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A motto for politicians

Homeless center is not just a neighborhood issue.

Here's a motto for politicians: When in doubt, support the neighborhoods. But not always.

What do you do, for example, when most people agree that a city needs a homeless center, but everyone wants it in someone else's neighborhood? That's a dilemma facing Long Beach.

The way the city's Planning Commission dealt with it the other night was to vote 4-2 to approve a Westside industrial neighborhood as the site of a facility that would provide 59 beds to people who are homeless, and have 90 days to make the transition to a better life.

The hearing went on for hours, and you can imagine what the two opposing sides had to say. Opposed: This will attract other homeless people, bring down the neighborhood generally, threaten a neighborhood improvement program specifically, and besides, the site has environmental problems. In favor: Long Beach has several thousand homeless who need help, there is no better location, the environmental problems have been cleaned up, and besides, it is the right thing to do.

This is something like an airport issue: Put it to a vote, and it would carry all the neighborhoods except one.

In this case, the vote that counts most likely will be that of the City Council, if the

Planning Commission's decision is appealed. That would be the end of the project if the district's representative backed the neighborhood opponents, but she doesn't.

District 1 Councilwoman Bonnie Lowenthal supports the center, and she is right. As she points out, this is a transition center, whose residents are temporary, either working or about to land a job, don't leave the property except in shuttle buses to general-purpose centers, are getting job counseling and other help, and have been carefully selected as candidates for success.

Such a transition center will do nothing for most of the thousands of sad cases who live on the streets: people who are mentally disturbed, or addicted, or slowly committing suicide with alcohol. All of them, including petty thieves, vandals or worse, tend to get characterized loosely as "homeless," which is a disservice to the candidates for a transition center.

Some homeless facilities actually would improve the neighborhood, as was the case with a Salvation Army project proposed some time ago in another district that got turned down. The district's councilman opposed it.

The Westside project probably won't enhance the neighborhood, but it also won't bring it down, and it will help people who need it. And there you have the difference.

When there's little doubt and the risk is small, support the greater good. Besides, it's the right thing to do.

We Get Letters

Shelter Support

To The Editor,

It was good news for the neighborhood and for the city when the Planning Commission approved the year-round homeless shelter (July 5 *Downtown Gazette*).

As a home owner in the Wilmore City neighborhood of Long Beach, I am protective of my property value and knowledgeable about the continuing problem of homelessness in the area.

A year-round homeless shelter will serve to get the homeless off the street and into an environment where help is provided to them.

I respectfully disagree with two organizations that oppose the shelter, the Wilmore City Heritage Association and the

Westside Project Area Committee. Both groups seek to stop the establishment of the shelter.

However, I think that helping the homeless to get off the streets of Long Beach will improve the West Side both in the short term and in the long run.

The Planning Commission rightfully approved the project. I urge the adoption of a local neighborhood advisory committee to work with shelter staff and city officials to address local concerns if the project is approved by the City Council.

Dave Hall
Wilmore City

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PRESS-TELEGRAM

DRIAL



Not Enough Beds In City To Serve Homeless

By Steve Irsay
Staff Writer

There are nearly 6,000 homeless people in Long Beach, according to a 2003 city-sponsored survey.

Like many cities, that is about 1% of the overall population. As for shelter space, there are only about 1,400 beds in Long Beach.

"We don't have the services to meet our 1%," said Susan Price, the city's homeless services coordinator. "And by services, I mean beds."

In an annual report filed with the city earlier this month, the Homeless Services Advisory Committee (HSAC) puts the creation of a controversial year-round shelter near the top of its list of initiatives to reduce homelessness, at least in the short run. The overall problem, however, remains the availability and affordability of permanent housing, the report states.

The year-round shelter would be located at 1368 Oregon Ave., just east of the Los Angeles River in a building that has been vacant since last December. The project goes to the Planning Commission today, Price said, and if it gets appealed could wind up before the City Council in late August. (See story, Page 1A.)

