

Merchants don't want mission downtown

Bob Imrie
Staff Writer

7-13-82

One residential neighborhood in Rapid City doesn't want a gospel rescue mission that houses and feeds transients nearby, and neither do some downtown merchants.

Rapid City Planning Commissioner Tom Vucurevich said Tuesday he has received "four or five calls" from merchants objecting to having missions — like Corner Stone Rescue Mission — in the downtown business district. "They are really fearful," he said at a commission meeting. "They were fed up when the bars were downtown and that's just starting to be cleaned up. They are just getting it again where the housewife is coming downtown in the afternoon."

Despite the concerns, the planning commission recommended that the Common Council pass an ordinance that would allow missions only in industrial or commercial areas within the city, including the "central business district."

After spending more than a month working on the proposed law, the commission sent it to the council for first reading July 19. Two readings are needed before the ordinance is adopted.

Commissioner Lee Geiger, a member of the Downtown Association, said he expects some complaints if missions are allowed downtown. He said it's "appropriate zoning but nonetheless I have the same apprehensions."

Commissioner Les Swedin said there are protections because missions must get permission from the city before they open. That gives nearby property owners a chance to question the plans, he said. "Policing in the central business district is better than in any area," he added.

In mid-May, the Corner Stone Rescue Mission opened at 1101 St. Joseph, a residential neighborhood. Complaints from neighbors about loitering and harassment from the transients promp-

ted the city to file a lawsuit to close it for violating city zoning laws. Seventh Circuit Judge Rolland Grosshans is expected to announce his decision this week.

According to city planning director Knute Knudson, existing laws exclude missions from residential neighborhoods and only allow them to work out of already established churches.

The Corner Stone Mission provides free food and lodging to transients if they attend a worship service. Up to 34 people have stayed at the former apartment complex at one time, but the average is 17, according to manager Dave Adams.

Under the proposed ordinance changes, missions could locate in areas zoned general commercial, light industrial and heavy industrial, besides downtown. But the ordinance says specific plans must be approved by the council first. It says a mission, when applying for a "use on review," must present a "detailed program and service plan" to include how many hours it will be open and how it intends to supervise the transients. The building to house the mission also must meet fire, building and health requirements.

Attorney Dick Churchwell, who represents Corner Stone Mission, called the proposed law too restrictive. "It is my opinion that legislatively it will prevent rescue missions in Rapid City because it's overly restrictive." He says missions should be allowed in commercial and industrial areas "by right" and by "review" in areas zoned high density residential. The Corner Stone Mission will try to change the ordinance during upcoming hearings, Churchwell said.

The proposed ordinance defines a mission as a non-profit business that provides food and/or shelter to transients and may include "religious instruction, counseling and other incidental service customarily provided by missions."