

Letter To The Editor: A View About Alton's Recent New Hope Center Presentation At Salvation Army

by Tyler Dreith
April 22 2024 1:51 PM



Letter To The Editor:

Despite a rainy and stormy night, neighbors spread from across the Alton area packed in at the Salvation Army for 4th ward alderwoman Rosi Brown's monthly meeting for her constituents and others who wish to stay current on city matters.

Typically, this monthly meeting is held at Today's Beauty Supply, a smaller venue within Brown's Ward, but the issue at the center of this meeting required a larger space to gather. The Salvation Army is proposing to build a new transitional housing development called The New Hope House in Alton.

The New Hope House model is currently active in a scattered site operation, where people who are unhoused are put up in a hotel which has proven to be very successful in transitioning folks to permanent housing and competitive employment, but they note continuing to run with the scattered site model is very costly. The Salvation Army said that they had an 80 percent success rate last year alone graduating people from transitional housing to permanent housing.

This proposal has been met with support and opposition from citizens in the community throughout the process thus far. It seems the majority of folks who have spoken against the proposal at public forums support the work that the Salvation Army has been doing in Alton for over a century and see the need to house our most marginalized neighbors, but are against having this site built in their neighborhood for fear of a rise in crime, declining home values and it being an eyesore to their picturesque Normal Rockwell image they have of their community.

The problem with pushing a project like this out of site, is that you make it difficult to access important services in our community such as hospitals, grocery stores, food pantries, public transit, libraries and so on. That isn't how we love our neighbor, housed or unhoused.

Some folks are flat out against having any services for our unhoused neighbors as they think this attracts unfavorable people to our community. Former Alton Mayor Brant Walker who is seeking reelection this next year is one of those individuals. He consistently spoke out while they were trying to field questions. When he finally did get in line to take the microphone, he spoke about the problematic issues of serving those with substance abuse and mental health concerns.

1st Ward alderman Ray Strebel who is seeking to run for Mayor next year was observed at the meeting but he didn't ask any questions and left before the meeting was over. He recently wrote an editorial with concerns he had over not having satisfactory answers to questions he posed to the Salvation Army team.

Mike Drake who previously lost to Strebel in the last election also was in attendance but left before it was over and didn't ask any questions. He too recently wrote an editorial in opposition to the New Hope House proposal. It would have been nice to talk with these two men to see how they would address the homelessness problem in our community if they ran and won during the next election. Will they address it or try to ignore it? About 25% of Alton's population is living in poverty. Those are staggering numbers compared to the national averages.

Alton resident, Kennedy Smith passionately pleaded with the audience tonight urging them to get behind The New Hope House and credited the Salvation Army with turning

his life around. Kennedy stated, “Regardless of where we put this, it needs to be! We said that we built a new hotel and we built a new Starbucks. We forget about our own people. How can you go to bed at night knowing that somebody is hungry?”

The reality is, that we live in a broken world. When we live in our houses it is easier to hide some of our brokenness away. It’s not on full display like it is for our friends who are living on the streets. I’ve heard this so much lately, “Why Alton for The New Hope House?” My response, “Why not Alton!” We all have our different reasons for serving our fellow man. I choose to do so because Jesus commanded it of us. “You are the light of the world-like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father. **Matthew 5:14-16** Let Alton be that city on the hilltop that shines its light to the world and gives shelter in the storm.

Tyler Dreith, Alton Citizen and Operations Director of the Alton-OWL

Opinions expressed in this section are solely those of the individual authors and do not represent the views of RiverBender.com or its affiliates. We provide a platform for community voices, but the responsibility for opinions rests with their authors.