communication. Based on this, the applicant shall provide annual reports including information regarding demographics of individuals and families served, reported incidents with law enforcement, and other information identified through the public listening session.
- 4) Policies regulating the facility shall not materially change without prior approval by the City, and notification to the community

Passed unanimously.

Motion to approve Conditional Use Permit with staff recommended conditions and Plan Commission added conditions by David Mettille, seconded by Eric Lindell. Passed 4 to 3, Beirl, Gregor and Gellatly opposed.

## **5) Announcements/Reports/Comments/Questions**

Mayor Lewis announced that an additional public hearing for this CUP will be held at the City Council meeting on September 28<sup>th</sup>, which will be a hybrid meeting that can be attended virtually or in person.

## **6) Adjournment**

Motion to adjourn by David Mettille. Seconded by Eric Lindell. Passed unanimously.

*Meeting was adjourned at 9:55 pm. Minutes done by Megan McBride.*