



KETCHIKAN GATEWAY BOROUGH

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Office of the Borough Mayor

October 8th, 2024

Veto of Motion to direct staff to provide \$42,376.00 to the City of Ketchikan for the purpose of funding the proposed PATH overnight winter warming shelter.

Assembly Members,

I would like to express my gratitude for the concern and compassion shown by the sponsors of the motion regarding the funding of a warming shelter (low barrier facility¹). However, I am compelled to veto this motion for several reasons that I believe warrant further consideration.

First, there is a misconception that the lack of warming shelters leads to individuals freezing to death. In nearly all such cases cited, the death is put into motion as a result of incapacitation; primarily due to alcohol or drug use, rather than a singular environmental exposure. While exposure may ultimately be the mechanism, the underlying issue is the inability of individuals to care for themselves due to incapacitation from substance abuse.

Respectfully, unless the Assembly/City Council is proposing a warming/low barrier shelter where people are allowed to consume substances on site, then the incapacitation will occur off-site and the focus should be on intervention and response as the best means of preventing exposure related deaths.

The most effective way to prevent exposure-related deaths is through increased public safety interventions. Alaska Statute Title 47, which defines "*gravely disabled*," gives public safety personnel the authority to intervene when individuals are unable to care for themselves. The City's new Mobile Integrated Health Unit, with its van, can be used for this type of intervention and should be fully utilized during cold weather to patrol the community and identify those in need.

While a warming/low barrier shelter provides a destination for individuals in need once identified, it is essential to remember that incapacitated persons have been, and still are in many communities, taken to hospitals for this help; a safer option when the cause of incapacitation is unknown. This proposed facility is not designed or staffed to be a "*detox center*" but it will in essence be used as such. Additionally, based upon recent testimony, there is excess capacity at our two existing shelters, PATH and WISH, for those able to follow those facilities rules/requirements.

Careful and deliberate consideration is needed as funding another shelter will impose a growing local financial burden, likely in perpetuity. Taking incapacitated individuals to a hospital is usually a Federal expense (Medicaid), and taking them to jail for criminal behavior is generally a State expense. A local warming facility would be a local government cost, which we must carefully consider, especially when so many of our citizens are already burdened by the rising cost of living.

There are also important considerations surrounding the proposed location of this warming / low-barrier shelter. **Best practices suggest**ⁱⁱ placing such facilities outside business areas and neighborhoods. When the City first considered a warming/low barrier shelter years ago, I presented case studies, such as **Honolulu's**ⁱⁱⁱ success in relocating shelters; which reduced homelessness and improved local quality of life. **Juneau**^{iv} achieved similar improvements in recent history by moving their shelter away from downtown. The proposed location for this shelter in Ketchikan is repeating a failed experiment and is not in the best interest of the community.

For the following reasons, I am vetoing the motion:

1. We do not have “**Clearly Defined**” voter-approved powers to proceed with this and claiming it supports economic development and should fall under that power, ignores the reality experienced with the last low barrier shelter. The previous operation of the last warming/low barrier shelter in the downtown area resulted in numerous economic hardships for businesses and residents, negatively impacted property values for some businesses, cost the City taxpayers significant Police/Fire/EMS costs and conflicts with the City, Chamber Of Commerce, Visitor Center and others goals of promotion of a positive visitor experience. In its proposed location it causes economic burdens far exceeding its contributions^v.
2. Increased intervention will be more effective in preventing incapacitation deaths than an additional shelter; and the City now has greater intervention capacity with the Mobile Integrated Health Unit. This service, a new annual cost of approximately \$600,000, should be allowed to operate for a season and evaluated before asking the community to provide additional tax revenue to fund operation of a **third** shelter. This evaluation would support the responsible use of tax monies.
3. The proposed shelter location, surrounded by bars, in a prime location to source illegal drugs, is counterproductive for those needing shelter who are also struggling with substance abuse^{vi}. Placing a warming shelter in this location is unsuitable for many reasons and encourages dependency. Enabling those with substance abuse disorders increases the likelihood of alcohol related deaths and overdoses, both of which claim far more lives than exposure related deaths.
4. Funding requests of this type should go through the normal grant process as is customary for other nonprofits.
5. After two years of constant complaints and dozens of police, Fire/EMS calls per month, the Ketchikan City Council voted in March, 2024 to end the lease of the prior “low barrier” shelter.

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Numerous citizens reported over the years that the low barrier shelter occupants increased property crime, fights, disturbances of all types, women were frequently accosted, people afraid to go out at night, historic building burned down, tourists robbed, benches that had to be removed by the borough and many other complaints. Since the closure of the low barrier shelter, businesses and citizens have reported significant improvements.

At many past City Council meetings there was near unanimous agreement from both supporters and detractors that it was *“The wrong building in the wrong location”*. The current proposal to create a new low barrier shelter one block away is literally the exact same process that led to years of city problems and community strife. The new proposal of limited hours and dates of operations is also a repeat of the past that eventually turned into a full time operation.

6. There has been inadequate reporting to the residents and businesses in the downtown area that a proposal to create a new “low barrier” shelter is underway. A larger community discussion needs to take place. The prior low barrier shelter was under City control, the new proposed shelter will be under private control. This likely means that once started it will be permanent, with likely permanent and increasing “asks” for community funding.

I appreciate the Assembly’s attention to these concerns, but strongly disagree that repeating the past failed actions will somehow produce different results and I therefore veto this action.

Sincerely,



Rodney Dial

Mayor, Ketchikan Gateway Borough

ⁱ A **low-barrier shelter** is a type of emergency housing that minimizes entry requirements, such as sobriety, identification, or participation in programs; these shelters can also lead to community concerns, such as: Increased public intoxication, Crime and safety issues and negative impacts on residents and businesses.

