

They say that you can judge a society by the way it treats its elders and its neediest citizens. Next week, Rapid City has an opportunity to demonstrate leadership, grace and civility by allowing the Cornerstone Rescue Mission to relocate its Women and Children's Home (Home) to the former assisted living facility at the corner of Fox Run Dr. and 5<sup>th</sup> Street owned by the Rapid City Medical Center.

On Thursday, Rapid City's Planning Commission will consider the Cornerstone petition for a special use permit to operate their housing program. As you might expect, not everyone is in favor of the idea. I am. Here's why.

Every day, we read about the growing disparity between the haves and the have-nots in this country. In our own community of some 700 plus kids in our public schools were technically listed as homeless last year – meaning they didn't have secure housing of their own. That should be unacceptable to all of us, and if there's a local effort to stem that tide, let's support it.

Cornerstone's Women and Children's Home is an outgrowth of this local community, it's not some long arm of government or a national charity stepping into our turf, trying to push an unwanted supportive housing program on us. It was Rapid City's own citizens who stepped up in partner with Cornerstone to fund and support the existing home 10 years ago. The men, women and children who volunteer to help support the Home are Rapid City's own. This is a local effort, fueled by compassion.

Cornerstone has been looking for a better facility to operate their Home for the past three years. With requirements for a built-in sprinkler fire suppression system, and room to house up to 35 women and children, it's been difficult to find a building that's an appropriate fit. 301 Fox Run Dr. has an existing sprinkler system in place, ample existing bedrooms and bathrooms, a large kitchen, and room to allow spacious living and dining areas. It will allow the Home to open as soon as possible, without any major building modifications.

The building at 301 Fox Run Dr. is next door to the VA Clinic which allows easy access for our female veterans which one room is dedicated to along with easy access to other local resources and transportation. And there's something exceptionally civil about using a well built and nicely landscaped building as a place to welcome and house our neediest neighbors while they reorganize their lives in order to become independent again. The messy problems that cause homelessness – divorce, death, illness, job loss, abuse, mental health problems – require respite, some hands-on assistance, and

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support. Why shouldn't that support take place in the center of our town, in a safe and comfortable setting? In my decade as executive director of Cornerstone Rescue Mission I can unequivocally say the program has been very successful in transitioning families into permanent housing and employment.

Rapid City can take pride in this effort. Our neighbors won't be shoved off to some corner, but welcomed into the very heart of our community. We have a chance right now to become known as a leader in hospitality, in the broadest way possible. What a powerful way to do something right.

Respectfully,

Jim Castleberry

Jim Castleberry, PhD