

WELCOME HOME BILLINGS

Public Comments

Mitzi Vorachek, Domestic and Sexual Violence Services of Carbon County, September 25, 2009.

Ms. Vorachek asked if we had dealt with the issue of domestic violence in surveying the homeless. She noted there are five - six women living in the woods in Red Lodge and some of them were fleeing from domestic violence situations. She estimates there are quite a number of homeless individuals living in Red Lodge. Ms. Vorachek notes services in Billings need significantly more funding to meet the needs of victims of domestic violence.

PUBLIC HEARING FOR WELCOME HOME BILLINGS, TEN-YEAR PLAN TO IMPACT HOMELESSNESS AND FY2009-2011 TWO-YEAR ACTION PLAN, October 13, 2009.

Action scheduled for October 26, 2009. Community Development Manager Brenda Beckett provided a brief overview of the Welcome Home Billings plan for the benefit of the viewing audience that had not seen it. She noted that a copy of the plan could be viewed through the City's website or at the City Clerk's office. Ms. Volek clarified that action on the item was scheduled for October 26, 2009. The public hearing was opened.

Adela Awner, 1123 17th Street West, stated that she was the Director of Interfaith Hospitality Network and emphasized that the program did not just provide shelter, but worked with families to change their lives. Ms. Awner referred to homeless statistics for the City that were a stark reminder of the number of homeless adults and children. She advised that she was a member of the Mayor's Committee on Homelessness and encouraged adoption of the plan.

Councilmember Astle commended the job of the Interfaith Hospitality Network and the congregations involved in that effort. Councilmember Gaghen asked about the statistics regarding homeless children in the school district. Ms. Awner explained that the data included students in grades K-12 and could include high school students that did not live with their families. She said to keep in mind that 20% of the homeless population was under the age of 5 and not yet in school.

Lisa Harmon, 2815 2nd Avenue N, stated she was the immediate past chair of the Mayor's Committee on Homelessness. She explained that she learned about the homeless population living in the downtown after she was hired by the Downtown Alliance. She reported that the BID had employed homeless individuals since 2005, at \$2 above minimum wage which was still not enough for someone to maintain a home, family, car, etc. She said one homeless individual hired by BID had worked there for over a year and recently moved to Independence Hall. She said the efforts of momentum that surrounded the plan contributed to his success. She encouraged support of that plan.

- **Kathie Shandera, 1109 N. 31st**, said she worked for United Way and was a member of the Mayor's Committee on Homelessness. She encouraged adoption of the plan that was a three-year effort by many volunteers. She commented that the chronic homeless consumed many of the police, fire, and jail services. She said the plan included economic numbers that supported action and no action would result in increased costs. Ms. Shandera reported that \$54 million was the estimated cost of homelessness in Billings, and the group tried to identify funding to help reverse that trend. She pointed out that the State of Montana received over \$1 million in Continue of Care funding from the Federal Government and currently, 90% of those funds went to communities west of Billings, with

Billings receiving 10% of it, and communities east of Billings receiving nothing. She said one of the goals and policy recommendations was to allocate those funds according to the number of homeless individuals in the communities. She said Billings had one of the largest homeless communities in the State of Montana.

- **Amy Cowley, 546 Avenue F**, reiterated that as a registered nurse, she knew that many of the homeless had mental illness and drug or alcohol addictions. She said had seen that from a personal and professional view. She said she would like to see more alternatives and support for the plan.

There were no other speakers and the public hearing was closed.

Mayor Tussing commented that he was proud of the work of the committee. He noted that there was very little turnover among the members and when there was an opening, it was not difficult to fill. He stated he knew the document took a lot of effort and the group had his thanks and appreciation.