"We have finally come to a place in the city of Long Beach where we've got this project that is up and running," she said. "We need more housing solutions, from an emergency year-round shelter to permanent affordable housing."

Mathematically, the shelter's 20 beds would do little to close the gap between the homeless population and the number of

available beds. But the shelter is still very necessary, Price argues.

"You'll really never have enough beds to address the needs," Price said. "But I'm not saying we need 6,000 beds."

She said the existence of the year-round shelter would help the chronically homeless: those who have been on the streets for more than a year, or four times in a three year period. Forty-three percent of the city's homeless fall into this category, Price said.

The shelter would give some of the chronically homeless a roof over their heads while they are participating in other programs through the Multi-Service Center (MCS) aimed at getting them off the streets for good, Price said.

The year-round shelter would cater to the more visible and, arguably, more immediate homeless problem. The "biggest barrier" to stamping out homelessness entirely, however, is affordable permanent housing.

"We are not looking to open a bunch of shelters," she said. "The issue around homelessness is the lack of housing. It's very much an economic issue."

The affordable housing issue is particularly important in Long Beach, which ranks 10th in the nation in the percentage of people living below the poverty level, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

"With that level of poverty, there are a number of people in

Continued on Page 17A

our city who are at risk for homelessness," Price said.

These people can be pushed into homelessness by a temporary setback such as a lapse in employment, medical injury or even a rent hike, Price said.

Targeting episodic homelessness through eviction prevention or assistance with rental deposits is one of the best ways to prevent homelessness, Price said. This approach is sometimes referred to as "closing the front door" to homelessness, and it receives less money than programs that deal with existing homelessness, she added.

She said the MCS, which coordinates the city's homeless services, uses limited federal Emergency Shelter Grant money to pay for eviction prevention and other "front door" tactics.

The funding for prevention will fall to \$27,000 annually starting in October, down from \$37,000 last year, because of a change in allocation, Price said.

The prevention money also is critical because it often helps homeless families, whereas the year-round shelter would largely benefit single adults, Price said.

Price did highlight some bright spots in the battle against homelessness, in particular the existence of the City Manager-led Interdepartmental Homeless Services meetings that bring together leaders of various agencies to discuss homeless issues.

"As a result, I think we have come up with more proactive ways of dealing with homelessness," Price said, citing affordable housing as a top priority on the agenda.

Another topic of discussion has been turning weekly motels, where many homeless people live, into actual homeless shelters.

"The motels are unsupervised shelters," she said. "If they were properly run then we could better move people into self-sufficiency outside that."

Price said the MSC is busy preparing its annual application for federal funding from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

The application is due at the end of July and the center should find out the results of the request for funds in December.

Shelter For Homeless Must Find Home Soon

Location, location, location.

That's the real estate mantra, and the sticking point for a proposed year-round shelter for the homeless people of Long Beach.

The homeless issue is a tough nut to crack. Most people want to be charitable and have the unfortunates cared for humanely. But, while most don't have the temerity to say it out loud, they also want the homeless dealt with somewhere else.

There are some legitimate concerns. Homeless people often are homeless because of drug or alcohol problems, or because they are mentally or emotionally incapable of holding a job or functioning in "normal" society. They have to survive somehow, but that often entails petty thievery, panhandling and less than sanitary surroundings. Those are not exactly ingredients for improving neighborhoods.

Still, it is clear that simply shoving the problem into the next neighborhood, city or county isn't the solution. Ignoring the homeless issue is not

just counter productive for communities, it is downright heartless.

In the last few decades, our state and federal governments have provided little more than lip service when it comes to solving the dilemma of homelessness. In fact, a strong case can be made that state and federal policies have worsened the situation with elimination of mental health facilities and more.

So that has left the issue to those closest to it — the cities. At long last, Long Beach officials are ready to step up to the plate with a year-round shelter for the homeless.

But they've hit a snag. Location, location, location.

For years, even the temporary winter shelter has bounced from site to site as neighbors successfully complained that the influx of homeless people caused an unfair burden. Add the physical requirements to shelter any population of 50 and more, and finding a location was extremely difficult.