ⁱⁱ **1 Honolulu, Hawaii:** After relocating shelters from downtown Honolulu to areas like Sand Island, the city experienced a decrease in crime rates, improved business conditions in tourist areas, and better access to supportive services for the homeless. The move helped reduce visible homelessness and provided a more organized service environment([City and County of Honolulu](#)).

2 San Diego, California: In 2021, San Diego moved a large shelter from downtown to an industrial area. This shift helped alleviate tensions with downtown businesses and residents, while also offering the homeless population a more secure and spacious environment. The new location near supportive services has improved overall shelter conditions([City and County of Honolulu](#))([KTOO](#)).

3 Seattle, Washington: The city of Seattle has seen improvements after relocating shelters and providing additional support services outside the downtown core. This has contributed to a more focused approach to addressing homelessness, including providing better health and recovery services for shelter residents([KTOO](#)).

4 **Salt Lake City, Utah:** The city moved several homeless services away from the downtown area into new, strategically located centers with greater access to supportive services. This change reduced complaints from businesses and helped provide better resources for the homeless, improving overall outcomes ([KTOO](#)).

iii When Honolulu moved its homeless shelters and services out of the downtown area, several improvements were noted. Among these, the Chinatown district experienced a reduction in crime rates, fewer visible homeless encampments, and a general improvement in the quality of life for residents and businesses. The city also saw enhanced public health outcomes, as more comprehensive services were provided at centralized locations, reducing the strain on downtown resources. *Honolulu Homeless Initiatives Unit and the Pūnāwai Rest Stop program.*

iv Supporters of moving Juneau’s Glory Hall homeless shelter from downtown to a location near the airport highlighted several potential benefits:

1. **Increased space and better facilities:** The new location would offer more privacy and individual spaces for patrons, improving their mental health and well-being by giving them their own small, personal areas rather than communal dormitories([KTOO](#))([Juneau Empire](#)).
2. **Proximity to essential services:** The move would place the shelter closer to employment opportunities at nearby big-box stores and the Juneau Job Center, making it easier for residents to find work ([Juneau Empire](#)).
3. **Reduced distractions:** Some patrons felt that moving out of downtown would help them focus more on rehabilitation programs without the distractions of the busy downtown area([Juneau Empire](#)). These factors were seen as helping improve both the shelter’s services and the overall well-being of its residents.

Businesses in Juneau claimed several benefits following the proposed move of the Glory Hall homeless shelter out of the downtown area:

1. **Improved business environment:** Many businesses in the downtown area expressed that the presence of the shelter negatively impacted their operations due to increased loitering, public intoxication, and general disorderly conduct. Moving the shelter was expected to improve the environment for tourists and customers, making downtown more attractive for commerce([KTOO](#))([KTOO](#)).
2. **Improved public safety:** Business owners and downtown stakeholders hoped that moving the shelter would reduce crime rates and improve public safety, as the concentration of homeless individuals in the area had led to concerns over vandalism and theft ([KTOO](#)).

v 1 **Fairbanks North Star Borough** (2017): The borough faced legal challenges after it attempted to implement a ban on wood stoves to address air quality issues. Many residents argued that the local government overstepped its authority since voters had not approved such regulatory measures. The backlash led to public outcry, with concerns about the government exercising regulatory powers without a clear mandate from voters([Alaska Public Media](#)).

2 **City and Borough of Juneau** (2000s): Juneau's local government attempted to impose certain property taxes to fund city infrastructure without securing proper voter approval. The decision led to lawsuits, and the courts ruled that the city had exceeded its authority by not seeking voter approval for the tax increases. This caused financial and political issues for the city, and the tax was eventually rolled back([Juneau Empire](#))([Juneau Empire](#)).

3 **Ketchikan Gateway Borough** (2006): The borough implemented a sales tax increase to fund education without a direct vote by residents. This action led to legal battles, with the state’s superior court ruling that the borough had violated the legal requirement to get voter approval for tax increases. The decision not only nullified the tax increase but also spurred distrust within the community about future tax measures([KRBD](#)).

4 **Mat-Su Borough** (2014): The Matanuska-Susitna Borough faced legal issues when it attempted to expand land-use planning authority without voter approval. Many residents in rural areas objected to the imposition of land-use regulations, leading to lawsuits. The courts ruled that the borough had exceeded its legal authority, forcing a rollback of regulations([KRBD](#)).

^{vi} Concerns about relocating the Glory Hall shelter to areas near bars and liquor stores have centered on the potential negative impact on the homeless population, particularly those struggling with alcohol addiction. Critics argue that placing a shelter in close proximity to alcohol outlets could increase the temptation for those trying to recover from substance abuse. The risk is that access to liquor stores could undermine efforts to support residents in staying sober, as some patrons of the shelter might find it harder to avoid relapsing in such environments([KTOO](#))([Must Read Alaska](#)).

Additionally, concerns have been raised about the shelter's ability to provide a supportive atmosphere for those seeking recovery, as the environment around bars may expose residents to negative influences and potentially hazardous situations. These locations could also be detrimental to mental health, making it harder for people to focus on long-term rehabilitation ([KTOO](#)).

Mariya Lovishchuk, the director of Juneau's Glory Hall shelter, has acknowledged the potential challenges of placing shelters near alcohol providers. Concerns are primarily about the negative influences that could undermine recovery efforts for those struggling with addiction. Proximity to liquor stores can tempt residents who are trying to stay sober, potentially making it harder for them to focus on recovery. ([KTOO](#))([KTOO](#)).