



## AUGUST 14, 2009 RESIDENT QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES ABOUT COMMUNITY HOUSE

1. It is our understanding that the Town is involved with the development of the IFC Community House project. We know that the Community Design Commission met about this issue on June 17, 2009 and that the Town Council is scheduled to meet about this matter on September 21, 2009. We also know that there is a file about this project at the Town's Planning Department. The full extent of the Town's involvement, however, remains unclear.

**Q** What has been the formal planning and development process for the IFC Community House project relocation?

**A** The Inter-Faith Council for Social Service (IFC) developed a formal partnership with the Town of Chapel Hill in 1985 when the Town Council offered the IFC a no-cost lease in the Old Municipal Building (OMB) to house homeless persons. The program began in congregations, then moved into the basement of the OMB and eventually expanded to the entire OMB after Council members approved a task force recommendation that the OMB be used as a homeless facility.

The IFC formed another partnership with the Orange County Board of Commissioners in 1994 to plan and develop a new facility for homeless women and children initially called Project Homestart. The Board of Commissioners provided a no-cost 25-year lease of a three acre parcel on Homestead Road to the IFC at the Southern Human Services Center. Since HomeStart's opening there has been no adverse or negative impact on neighboring areas. In fact, new neighborhoods have developed near and around our HomeStart campus. The Church of the Advocate will soon be building a new church in our vicinity.

Here is some additional information about IFC's history with shelter facilities:

- In 1990, after a year-long renovation of the OMB, the IFC co-located the Community Kitchen and Community Shelter at the OMB officially known as Community House;
- The IFC opened its HomeStart facility, originally known as Project Homestart, on Homestead Road in 1998 for homeless families;
- After HUD funding ended for HomeStart in 2003, the IFC Board of Directors reorganized the HomeStart program for homeless women and children;
- The new Homestart—whose model is based on the vision of the Planning Committee—has the mission of “providing a safe, structured home for homeless women and children, helping them to access community resources and offering everyone on-going support to break the cycle of poverty and homelessness”;
- And the IFC relocated single women guests from the downtown Community House facility to HomeStart during the same year.

There have been myriad community meetings and task forces appointed by Chapel Hill mayors since the year 2000 to find a permanent location for Community House. A



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formal agreement and special task force was created by Mayor Kevin Foy and IFC's Board President in 2004 "to address homelessness and new facilities." The IFC Board of Directors came to three major conclusions based on task force recommendations during this process:

- 1) The Old Municipal Building was no longer adequate for IFC needs
- 2) The Town of Chapel Hill decided that the OMB was needed for other town offices
- 3) New facilities would consist of a men's shelter and a separate building/location for combining IFC food programs (Community Kitchen and Food Pantry)

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In May of 2008, after a long search for a permanent location for Community House, the UNC Chancellor, Chapel Hill Mayor and IFC Executive Director announced a new partnership and property location near the United Church of Chapel Hill on Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. The Chancellor announced that the University would lease 1.66 acres to the Town on a long-term basis. "The Town would then make the site available to the Inter-Faith Council for Social Service (IFC) for the construction and operation of a new men's residential facility."

**Q** When will a final determination (i.e., approval or disapproval) be made on this project?

**A** The IFC will be applying to the Town of Chapel Hill for a special use permit (SUP) for the Community House project. The Town will determine the timing of its decision on the SUP, but we hope that approval will occur in the spring or summer of 2010.

2. We understand that the IFC submitted a document to the Town Planning Department entitled "Community House Comprehensive Plan Evaluation", which is described as a "request for review of a Concept Plan." A copy of this document is attached.

**Q** When was this document submitted by the IFC to the Town?

**A** The "Concept Plan" was submitted by GGA Architects on behalf of the Inter-Faith Council to Town officials on May 15 in preparation for the June 17 Chapel Hill Community Design Commission (CDC) meeting.

3. The IFC's "Community House Comprehensive Plan Evaluation" document refers to the Chapel Hill Comprehensive Plan, which is described on the Town's website as having been created to set "a positive course for Chapel Hill's future" and to establish a "vision and directions in which we want the community to move." The IFC states in its "Community House Comprehensive Plan Evaluation" request that its Concept Plan is consistent with the Town's Comprehensive Plan.

**Q** What was the reviewing body's determination about the IFC's "Concept Plan" and its consistency with the objectives of the Town's Comprehensive Plan?