This last winter, a site in an industrial area on the west side of the city seemed to fit the bill. There are no residences anywhere near 1368 Oregon Ave., and the businesses there are almost universally manufacturing, storage or transportation facilities. A tour of the area last Sunday could find no sign of life, let alone concern for problems created by homeless people.

Yet members of both the Westside and the Central Project Area Committees (both groups formed to advise redevelopment project areas) have filed statements of opposition to the year-round shelter. In fact, the West-

side PAC voted to say that, "there is no support for a shelter anywhere in any of the project areas."

That's just plain wrong. This area is the place where a shelter will have minimal impact. More importantly, it is an area where a shelter is economically viable.

That's right, economically viable. It's a virtual certainty that opponents will argue that, if a shelter is so important to us, it should go in our area. Even if we agreed, it wouldn't work. Short of a donation of space, a homeless shelter cannot afford space in Belmont Shore, in Bixby Knolls, downtown or in any

other residential area. Only the industrial site now under consideration makes sense.

We agree with PAC members that monitoring and code enforcement must be done vigorously. The shelter must be proactive in order to do more than warehouse the people involved.

But that is exactly what is planned, and it can work in this location. We urge that the Planning Commission give its approval, and that the City Council does the same when the inevitable appeal takes place.

This location can work. Let's make it happen.

GAZETTE NEWSPAPERS, INC

Established 1977

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Time Now To Agree On

Homeless Shelter Home

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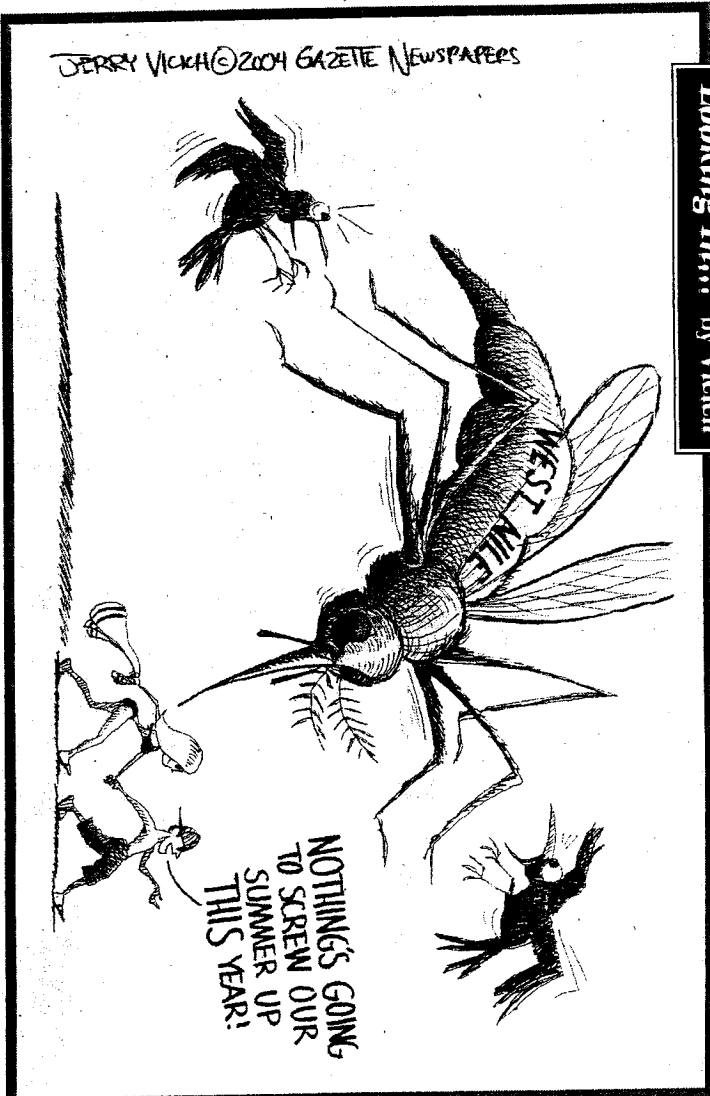
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Gazette Commentary

Looking In... by Vickh



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But that is exactly what is planned, and it can work in this location. We applaud the Planning Commission for giving its approval and count on the City Council to find the conviction of its beliefs and do the same when the inevitable appeal takes place.

