

Assembly Member

Felix Rivera

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STATEMENT FROM ASSEMBLY MEMBER FELIX RIVERA ON ARCTIC REC CENTER AND FINDING PERMANENT LOW-BARRIER SHELTER:

Over the last six days, I've received numerous communications from my neighbors regarding the possible purchase of the Arctic Rec Center as a low-barrier shelter. To make sure as many people as possible understand my position, I have put together the below statement.

First, I want it to be super clear where I stand on this project: The proposal put forward by the Emergency Shelter Task Force provides a vision to make progress on multiple fronts that I haven't seen in years. From providing 150 permanent year-round shelter beds that are desperately needed in our community, to offering day services so clients would have something to do during the day, to hosting navigation services so clients can connect to housing and services, and last, to the possibility of building housing on the land behind the building. The possibilities are exciting.

But I will not let that excitement get in the way of me doing my job to fully vet this project. Some of my neighbors have asked how I would vote on the purchase. The truth is if the project came before the Assembly today for a vote, I'd vote no. It isn't ready and there are too many unknowns that we haven't explored just yet.

I want to acknowledge a lot of what I've heard over the last six days that leads me to that conclusion. I've talked to a small group of individuals who see the potential of this project and are supportive. I've talked to a large group of individuals who are skeptical about the project but are willing to have a dialogue. And I've also talked to a large group of individuals who see what has happened at the Sullivan Arena and don't want that in their neighborhood.

So what will the future of the Arctic Rec Center look like? If the Assembly even decides to move forward with the project, it will be a long and complex process, to include a re-zone, conditional use, replat, shelter licensing, and securing funding. In addition, I am committed to ensuring that the Assembly hosts multiple town halls with neighbors to share information so everyone is on the same page and hear about their concerns and ideas.

Because of the complexity of opening this facility and due to the many conversations I've had over the last six days, I have worked with Assembly leadership to broaden the conversation. Rather than focusing on the Arctic Rec Center, I have requested that we focus on all possible solutions to permanent year-round low-barrier shelter.

To be totally honest, those options are slim. Multiple administrations, working groups, and task forces have explored the possibilities and they are limited. But for my part, everything should be on the table as we continue this conversation.

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And this conversation is a timely one – it is my goal to stand up a permanent year-round low-barrier shelter by September, before the next winter. That means we can't delay this conversation and that means we will need to have many difficult conversations over the next several months.

An Assembly worksession is scheduled to continue this conversation for Friday, March 31, from 12:40 to 2:10pm at City Hall, first floor, room 155. I invite any interested parties to attend or listen in on the phone.

I am committed to doing what is right by the community and neighbors I represent – both those housed and unhoused. I deeply apologize for any lack of clear communications which occurred over the last few weeks. We need to get this done right and I will work to ensure we do just that.

I want to encourage folks to reach out to me anytime either via my email or phone, felix.rivera@anchorageak.gov or 907-764-0841.

I look forward to working with our community to solve this critical need.

Felix Rivera

