

# Community gathers for resource center workshop

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By **JESSICA O'BRIEN** Staff Writer

MICHIGAN CITY — Supporters and opponents of a proposed resource center to be located at 1802 Franklin St. gathered at City Hall on Monday for an informational workshop called by Councilwoman Pat Boy.

Approved by the Board of Zoning Appeals earlier this year, the Keys to Hope Resource Center has been a topic of heated debate between midtown business owners and the Citizens Concerned for the Homeless (CCH), the nonprofit organization which will oversee the facility.

This debate has been presented before the Michigan City Common Council during public comment portion of the last few meetings, causing Boy to call the workshop to allow both sides to present their argument. The council, however, can take no action on the matter as the decision has already been made by the BZA.

According to City Planner Craig Phillips, only a judge can overturn the BZA's decision to allow the resource center to set up shop along the business district due to a special use allowance.

CCH was required to inform abutting and adjacent property owners, Phillips said, but none spoke in opposition before the BZA and several letters of support were received. Approval was granted by the board to move forward with the project in March.

The chief complaint of the businesses in this area of town is a concern for their patrons and the affect a center for the homeless may have on their business. In particular, they are concerned about the homeless gathering and congregating, potentially causing a nuisance to their customers and attracting vagrants to this part of town.

During Monday's workshop, however, CCH discussed their plans for the resource center in a presentation by Jim Musial, director of Sandcastle Shelter, which is also operated by CCH along with Grace Learning Center.

Musial has been spearheading the Keys to Hope Resource Center project since CCH took over operation from a group of local pastors who established the idea of offering such a service to the community.

Describing Keys to Hope as a resource center as opposed to a shelter, Musial said the intention is to help not only the homeless, but the marginalized, low income and disenfranchised as well.

The purpose, he said, is not to provide shelter for these individuals, as the center will only be open for operation from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. The goal is rather to help these people by offering shower and toiletry facilities and supplies, phone and internet access, assistance in resume writing, life skills classes and overall individual case management.

Essentially, Musial intends Keys to Hope to operate as a one-stop-shop for services, programs, referrals and assistance needed by the less fortunate in Michigan City and La Porte County. Attempting to dispel myths that it will operate as a homeless shelter, he called it "a daytime, nonresidential resource and enrichment center."

Nearly 100 individuals were in attendance for Monday's workshop to hear this presentation and voice either their support or concerns for this facility. Among the crowd were council members, CCH board members, business owners, community activists and members of the public.

Many of the comments made were in favor of the resource center, supported overwhelmingly as something necessary in the city. Even the majority of the business owners who are against the planned location of the resource center were in agreement that the center is a good idea.

"I'm compassionate for what you're doing, but I'm opposed to the 1802 Franklin location," said Ken Purze, who owns property in the vicinity of the proposed facility.

Purze further voiced his objection on Monday by reading excerpts from the CCH articles of incorporation, which presented the organization as one which operates to provide shelter for the homeless. His concern is this center will essentially promote a gathering place during daytime and nighttime hours for the city's homeless.

John Magro, whose family has owned a city business for more than 100 years, also voiced his concerns, despite his agreement that Keys to Hope and CCH are wonderful organizations.

"It's a business district and main street. It should remain a business district," he said. If the Keys to Hope center does not provide shelter, but instead resources for the homeless, perhaps it should be located next door to a shelter rather than a business, he said.

However, the 1802 Franklin St. facility, while centrally located in town, was not selected by CCH based on its address. It was gifted to the organization from Good Shepherd Corporation, who agreed to lease the building to CCH for \$1 per year for the next 15 years.

Other issues discussed by the opposition were a lack of parking space available at the facility and questions as to proposed funding to continue operation after Keys to Hope opens for business.



Photo by Adam Parkhouse

### **Resource center workshop**

Jim Musial (standing, left), director of Sandcastle Shelter, speaks to a group of about 100 citizens during a workshop Monday to discuss the proposed Keys to Hope Resource Center at 1802 Franklin St.