Cornerstone Rescue Mission has responded to the concerns of its neighbors while fulfilling its purpose of sheltering the homeless, city officials said Tuesday.

"The care center is working," Bryan Schnell, executive director of the Downtown Development Corp., told the Rapid City Planning Commission. "That is probably best reflected by the fact that there is not large numbers of organized business people and property owners here trying to defeat the use on review."

The mission staff and members of the mission's parent organization, Community Care Center Inc., have repeatedly endeavored when downtown property owners had concerns about the mission and its clients, Schnell said.

The planning commission voted 5-0 to approve the center's downtown location for another year. Commissioners Bob Knecht and Jim Keck were absent. The commission's recommendation now will go to the Rapid City Common Council.

When Community Care Center Inc. first proposed a downtown location for the mission and three other agencies that serve needy people, many merchants and property owners objected. They said they feared mission clients would harass their customers, threaten their employees and lower downtown values.

"We are very happy today to say the care center is working as well as we said it would," said Joe Rovere, chairman of the care center board.

Rovere said several people who originally had objected to having the mission downtown had served on a volunteer board helping to run the shelter.

Schnell said downtown property owners still were worried about care center clients loitering in front of the center, drinking in nearby alleys and leaving disabled cars in the parking lot.

"Again, there is no law against loitering in front of the center," Schnell said. "But one of the pre-existing conditions is that we would try to keep that to a minimum so that people coming into the downtown from the east end would not be seeing individuals who may be down on their luck wandering in front of the center, adding to a less than good image of that area."

Herb Kaden, whose business is across the street from the care center, said he recently called the police after a man who said he was "the attorney for Jesus" came into Kaden's business.
“He just kept saying, ‘I’m concerned about your soul’ and intimidated a woman employee, Kaden said. “He was a little bit overbearing, and he wanted her to give him a hug and some things like that.”

Kaden said he didn’t know if the man was staying at the mission but that the man said things that indicated he had stayed there. Kaden said he wanted to know how he should handle such situations.

“What you should do is call the cops,” said Police Chief Tom Hennies, a member of the care center board. “But you cannot expect the cops to handle the situation in a manner in which you want it handled if (police) can’t legally do that. ... A lot of people that need medication are out on the street. It happens all over the country. Unless they are a danger to themselves or others, they can’t be institutionalized.”

The Rev. Dave Adams, director of the mission, said the shelter on an average night housed 28 men, 10 women, 14 children and six families.

Police are called to the shelter about 30 times a month, often to remove intoxicated people, and almost all the calls come from shelter workers themselves. Shelter workers log all incidents and patrol alleys to make sure “nothing is going on there that shouldn’t,” Adams said.

Hennies said there were no serious crimes in the area of the care center during its first year.