

Care Center finds a home downtown

Barring unexpected developments, after bids are opened ⁹⁻⁸⁸⁷ Tuesday for the purchase of the old City Hall building on Main Street the Community Care Center will finally have found a home in Rapid City.

The Community Care Center will bring together four organizations — Church Response, the Salvation Army, the Cornerstone Rescue Mission and the Black Hills Regional Food Bank, Inc. The mission will provide a bed for the homeless in far better surroundings than the mission currently can provide. The Salvation Army and various local churches will feed the hungry from the building, and the Food Bank will store goods and operate out of the building.

Officers and members of those organizations believe the old City Hall building is the best location for a consolidation of services that will allow them to provide better service to the needy and save money by sharing the building. The building is located close to the areas already used by the homeless and the needy (the greenbelt along Rapid Creek, Job Services). It can be remodeled at reasonable cost to provide the proper space for all agencies. It is centrally located, and by far the greatest number of people using the building will not be staying at the Cornerstone Mission but will be stopping in briefly. And zoning and lack of nearby residential areas make the site more acceptable than many other alternative locations.

It's a good use for the old City Hall, one that should benefit the community as a whole. But promoters of the site must be vigilant to protect the rights of the facility's neighbors.

There have been some unfortunate references made about those who opposed placing the project at the old City Hall. Some who raised legitimate concerns about the effect of the Community Care Center on the surrounding area were characterized as un-Christian and uncaring. Those characterizations were unfair and incorrect.

Certainly the homeless and needy have rights. So do city residents who have jobs in the area of the care center and who operate nearby businesses. They have the right to have their property values protected, their personal safety insured — and they have the right to have their integrity and character unimpugned for raising honest and realistic concerns.

Certainly only a small minority of those drawn to the care center will be troublemakers. But concern that the vital downtown area not be blighted or damaged is legitimate.

There is a personal involvement on our part — the Journal printing plant is located adjacent to the proposed Community Care Center. With good management at the center, watchful law enforcement and strong community involvement, we believe any problems linked to the care center are manageable.

There are already street people downtown, at the public library, in restaurants and businessplaces, wandering the sidewalks and alleys. Some of those people are not clients of the agencies that comprise the care center. Some are mentally disturbed and disinclined to seek help. Those who are inebriated or on drugs will not be allowed to stay at the mission — the same policy as is currently in effect. Others are transients, stopping by in fair weather for a few days before vanishing on the Interstate 90 corridor.

The Community Care Center should make the four agencies more capable of helping the community's needy. Those agencies take a burden off city and county and state government.

The care center, properly maintained and managed, with sufficient volunteer help, should become a source of pride for the community. It will serve as a constant reminder that there are those less fortunate than ourselves who need help — and as a symbol of the community's commitment to provide that help.