**A** Although we have not seen the CDC's prepared recommendations and report, commission members were favorably impressed with the site plan, building plan, program, sustainability features and building materials. We believe that the Town Council will review the CDC's recommendations sometime this fall as part of the SUP



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process. You may wish to contact the Town Planning Department for more information about the Town's process and Town documents.

4. Based on review of data on file with the Town, coupled with additional external research, and a single mailing we received from the Town (dated June 3, 2009), it seems that the only formal meeting by the Town regarding this project occurred on June 17, 2009 and was conducted by the Community Design Commission.

Q Has this been the only meeting to-date related to the IFC Community House that was open to the public?

A The only public Town meeting thus far was on June 17 with the Community Design Commission (CDC). Other presentations have been made to the UNC Architectural Review Committee, the Chancellor's Building and Grounds Committee and the UNC Board of Trustees.

Q If not, when were other meetings conducted?

A N/A

Q What were the results of those meetings?

A All of the UNC meetings resulted in site plan approvals with some design recommendations, some in concert with the CDC. CDC members had favorable comments which we think will be reviewed by the Town Council sometime in the fall.

5. The proposed location for the IFC Community House/Men's shelter is 1315 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. We understand that this property is/will be leased by the University of North Carolina to the Town of Chapel Hill, and then subsequently sub-leased to the IFC for this project.

Q What was the rationale for selecting the proposed location?

A The proposed University acreage was chosen after an extensive search by Town of Chapel Hill staff, IFC Board approval and in harmony with IFC strategic planning principles that the location be on a major transportation corridor, and be in close proximity to services and employers. The no-cost land lease donation by UNC in partnership with the Town of Chapel Hill is also a key factor.

Q Have any leases between any of the above-identified entities been executed?

A No

Q What other locations were considered for this project?

A A myriad of locations have been identified, requested, researched and discussed since the year 2000 including, but not limited to, County-owned land at the Southern Human Services Center, the current Chapel Hill Police Station, land near the Town Cemetery, Merritt Mill Road and Millhouse Road parcels, Public Service Gas Building and municipal lots in conjunction with the Old Municipal Building and land owned by partner congregations.

Q What was the rationale for eliminating alternative locations?

A Costs, lack of utilities, site development costs, zoning, and access are some of the reasons that other sites have been difficult to purchase, lease or develop.



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6. From the IFC's "Concept Plan" and 11-page document dated May 15, 2009, we understand that the demographics of the existing (and presumed future) population of the Community House are:

a. "Community House's beneficiaries are homeless men facing a myriad of challenges including persistent mental illness, substance abuse and health issues [...]" A copy of the IFC's "Concept Plan" is attached.

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**A** Homeless men regardless of their reasons for homelessness will be eligible for Community House services provided that house rules and procedures are followed and resident agreements are kept. Those who succeed will have the opportunity to move from bunks to quads and quads to doubles and eventual independence. Self-governance is also an important principle for breaking the cycle of homelessness. The IFC believes that resident participation in the planning and operation of new Community House programs will be important and helpful to all concerned.

**Q** What percentage of this population is from Chapel Hill or Carrboro?

**A** The IFC is obligated to use a particular database controlled by a state organization that unfortunately doesn't ask the question whether the homeless person seeking shelter is from Chapel Hill or Carrboro. Based on some research we did since the beginning of the 2009/10 fiscal year, we discovered 50% or more of Community House residents come from Orange County; and our HomeStart program normally serves a higher percentage of residents from Orange County. We typically fill Community House and HomeStart beds with Orange County applicants then take others who are "unsheltered" or may need shelter services.

Intake applications are completed for every person seeking shelter. Length-of-stay criteria are determined on a case-by-case basis contingent on resident progress or improvements based on individual goals and objectives agreed upon with staff and volunteers. If residents show improvements with their present situation (seeking/finding work, seeking housing, saving earnings, following through with counseling, seeking medical help/taking medications etc.), extensions are usually granted.

On another note, many medical institutions refer patients/former patients to our facilities regardless of their place of origin. When neighboring county shelters are full, homeless persons are either referred or go to the closest facility they can find to receive safe and supportive shelter.

"Studies have shown that homeless people do not migrate for services. To the extent they do move to new areas, it is because they are searching for work, have family in the area, or other reasons not related to services. A recent study found that 75% of



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homeless people are still living in the city in which they became homeless.”<sup>1</sup> Homeless persons come from many walks of life and sometimes different communities because they are looking for opportunities of shelter, health care, meals and support from community members. Homelessness is an international reality not just a Carrboro and Chapel Hill phenomenon.

