

Meeting Summary:

Overnight Shelters Text Amendment Community Meeting – North

North Regional Library

July 27, 2015

Attendees included council members Cam Gordon, Lisa Bender, and Blong Yang, staff from Minneapolis CPED, and approximately 20 community members and shelter operators.

The meeting began with a presentation by Shanna Sether, a planner with CPED, detailing the historic and current zoning code regulations for overnight shelters as well as an overview of how peer cities regulate overnight shelters. The majority of the meeting consisted of an open large-group discussion, centered around three questions:

1. How do you envision the ideal shelter environment to better serve those in need?
2. What types of locations do you see as appropriate for overnight shelters, both to best serve those in need and to ensure compatibility of uses?
3. If an overnight shelter were to locate near your home or business, what would be your primary concerns, and what suggestions would you have to mitigate those concerns?

For the first question, many of the responses focused around creating a dignified, safe place. Some ideas included offering storage space, privacy, and beds (not floor mats). Others suggested that shelters should be places where we would be comfortable having our family members stay—they should provide adequate heat and air-conditioning, and quality food and beds. Some suggested that shelters should provide access to transit and parking, and that children should be able to stay close to their schools. Some community members suggested that there is a shortage of shelter for children, single women, and trans/non-binary gender identified persons.

For the second question, discussion was mostly focused around the types of buildings that could be used for shelters. Some suggested that abandoned single-family homes could be used, while others suggested that any decent-sized apartment building would make a good shelter. Some community members noted that locating shelters in industrial areas could be seen as hiding shelter and might be undignified, however, if done in a dignified manner this could be an affordable location for shelters. Higher Ground was pointed to as a successful, dignified shelter. It is located in a transitional industrial area in a building specifically designed as a shelter and is viewed as very compatible with the surrounding area and dignified. Some noted that if a shelter building is run-down or seen as blight, it will negatively affect how the neighborhood views the residents of the building. Some community members voiced support for spacing regulations to prevent concentrations, but others were wary that spacing could prevent locating near support services or in neighborhoods that are less opposed to shelters.

For the third question, responses tended to focus around how shelter operators can work with neighborhoods to mitigate concerns of crime related to shelters. Some shelter operators expressed frustration with neighbors who assume that all crime in the area is caused by shelter residents. A

representative from the Jordan Area Community Council noted that they have had a lot of success working with the shelter operator in their neighborhood. The neighborhood association and the shelter operators communicate regularly about problems associated with the shelter, and the operator is very responsive to concerns. She also noted that the council and some neighbors toured the shelter, and that as a result, many in the neighborhood developed a better understanding of the issues that the shelter operators had to contend with. It was also suggested that neighborhoods with shelters have community safety meetings with the Police Department to better understand factors that influence crime other than shelters.