This location can work. Let's make it happen.

Survey Shows Need For Shelter Space To Serve Homeless Population

By Steve Irsay
Staff Writer

There are nearly 6,000 homeless people in Long Beach, according to a 2003 city-sponsored survey.

Like many cities, that is about 1% of the overall population. As for shelter space, there are only about 1,400 beds in Long Beach.

"We don't have the services to meet our 1%," said Susan Price, the city's homeless services coordinator. "And by services, I mean beds."

In an annual report filed with the city earlier this month, the Homeless Services Advisory Committee (HSAC)

Study

(Continued from Page 10)

tactics. The funding for such preventions will fall to \$27,000 annually starting in October, down from \$37,000 last year, because of a change in allocation, Price said.

The prevention money also is critical because it often helps homeless families, whereas the year-round shelter would largely benefit single adults, Price said.

Price did highlight some bright spots in the battle against homelessness, in particular the existence of the City Manager-led Interdepartmental Homeless Services meetings that bring together leaders of various agencies to discuss homeless issues.

puts the creation of a controversial year-round shelter near the top of its list of initiatives to reduce homelessness, at least in the short run. The overall problem, however, remains the availability and affordability of permanent housing, the report states.

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Another topic of discussion has been turning weekly motels, where many homeless people live, into actual homeless shelters.

"The motels are unsupervised shelters," she said. "If they were properly run and supervised, then we could better move people into self-sufficiency outside that."

"We have finally come to a place in the city of Long Beach where we've got this project that is up and running," she said. "We need more housing solutions, from an emergency year-round shelter to permanent affordable housing."

Mathematically, the shelter's 59 beds would do little to close the gap between the homeless population and the number of available beds. But the shelter is still very necessary, Price argues.

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year-round shelter would help the chronically homeless: those who have been on the streets for more than a year, or four times in a three-year-period. Forty-three percent of the city's homeless fall into this category, Price said.

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gest barrier" to stamping out homelessness entirely, however, is affordable permanent housing.

"We are not looking to open a bunch of shelters," she said. "The issue around homelessness is the lack of housing. It's very much an economic issue."

The affordable housing issue is particularly important in Long Beach, which ranks 10th in the nation in the percentage of people living below the poverty level, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

"With that level of poverty, there are a number of people in our city who are at risk for homelessness," Price said.

These people can be pushed over the edge into homelessness by a temporary setback such as a lapse in employment, medical injury or even a rent hike, Price said.

Targeting such episodic homelessness through eviction prevention or assistance with rental deposits is one of the best ways to prevent homelessness for those at risk, Price said. This approach is sometimes referred to as "closing the front door" to homelessness and it receives less money than programs that deal with existing homelessness, Price said.

She said the MCS, which coordinates the city's homeless services, uses limited federal Emergency Shelter Grant money to pay for eviction prevention and other "front door"

(Continued on Page 11)

Homeless Activist Knows The Life

By Steve Irsay
Staff Writer

James Brown has a captive audience for the next half-hour — and he is going to use every second of it.

The 40 homeless men and women are in a back room of the Second Samoan United Church of Christ on Cedar Avenue for the free soup and bread, and Brown knows it. But Brown, an outreach specialist for the Travelers Aid Society of Long Beach, doesn't care.

For him, it's a chance to speak to an often-elu-

sive segment of the population that needs help.

Equal parts politico, preacher and half-time coach, the stocky Brown, 47, blasts through a laundry list of items affecting the homeless community, from police-homeless interaction at Lincoln Park to the expansion of a free computer lab in the next room. He offers information and encouragement as he discusses each point.

