

10-1-21 DRAFT COMMENTARY FOR ADN (Max word count:600)

Smaller Homeless Facilities are Better for All

Shelter for people in Anchorage experiencing homelessness is now critical. The Assembly and the Mayor are jointly focused on finding structural options. Our Community Councils urge them to:

- 1) Continue using the Sullivan Arena at least until Spring.
- 2) Instead of building an expensive, 400-1000 bed Sprung Structure facility as the Mayor proposed, issue an RFP to buy or rent 2-3 existing, moderate-sized buildings that can supplement the Clare House, Covenant House, Brother Francis and Gospel Rescue Mission.

Jasmine Boyle of Anchorage Coalition to End Homelessness, said “experts believe that smaller, focused shelters are better for both clients and neighborhoods.” (ADN 6/23/21) Most Assembly members “prefer smaller, multiple shelter sites.” (ADN 8/26/21) Michele Brown, Senior Rasmuson Fellow, said “The Rasmuson Foundation has been a strong supporter of and advocate for Anchored Home, the community’s plan to make homelessness rare, brief, and one time, and which is based upon the principles of housing first and deploying small, geographically distributed shelters as an effective pathway to stable housing.” (9/29/21 personal communication)

Our Community Councils agree. We think that shelters housing between 100-175 people in different locations along transportation corridors, are far preferable to the noise and anonymity of a large one, which can easily be perceived as a warehouse for homeless people.

Smaller facilities, licensed in B-3 Zones, could be tailored to meet particular needs and reduce/disperse the negative impacts a large facility would have on adjacent neighborhoods and parks.

Another reason for using existing smaller facilities for those experiencing homelessness:

Any rush to convert or build a new, large facility is likely to be problematic. The steps (design, contracting, permitting, earthworks, construction) could result in expensive delays and perhaps unexpected failures.

This became glaringly evident after the Boutet Company, wisely hired by the Assembly, made an engineering assessment of the huge Sprung Structure facility proposed by the Mayor for SE of Elmore and Tudor Roads. On 7/15/21, the Mayor told the Assembly that he wanted immediate approval for \$15 million (later raised to \$22 million +) for the purchase of this ill-defined structure. He made this request despite many serious issues raised by the University Area Community Council's 7/8/21 letter to him and the Assembly. Earlier, in a 6/25/21 email to UACC, the Mayor's staff promised to deliver a detailed version of his proposal shortly, but the public has yet to see any details.

On 9/11/21, the ADN reported that Boutet concluded his proposed Sprung Structure failed the Muni's criteria for seismic safety, wind load and snow load. Assembly member Chis Constant added it "can't even be used because our building safety wouldn't allow it." Correcting these problems would add millions and more delay. Given these design failures, it's fortunate that no member of the Assembly was willing to make a motion to fund the proposal.

Curiously, even after Boutet's findings, the Administration has not publicly withdrawn its support for this large one-size-fits-all Sprung Structure.

- 3)** In addition to locating physical structures, identify and order specific furnishings, equipment, and supplies for such facilities. And/or reuse those used by Bean's Café and 99 Plus 1 at the Sullivan Arena.
- 4)** Tap Anchorage's homelessness experts to guide hiring professionals and support staff for necessary services.
- 5)** Demonstrate that any decisions include full descriptive/ technical details and follow the recommendations in the *Municipality's 2018 report, "Anchored Home – Strategic Action Plan to Solve Homelessness"* which engaged over 700 community members, businesses and agency representatives. This report urges continued extensive community dialogue/involvement and measurement of progress and success of any implemented solutions.