**Q** To what degree does this project promote influx of homeless men from places other than Chapel Hill or Carrboro?

**A** We do not promote, attract or advertise for more homeless persons living outside Orange County to fill our beds at Community House or HomeStart. We simply serve those who come to or are referred to us. We currently have 30 beds and 25 permanent floor spaces at Community House. HomeStart has 55 emergency and long-term spaces for women and children. Our aim is to create a new 52-bed facility that will respond to the needs of homeless men in Orange County.

7. We believe that there will necessarily be consequences, known or unknown, associated with the relocation of the existing Men’s shelter to the proposed location on MLK Blvd.

**Q** What impact study has been completed (by the Town, or by the IFC and submitted to the Town) concerning the potential effect (positive or negative) of relocating this population proximate to residential neighborhoods?

**A** A well managed, structured men’s or women’s shelter should be seen as a benefit to the entire community and homeless individuals. IFC’s years of experience and expertise speak for itself. Reasons for locating this facility on University property were addressed under question five. During our stay at the Old Municipal Building, our program has been within a block of several residential neighborhoods that have not depreciated in value.

**Q** What impact has this population had on the existing location at 100 W. Rosemary Street? Businesses? The University? Neighbors?

**A** We can say that the on-going Town/IFC partnership for the last 24 years has been an important public/private partnership that has resulted in quality services for the community’s homeless population at Community House. There are mixed opinions whether or not programs like ours should remain in the downtown center or have value for the community. Downtown congregations, hundreds of volunteers, health professionals and many of our donors have strong feelings that our downtown location has been an important place for addressing socio/economic challenges including hunger, health care and homelessness. Unfortunately, there are misperceptions, blame and judgments aimed at the Inter-Faith Council by some businesses and consumers, but this is because the reasons for homelessness, panhandling and street populations are greatly misunderstood. We cannot deny that some business representatives believe the men’s facility should be relocated out of the downtown based on these

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<sup>1</sup> National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty



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misunderstandings and fears expressed by various individuals. Relocating Community House residential programs will not reduce the myths that circulate or the realities about increasing numbers of persons with persistent mental illness being discharged to the streets.

**Q** If no impact study has been conducted, what is the rationale for not doing so?

**A** The IFC believes that the proposed site for Community House is an ideal location for the kind of program we wish to offer to homeless men. HomeStart, which is in close proximity to the University site, has been an excellent location for homeless women and children since 1998. Since the establishment of this project several new neighborhoods have been developed near the HomeStart campus. Our partnership with Orange County and the facility's access to public transportation and service agencies have helped thousands of residents with services and support, including many successfully transitioning back to independence.

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8. At the Town Community Design Commission Meeting on June 17<sup>th</sup> Mr. Chris Moran, IFC Executive Director, clarified that "one of ten men recover/graduate/successfully complete" the IFC's program and return to productive integration back into the community. Also mentioned at this meeting, by a Social Worker who is a Commission member, was that 50% of the homeless population was "seriously mentally ill."

**Q** What happens to the nine out of ten men who do not "graduate?"

**A** I was not referring to our residential programs, but citing service examples provided by other groups who work with substance abusers or those in recovery from alcohol and other drugs. I explained that recovery is a lifelong challenge, and so is ending homelessness or poverty. No magic can be found to overcome these challenges. For example, "Addicts looking to recovery should not look to the 6 out of 10 that may use again, but at the 4 out of 10 that use a brief period of rehab to transform their lives, achieve very difficult sobriety, and live a far better life without drug or alcohol abuse."<sup>2</sup> The analogy intended here is that many individuals who repeat the homeless experience need programs like those the IFC is planning whether they are successful or not at first. Statistically, one out of ten who becomes fully recovered doesn't mean the service that touched the other nine failed them entirely. Their time may come.

Measuring success depends on many factors. The odds are greater for success when we think about governmental assistance. Know that a relatively small percentage of homeless people receive government assistance, and most folks who become homeless are homeless one time, not many times. Unfortunately, the IFC doesn't have ample resources to wrap case management services around "graduating" guests to document or prevent their return to homelessness. Additional governmental funds could help with

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<sup>2</sup> Drug Rehab Recovery Statistics, Can You Trust Them? by Christian Shire



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these efforts. This is also where the Orange County Partnership to End Homelessness and Carrboro and Chapel Hill communities could make a huge difference.