As the soup in the Styrofoam bowls dwindles, so does the crowd. While Brown is still talking, most people head for the back door where bags of

(Continued on Page 49A)

Homeless

(Continued from Page 1A)

bread are up for grabs.

But several stay behind to speak to Brown personally. One after another, Brown crouches down beside the person and listens to their problems. Usually, he finds a name and phone number for them in his bulging black organizer.

"There are a lot of people out there with a lot of needs," he says.

According to a city-sponsored count conducted in March 2003, there are around 6,000 homeless people in Long Beach. Brown, who was involved with the count, says there are easily a few thousand more who either don't fit the federal definition of homelessness or just weren't counted.

Brown says his overall mission is to reach the city's homeless population and let them know they are not forgotten. He finds out about their needs and helps them navigate the services

available to them in the city.

Equally important, he adds, is working the other way: letting the city — average residents on up to political leaders — know about its homeless population, especially those who are less visible because they spend their days at work and their nights holed up in low-rent hotels.

Brown knows this segment of the homeless population well. Up until four years ago, he was part of it.

The Pomona native became homeless in the early 1990s when the grandmother he lived with passed away. Brown discovered he could not afford to keep their apartment on Bellflower Boulevard by himself.

Brown bounced between park benches, church steps and hotels throughout Long Beach. For most of that time he was working various jobs, such as detailing the sides of supermarket trucks, but simply not making enough money to afford a place to live, he says. Crack use and a few short stints in prison on

drug-related arrests also set him back, he freely admits.

But a few years ago, Brown took advantage of a new opportunity — the city's Multi-Service Center (MSC) — and broke free of what he often refers to as the "cycle" of homelessness. He wound up in a life skills class learning things like money management and decision-making skills.

After a stint as a truck driver earning \$18.50 an hour, he took a pay cut (to \$500 a month) to intern at the MSC in 2001. He then interned with the Travelers Aid Society where he was eventually hired as an outreach specialist and case manager.

While he was in the life skills class, Brown and a few other formerly homeless people started a Long Beach chapter of the Community Action Network (CAN), a grassroots homeless organizing group with active branches in Los Angeles and Hollywood. Anyone who is homeless or formerly homeless

(Continued on Page 50A)

Homeless

(Continued from Page 49A)

is welcome to join.

Two months ago, Brown started renting two small rooms behind the pulpit in the cavernous Second Samoan United Church of Christ for the CAN offices.

Karen Reside, the executive director of the non-profit arm of the Second Samoan United Church of Christ, said she brought Brown to the church after she heard Brown speak at a homeless coalition meeting.

"I was just so impressed with what he had to say and his abil-

ity to articulate about the homeless needs," Reside says. "His big point was that he believed that the homeless should be involved in being able to talk about what their needs are."

Brown says that another important part of his work and the work of CAN is to empower the homeless to inform everyone else about their situation.

"That is our first priority: to introduce regular, everyday people to regular, everyday homeless (people)," he said. "You can't call a man lazy if you see he's working two jobs, living in a hotel and trying to feed his family, see? We think that myths and lies are beaten by the truth, and that is what we are trying to put out there."

Brown says that one of the biggest problems in the fight against homelessness is one of perception, or rather, misperception: that all homeless people are like the highly visible person begging on a corner or passed out drunk on a sidewalk.

"Most people view the homeless the way they see the homeless," he said. "But they never saw me, because I was working trying to take care of my girl, trying to find a place to live. They never saw me drinking on the corner, I never panhandled, none of that."

Brown points out that many homeless people — often women and their children — ride buses or stay in parks all night only because they, like anyone else, are afraid to be out alone in dangerous neighborhoods.

There also are people on the streets who are trying to save their pay for a place to live, but without any security fall victim to street robbery just like anyone else.

(Continued on Page 51A)

Homeless

(Continued from Page 50A)

"Those families, those men and women who are not doing wrong, are getting preyed on," he says. "You've got no walls, no doors to lock. You are the easiest victim."

