

February 9, 2018

Mayor Kelli Linville
210 Lottie Street
Bellingham, WA 98225

Jack Louws
County Executive
311 Grand Avenue, Suite 108
Bellingham, WA 98225

RE: Proposed Low Barrier Shelter at 211 E. Champion Street, Bellingham

Dear Mayor Linville & County Executive Louws:

I am a lifetime resident of Bellingham, Washington and have been employed by the law firm of Chmelik Sitkin & Davis since 1987.

In 1994, when we moved into our current offices located at 1500 Railroad Avenue, problems with the transient community were frequent. These problems ranged from people sleeping around our office building—sometimes blocking the entrance causing us to interact with them; people shouting obscenities at you when they were asked to leave or simply because you looked their way while walking by; and people hiding in the bushes along our office building. It was obvious that these people were either on drugs, drunk, or both.

We had a scary situation at one point where some transients were able to break into a boarded and locked boiler room next to our loading dock on Champion Street and started a fire for which we had to call the Fire Department! One other issue of concern was the amount of litter we had in our parking lot and around our entryways, which often included used drug paraphernalia (needles), used condoms, cigarette butts, empty alcohol containers, and even human excrement.

As I am sure you can imagine, these situations made it difficult to feel safe. On the occasion where I would work late into the evening, I was always very concerned about walking from the office to my car. In fact, before I would walk

out the back door, I would look around to see if there was anyone out there and then I would call a family member and talk to them as I walked to my car.

Lastly, the window to my office sits adjacent to the parking lot where the shelter would be built. In the past, when the Rainbow Center was in operation, transients would leave their dogs tied up for hours at a time which caused them to bark. I would have to call the Rainbow Center to request the removal of the dog. There was also frequent verbal fighting (screaming at each other at the top of their lungs) to the point I had to call the police because of the aggression and noise level. In fact, there were a couple of occasions, while I was talking to clients on the phone, I was asked if someone in my office was yelling and, on another occasion, I was asked if I had a barking dog in my office.

Thankfully, over the past five years, things have improved in this area and the frequency of the situations mentioned above have significantly been reduced. I strongly believe that it is attributable to the new businesses being opened and the new housing being built in this area. I no longer have the safety concerns that I once did. Now, I can walk to lunch without being harassed for handouts, I hear kids playing next door instead of people fighting and dogs barking, and I don't feel fearful when walking to my car at night.

In summary, I think it would be highly inappropriate and a shame to now backtrack and promote vagrancy in this area again.

Thank you very much for your attention.



Rhonda Vogelzang
Post Office Box 28546
Bellingham, WA 98228