

Sent: Wednesday, May 27, 2020 2:32 PM

Subject: Testimony from Sean Ryan to Assembly roundtable

Thanks to Chair Rivera and ACEH for giving me the opportunity to speak at this roundtable. Unfortunately, the short notice led to the inevitable snag in getting Microsoft Teams downloaded and properly configured. I'll offer written remarks instead.

HRAC exists to be an engaging advocacy voice on the topic of houselessness. Most if not all of our active members have experiences on the street and therefore can offer solutions not currently in the pipeline. The topic of overhauling our shelter system has appeared throughout my tenure with the group and particularly in 2020 with the various proposals for day shelter in the community.

The biggest problems I see with the shelters boil down to isolation from the community and lack of economic opportunity. This is compounded by a housing strategy that emphasizes Housing First only for the most highly endangered individuals, not anyone who falls into houselessness. As a result, many individuals fall through the cracks, sometimes for years at a time. Very little incentive has been given with regard to reversing this, in spite of calls within the community.

The resource hub in front of Ben Boeke is an important step in the right direction and there is a proposal to expand that service in the community. Unfortunately, the approach taken in administering the hub further results in allowing people to fall through the cracks. My experience is that the larger the shelter is, the more likely it is that engagement will occur through the initiative of the client and not the initiative of the provider. This has led to claims that there is in fact a lack of engagement and a call to change this.

The comparisons in the entry barriers which exist at Boeke and Sullivan versus Brother Francis give credence to the notion that a criminal element was tolerated in the shelters at one point but not at another, with no change in Boise v. Martin. This can be viewed as a lack of active oversight by the Municipality.

Last year's Camp Here showed that smaller, less centralized environments can work, as evidenced by the greater percentage of people who moved on to employment and housing than what is normally found in the shelters. Perhaps more importantly, it brought together supporters in the community who desire long-term solutions. Entities in the community who desire to offer skills training, counseling and alternative forms of housing such as sanctioned camps and tiny homes just need a foot in the door, whether that constitutes starting operations or even getting a place at the table to start dialogue in moving Anchorage in that direction. While it has proven to be difficult in bringing disparate factions together, I'm proud of helping to facilitate that dialogue through my participation in HRAC. Please feel free to e-mail me at sr018260@gmail.com if you desire more specific information on the shelter experience and how it can be changed for the better.