CAN's education efforts are being helped now because of the hot topic of a proposed year-round shelter. The group will be handing out flyers about the controversial year-round shelter that was approved earlier this month by the Planning Commission and now faces review by the City Council.

Brown says he rejects the implication that "year-round shelter" caters to people unwilling to work. That perpetuates the image of laziness that already plagues the homeless population. Instead, he views the shelter as a stepping stone off the streets for those who are motivated.

"We hear so much about the people who are a paycheck or two from being homeless," he says. "But there's a flipside to that same coin. What about the people who are a paycheck or two from having a place? Those people, where they to get 30 days somewhere, they can put together that money."

Brown says that if the highly-regulated shelter, which will provide transport and not allow walk-ins, does not win final approval it will be just another in a long line of broken promises from the city to its homeless citizens, who have grown tired of long-term plans with indeterminate start dates.

Brown says he believes that the city should take better care of its homeless population if for no other reason than the fact most are taxpayers who live, work and spend their money in this city.

"I lived in a hotel, I worked two jobs and I was broke at the end of every month," he said. "I lived right here in Long Beach. Somebody got that money."

Brown agrees he has come a long way from his days on "crack alley," as he refers to a stretch of Pacific Coast Highway he used to call home. For the past two years, he has rented a one-bedroom apartment on Broadway and Orange Avenue, which he shares with his girlfriend and their 18-month-old child. But, Brown says, he realizes he can easily slip back in.

"I sat down the other day and figured out, should I lose my job today, how long could I realistically depend on having a place," he says. "I'd have 60 days."

Press-Telegram

Long Beach, California MONDAY, AUGUST 2, 2004

Shelter showdown in L.B.



Case manager Daniel Montoya helps a client, part of Glendale's Project Achieve program through which the homeless pass to achieve permanent homes. The Project Achieve facility is a converted warehouse that offers temporary shelter to 40 people, 70 percent of whom acquire permanent residences.

Photos by John McCoy / Press-Telegram

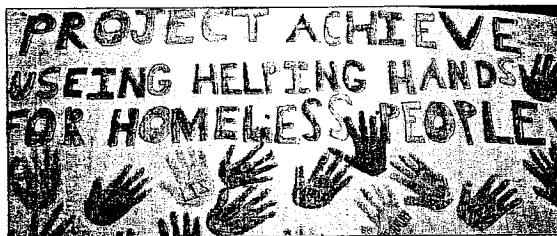
Council votes Tuesday on proposed homeless facility plan

By Jason Gewirtz
Staff writer

GLENDALE — From the outside, nothing about the off-white building with rock-relief exterior says homeless shelter.

On a recent afternoon, nobody stood outside the building on Fernando Court. The streets in this small industrial pocket of Glendale were clean. Workers at a packaging shop behind the building said they didn't know their neighbors ran a homeless shelter until they were told.

But inside, the Institute for Urban Research and Development — IURD — offers beds



A children's poster ornaments a Project Achieve shelter wall in Glendale, a location Long Beach council members visited while considering a proposal to convert a vacant building into a 59-bed overnight shelter for adult men and women.

for up to 40 people per night. During the day, the group offers case management to homeless people looking to get back on track.

"The primary purpose of this is to transition into housing of their own," said Paul Hebblethwaite, the shelter's program director.

Now, the nonprofit IURD hopes to bring a version of its shelter to Long Beach. On Tuesday, the City Council will vote on the proposal, which would be the city's first year-

round emergency shelter if approved.

Last month, the city's Planning Commission endorsed the project, despite objections from dozens of residents who said the proposal at 1368 Oregon Ave. was inappropriate. Nearly 20 people have appealed the Planning Commission's vote to the council, forcing Tuesday's hearing.

The Long Beach proposal calls for converting a vacant industrial

building into a 59-bed overnight shelter for adult men and women. Clients would be bused to the site from 4:30 to 8 p.m., with possible exceptions for people whose jobs end later. Clients would leave between 7:30 and 8:30 a.m.

The shelter would not accept walk-ins.

