

Madison County Grants Committee Hears Support for New Hope House

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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EDWARDSVILLE - Many people turned out at the Madison County Grants Committee meeting to voice support for the [Salvation Army's New Hope House](#).

The committee held its regular meeting on Tuesday, April 2, 2024. During the public comment portion of the meeting, several visitors addressed the New Hope House, a 48-bed homeless shelter that was previously slated to be built at 525 Alby St. next to the Salvation Army in Alton.

In a letter to the Madison County Grants Committee last month, the Salvation Army asked the committee to defer any decision on the \$2.5 million HOME Investment

Partnership/American Rescue Plan (ARPA) grant while they found a new location for the New Hope House. A March 26 [press release by Valerie Doucleff](#), Grants Committee member, said the project was “indefinitely on hold.”

During the Grants Committee meeting on April 2, Travis Widman of Widman Construction, Inc. addressed this word choice. He said he was speaking on behalf of the Salvation Army.

“The word ‘indefinitely’ is a very loose term,” Widman said. “By definition, I would say it was the correct one because we don’t have a defined timeline, but I can tell you that our team is working tirelessly on finding another location. We are still committed to working in Alton, but we have talked to a lot of community members. We’ve talked to a lot of folks in the City of Alton, and we all agree that we need to find a different location.”

Widman said there are “a lot of benefits” to finding a new location, including big savings on retaining walls, historical architecture and utilities. He said they are “thinking weeks, not months” before they are able to present an alternative location to the Grants Committee.

Tyler Dreith, a Middletown resident and a volunteer with the Overnight Warming Locations, noted that transitional housing like the New Hope House is “huge for transformation within people’s lives.” He encouraged those who are opposed to the idea to continue conversations and “be part of the solution.” Mike Varner noted that he used to volunteer at the Booth House, and he urged people to think of unhoused people as “our neighbors and friends.”

Martha Pfister, a volunteer with the Overnight Warming Locations and Middletown resident, read a few comments from people who have spoken in opposition to the New Hope House, including one comment that compared unhoused community members to turds. She also pointed out that many municipalities, including Alton, have passed camping bans that will fine people who camp in public spaces.

“I just really want to share with the Board my feelings to remind you that there is no secret option C,” Pfister said. “Madison County cannot have it both ways. Madison County cannot fine an unhoused person for living in a tent while simultaneously tearing apart every proposed plan to provide the alternative space. We cannot make homeless people disappear. We can have discussions, we can ask questions, we can share concerns, but then we need to try a real solution. We need to speak of our neighbors with respect.”

Mick Madison, a Madison County Board member, took a few minutes to “shed a little history” on the New Hope House and why the Madison County Board postponed their vote. He explained that the Madison County Community Development Department applied for an ARPA grant and determined that a homeless shelter was needed. They sent out a request for proposals, and the New Hope House was the “winning proposal.”

“The only reason we postponed it is because we didn’t feel that everything in Alton was taken care of,” he said. “That’s why it was postponed, because it hadn’t been talked about with all the aldermen in Alton yet and it hadn’t gone through Zoning yet...The project came from us. Madison County started it. What we want is to have all the ducks in a row to be able to do it right where everybody’s happy in the community that it goes in.”

Grants Committee meeting Bill Stoutenborough spoke about the difference between “temporary” and “perpetual” homeless people. He said he supported the current project with two conditions.

“The Salvation Army has taken the blame for the City of Alton’s inability to adequately address the homeless problem,” he added. “In fact, the City has exacerbated the problem by restricting where the homeless can camp out...I support the current project with conditions. Those conditions would include the City designated an area where perpetually homeless could camp. And number two, that the City and the Salvation Army reach a satisfactory agreement with police patrolling the area from 10 o’clock to midnight, 10 o’clock being the time they close their doors.”

No action was taken on the New Hope House. However, the Grants Committee meeting did [vote unanimously to authorize the utilization of the 2025 Illinois Department of Human Services Rapid-Rehousing Grant](#) in Madison County, which would house unhoused families for up to 24 months. The vote now goes to the County Board at their meeting on April 17, 2024.