



ALEXANDRIA COMMUNITY SERVICES BOARD
Extended Care Services Division

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Carol Layer
Division Director

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Dear Neighbors,

On January 30, 2007, the CSB held the first of two scheduled community meetings in advance of the March 6, 2007 Planning Commission and March 17, 2007 (tentative) City Council public hearings on the Safe Haven SUP. Represented at the meeting were CSB members and staff; Planning and Zoning Department staff; City Councilman, Rob Krupicka; and 28 community members who signed in (there were several present who did not sign in). The meeting was moderated by an attorney from Hart, Calley, Gibbs & Karp, the firm representing the CSB through the SUP process. The CSB videotaped the meeting in order to have a complete record for reference in the future.

This letter is a summary of the meeting and provides follow-up information to some of the questions and requests that were made at the meeting.

The purpose of this meeting was for the CSB to listen to the neighbors' concerns and comments, and answer questions about the Safe Haven. At the meeting, the CSB provided printed copies of: the meeting agenda; revised Safe Haven FAQs; the Board's Housing Policy; a map of special needs housing locations throughout the City; letters from the Executive Directors of the Arlington and Fairfax County Safe Havens, recounting their neighborhoods' experiences; the CSB Consumer Handbook; and the current program rules that apply to the CSB's existing residential programs (this had been requested specifically by a neighbor, prior to the meeting).

Approximately nine attendees spoke negatively or neutrally about the Safe Haven proposal, or expressed questions and/or concerns about aspects of its programming or operations. The principle themes concerned community safety, primarily related to the presence or perceived concentration in the neighborhood of people with mental illness and substance abuse problems, and the "low demand" program model, including the lack of a proposed strict curfew or requirement for residents to take medications. Roughly seven people spoke in favor of the project from a variety of points of view including: affirming the need for the Safe Haven in Alexandria; encouraging a compassionate community response to people in need; describing positive, non-threatening personal experiences working, volunteering, and otherwise interacting with members of the Safe Haven target population; and providing testimony about personal experiences with mental illness.

CSB Board and staff members responded to the questions and concerns raised by describing the documented efficacy of the Safe Haven model in keeping people housed and getting people to accept treatment; the operational and programmatic "norms" of Safe Havens across the country; the CSB's familiarity with the members of the target population; the extensive pre-admission screening process and close observation and monitoring that will be provided; the prohibition on admitting anyone assessed to present a danger, including fire-setters, sex offenders, and those with sociopathic behavior; the

expectation

that residents will remain drug and alcohol free and will work with staff and accept services; and the CSB's experience in operating safe and successful residential programs in the City of Alexandria for over 25 years (serving over 700 individuals in just the past nine years).

Several meeting attendees requested additional information or follow-up:

- Someone requested the citation for the Virginia Human Rights regulations pertaining to restricting residents' ingress and egress from a program. That citation is 12 VAC 35-115-100, "Restrictions on the Freedoms of Everyday Life."
- Several people described observing illegal drug activity at Queen and Fayette Streets. and asked if the CSB could talk to the police about this. CSB staff has contacted the police to discuss this.
- A neighbor asked for a list of other properties that had been considered for siting the Safe Haven. This information has been added as Question 4a to the "Safe Haven FAQ" document, and is now posted on the CSB website for general reference at http://www.alexandriava.gov/mhmrsa/faq_safehaven.pdf.
- A neighbor of 115 N. Patrick St. reported that a particular individual is still seen in the neighborhood sometimes loitering on the property and sometimes panhandling. CSB staff has addressed this, but I do request that neighbors contact me if anyone is observed engaging in such behaviors there, so that we may follow-up.
- Several people discussed the possibility of visiting existing Safe Haven sites, residential programs, or other places, in order to get a better understanding of the population that will be served by the Safe Haven.
- And one person learned that the CSB had been operating two units in his condominium building for 10 years without his knowledge, and commented that the CSB should provide community notification to the appropriate condominium association when purchasing one or more units.

We still are looking into these last two matters and will have the responses for everyone at the next community meeting (but we will notify the specific individuals who inquired as soon as we can).

The CSB reminded the audience that in addition to the scheduled February 20 meeting, staff and board members would accommodate any requests by groups or individuals who want to meet at another time, or raise any other issues or concerns they would like addressed.

Please contact me at 703-838-5011 or carol.layer@alexandriava.gov if you would like any other information.

Thank you,

Carol Layer
Director, Extended Care Services Division