



Good Faith Communities Coalition

Taking action on homelessness and affordable housing with and for the poor in the District of Columbia

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What will it take to have low income families and their children live in financially stable households and neighborhoods?

March 20, 2016

Ninety testify on temporary family housing in neighborhoods

In the District's strategic plan to make homelessness "rare, brief and non-recurring" (*Homeward DC*), **neighborhood temporary housing for families** in all 8 wards was proposed. Each shelter would house **40-50 families**. After completion, **DC General**, regarded as "inhumane", **would close**.

The DC Council's Committee of the Whole held a **public hearing on March 17** on legislation submitted by the Mayor to allow all neighborhood temporary housing in the eight wards to go forward for contracting and zoning changes as a package.

Good Faith with 90 other organizations and "public witnesses" testified at the hearing. **Good Faith has consistently supported the temporary housing plan in all 8 wards**. However, **the site proposed for the Ward 5 housing** has raised serious environmental and community concerns in the Ward and across the advocacy community. Good Faith's testimony ([read testimony](#)) reflected these concerns and suggested a compromise.



Wilson Building

After 8 hours of hearings, most testifiers **supported the closing of DC General** as soon as possible. One Council member summed it up: **"This action reflects the moral values of the city."** Overall **concerns** expressed in testimony were: the costs and financing (Are we paying too much? Why the difference in cost from one ward to the next?), **the location of the Ward 5 site**, lack of community involvement in the process, shelter operations and security, and once again, the lack of private bathrooms. **Community involvement was an across the board concern**.



Council comments after hearing testimony:

- "eye popping" numbers (costs) need explanation. Mendelson and Grosso were particularly concerned about COSTS: after 15 year lease you don't own anything! Did we get a good deal? Are we paying too much? The theme was repeated again and again.

- All Council members agreed for the need to **work with communities NOW**.

- **Cheh (Ward 3)**: recommended a **revised Letter of Intent (LOI)** for **Ward 3** to include - bathroom specifics, three floors not four at ward 3 site,

Chairman Mendelson priority to families with preschool children, on-site childcare, neighborhood advisory committee now. The Mayor's staff claimed LOI can't be changed. Developers have secured financing based on it as is. Cheh also asked for further consideration of two smaller sites in the ward.

- **McDuffie (Ward 5)**: DC Government Services Administration (GSA) should have **looked further for sites in Ward 5**. Recommended site is not a place where families can prosper. Environment and community concerns make this industrial site unacceptable. "GSA have the resources and responsibility to look further." Many community testers said we want to be a part of the solution, but not at this site.

According to the Chairman, the Council will **vote on the proposed legislation package in mid-April**. The city will return to the community with designs in early April. Comments will be welcome except where program requirements dictate design. The Mayor has appointed a high level response team for every ward.

Mayor's proposed budget for FY2017 to Council next week....

TANF (Temporary Aid for Needy Families) is facing a crisis this year as more than 6,000 families with 13,000 children will reach the end of their eligibility for benefits (60 months). TANF is the **only cash benefit program for poor families** in the District. ([read TANF fact sheet](#))

Legislation is currently before the Council to **create exemptions to the TANF rigid time limit of 60 months**. On March 11 advocates including Good Faith met with the Mayor to urge her to support the legislation and to include the dollars needed to fund the exemptions (around \$30M) in her FY17 Budget proposal. **More on this critical issue after the budget is sent to the Council on March 24.**

How much should the community invest in people who are poor?

"We can keep spending the same inadequate amount we are spending this year, every year into the future and families will remain stuck, trying to live on poverty level incomes. Or we can spend now what it really takes to have low income families and their children live in financially stable neighborhoods. Children living in stable neighborhoods, and certainly the grandchildren of those currently living in poverty, will be able to break the cycle of poverty. We can then spend those dollars for some other public good."

George A. Jones, Chief Executive Officer, Bread for the City

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Good Faith Communities Coalition

301-325-8437

goodfaithdc@gmail.com

<http://www.goodfaithdc.org>