The Long Beach site sits in the Magnolia Industrial Group area, whose property owners assess themselves to pay for security and other area improvements. Opponents say a homeless shelter is a wrong fit for the industrial area.

A similar debate happened in Glendale in 1996, when IURD proposed the first of their four shelters in Southern California.

The Glendale complex, under the name Project Achieve, has a notable difference from the Long Beach pro-

PLEASE SEE COUNCIL / A5

COUNCIL: Shelter weighed

CONTINUED FROM A1

posal in that case management and the shelter are offered in one location. The Long Beach site would be strictly a shelter.

Glendale area homeless are referred to the Project Achieve building in a small industrial zone on a two-block stretch of Fernando Court. The site is one block from railroad tracks, one block from a commercial corridor that includes restaurants, a beauty salon and a veterinary clinic, and two blocks from the nearest homes.

Across the railroad tracks sits a new shopping mall with a Best Buy, a Starbucks and a Mimi's Cafe.

Once inside the building, clients are sent to specialists in housing, employment, mental health, veterans issues or substance abuse. The building also offers a free health clinic three days a week.

Success stories

Each year, the building sees 1,300 different clients, said Jennifer Zambrano, the case management director. About 200 of them use the shelter at some point during the year. Stays are limited to two months, although a one-month extension is sometimes granted.

Unlike the Long Beach proposal, the Glendale center allows families to stay the night. Operators boast a 70 percent success rate in terms of shelter residents finding transitional or permanent housing.

But Zambrano notes that the building takes in those who are most likely to succeed. Residents must have some source of income to enter the shelter. More than half the residents on any night have jobs, Hebblethwaite said.

Those with more needs such as serious chemical dependency or mental illness are referred to other agencies or shelters that can help. Similar to the Long Beach proposal, the Glendale shelter does not accept walk-in clients.

"In the four years I've been here, maybe two people have come here after hours," Zambrano said. "And we politely say we're not that kind

of shelter."

Neighbors OK

Several nearby business owners say the shelter has been a good neighbor.

Gary Ouyang, whose Magnet company makes women's clothing two doors away, says there were complaints at first. But his company has not had problems.

"I don't even see people passing by," he said.

"The primary purpose of this is to transition into housing of their own."

*Paul Hebblethwaite,
the shelter's program director*

Still, T.L. Rosenkranz, who runs Studio Frame Shop a block away, says it hasn't been perfect. Her business often is approached by Project Achieve clients asking for directions to the shelter, she said.

But the city of Glendale has helped, Rosenkranz said. When the shelter moved in, the city repaved sidewalks, added street lights and placed a fence to separate Fernando Court from the railroad tracks.

"We had our trade-offs to make it a better environment," she said.

IURD has offered Long Beach city officials and residents tours of the Glendale operation in recent weeks. Many come back with positive reviews.

But that doesn't mean the Long Beach shelter's approval is a slam

dunk on Tuesday.

Fair comparison?

Rebecca Rankins, a South Wrigley resident, was among those who toured the Glendale shelter recently. She said the building is not a fair comparison, in part, because it runs 24 hours a day.

"It's sort of like comparing apples and oranges," she said.

Jane Kelleher, one of 19 people who appealed the Planning Commission's endorsement to the council, said opponents still object to putting a Long Beach shelter in an industrial area.

People in the area are also concerned about homeless people coming into the area to find the shelter, despite assurances from IURD, she said. Past seasonal emergency shelter providers, she said, have not lived up to their promises.

"Glendale is not Long Beach," Kelleher said. "Long Beach has a lengthy history of disregarding the neighbors."

Councilwoman Tonia Reyes Uranga, whose 7th District is north of the proposed site, said the Glendale complex isn't necessarily a relevant comparison.

"People loved it, but that doesn't mean it still belongs in an industrial area (in Long Beach)," she said.

But Councilwoman Bonnie Lowenthal, whose 1st District includes the proposed shelter, is supportive.

"I'm extremely impressed with this provider," she said, "which is one of the reasons I'm so optimistic."