

It's now time for Keys to Hope, businesses to be good neighbors

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I walked from The News-Dispatch over to City Hall on Monday hoping to be in the room for a smart, nuanced discussion about the Keys to Hope Resource Center slated to open at 1802 Franklin St.

In a column this past weekend I wrote that, while the resource center is important and certainly fills a need, I had a hope that getting everybody in the same room together could produce a fruitful conversation about the location.

What I hoped might be included in that discussion was a proposal by the opposition for another place where this resource center could be located.

But, no, that's not what happened at all.

Keys to Hope has its facility at 1802 Franklin St. The building was gifted at a rate of \$1 per year and the zoning variance has already been approved. The only way to make a change here would be to offer a similar facility at an equally good deal. Given the fact Citizens Concerned for the Homeless already has money poured into that Franklin Street location, that was the only recourse for the opposition.

Nearly 100 people crammed into City Hall's Emergency Operations Center, and most of the people in the room were in support of the resource center and its location.

I can also say that 100 percent of the people in the room, as far as I can gather, are in support of the idea of a resource center, though some would like to see it at a different location, away, perhaps, from Michigan City's main drag.

The problem is, the message from the opposition was anything but unified and it wasn't until 90 minutes into the workshop that someone actually brought up that it's the location that might be a problem here, not the resource center itself.

How disappointing.

Those looking to establish this resource center did everything right. They went through the legal channels they were required to go through and The News-Dispatch even ran a front-page article on the project six months ago. The opposition of the resource center's location were late to the game and when they arrived, they weren't really prepared for battle.

Monday, I thought, was an opportunity to present a unified front and, more importantly, to present a viable alternative to the deal that's already in place.

No reasonable person can expect this group to abandon a project it's already poured money into just because a couple of neighbors are uncomfortable.

To be honest, I'm not even certain if presenting that alternative would have worked, either, but it was their only shot, and that opportunity is now gone.

My — admittedly unsolicited — advice to business owners in that corridor now is to find a way to make it work. Be good neighbors, just as you expect Keys to Hope to be.

Even though I wrote last week that I felt changing the location could be a good thing, make no mistake, a resource center like this - wherever it might be - is a good thing for Michigan City. I also think the people involved are competent and well-intentioned, which is a great combination.

In the same vein, the business owners who were upset about this location are competent and well-intentioned, also. They've done a great job establishing a thriving business and in this debate only sought to protect their investments and their hard work.

Keys to Hope will open at 1802 Franklin St., that much is certain. At this point, it's time to move forward and establish a great working relationship.

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