**Q** What will this population do from day to day?

**A** Every able bodied resident will have a specific work plan that entails job searches, work, school, job training or counseling. Persons with disabilities may need to be hooked up with associated agencies or case managers. All residents are asked to sign up for community subsidized housing (Section 8, Shelter Plus Care and Public Housing). Residents will be given responsibilities for the general upkeep of the facility, community gardens and rule enforcement. Senior residents will help mentor new residents coming into the program for the first time.

**Q** What is the formal programming offered by the IFC in which the homeless population will participate?

**A** Trained staff members and numerous credentialed volunteers will offer social work, job search counseling, health care and support. Other community agencies will be invited to provide specialized services (VA counseling, job programs, budget counseling, support groups etc.).

**Q** To what degree will there be “hanging out” and in what way would this impact, either positively or negatively, the community, local bus stops (along MLK Blvd.), local businesses (The Station at Homestead), public spaces (the Homestead Aquatic Center) and recreation areas (Homestead Park)?

**A** Drive by HomeStart (IFC facility for homeless women and children) and you will see that no one is “hanging out.” We want to design a building that is ample for all of our residents’ needs and programs. People will need to smoke outside, and will be at bus stops only when they are transporting themselves to jobs, services or shopping centers. Our location is not one that will be clearly visible from Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. In addition, this facility will be attracting paid staff, hundreds of volunteers and agency partners who will assist the IFC with its program beliefs and values.

9. The IFC’s “Concept Plan” document explains that this facility will provide “...floor space, emergency beds and transitional accommodations...” for 50 men.

**Q** What happens to the population beyond the maximum capacity, which one Community Design Commission member suggested was much greater than 50, and which publication about this project also suggest?

**A** A 52-bed facility is adequate for our community’s needs and our agency’s capacity. Floor space will be available for additional persons depending on weather (below freezing or above 95 degrees), health or overflow conditions. In the case of a community emergency, the IFC is willing to offer floor space to community members whose homes have been damaged or are without utilities.

**Q** What measures would be taken to prevent loitering in neighboring residential neighborhoods or the woods adjacent to the neighborhoods, which have apparently been known as “campgrounds” for homeless people in the past?



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- A** Homeless camps are under the jurisdiction of local police agencies and town ordinances and do not reflect our resident community. Loitering in any form on or near our premises will be actively discouraged.
- Q** Has the Chapel Hill Police Department been involved in planning for this project? What input has the CHPD provided about the impact of relocating the existing shelter on the areas (both business and residential) surrounding the proposed site?
- A** The IFC has a close relationship with the Carrboro and Chapel Hill police departments. The Chapel Hill Police Chief is very aware of IFC plans for new facilities and both chiefs and I recently met to talk about the ramifications of Community House and FoodFirst projects. The former Chapel Hill Police Chief was involved on the IFC's Strategic Planning Committee and subsequent meetings about relocating Community House and the Community Kitchen. The Carrboro Police Chief along with Carrboro and Chapel Hill business persons were active members of a community Best Practices Committee that was organized to plan the FoodFirst facility.
- Q** Have there been any discussions with the CHPD about the potential need for patrols or increased presence at and around the proposed site in order to ensure public safety?
- A** No, since our facilities are not currently viewed as undesirable or public safety threats.

10. Several institutional facilities/programs are currently located in close proximity to the proposed site for the IFC project. These include Freedom House at 104 New Stateside Dr. and the Women's Homeless Shelter located on Homestead Road.

- Q** Is there intent by the Town to place such facilities in close proximity in this area of Chapel Hill? If so, what is the rationale?
- A** No, I believe the property determination was based on a long search by Town staff that resulted in good matches for zoning, IFC investment, proximity to services and a location that is on a major transportation corridor.
- Q** If so, has the Town, or any entity, conducted an impact evaluation assessing the effect on concentrating these services?
- A** Not to my knowledge. The only studies that have been done so far are for environmental reasons.
- Q** Are there any other related facilities, such as drug/alcohol rehab "half way houses" in the area and/or what are the plans for such facilities?
- A** Freedom House, an organization with which the IFC has had a long-time partnership, is the only one in the immediate vicinity. Having Freedom House nearby is fortunate for IFC but wasn't a deliberate reason for Community House's relocation. Two Public Housing facilities are relatively close by. Church of the Advocate plans a new structure off of Homestead Road that will be close to Community House. Church of the Advocate and other neighboring congregations are strong partners with the IFC. Our FoodFirst (collocation of Community Kitchen and food pantry) location has not yet been decided.