

Commissioner Loretta Smith  
Commissioner Diane McKeel



July 6, 2016

Chair Deborah Kafoury,

The continued effort to increase our shelter capacity is important and desperately needed within Multnomah County. We applaud everyone involved in the search, renovation, and operation of additional shelter spaces within our community. The need for more shelter space does not preclude the need to ensure safe shelters. It is our responsibility to ensure that those in our care are safe and housed as humanely as possible. The recent developments to convert the Hansen Building to a homeless shelter are placing the safety of our most vulnerable residents at undue risk. Additionally, we are fully supportive of moving all remaining MCSO employees out of the Hansen Building at the earliest possibility.

The Hansen Building is the lowest rated building in the entire inventory of County facilities. We have worked for years to reduce the number of county employees occupying space in the building and as a County have authorized the design of and search for a replacement public safety facility to better serve our community and our employees. Currently only about 40 employees occupy the Hansen Building and most of those employees spend their work hours in the field. This contributes to a small number overall spending any significant time in the building. Moving 200 or more homeless individuals into the Hansen Building would dramatically and unnecessarily re-occupy a dangerous and poorly equipped building with far too many individuals.

Specific safety and facility concerns:

- No fire suppression (sprinklers) or smoke detectors on the two main floors.
- Poor water supply (currently one of the last remaining bottled water facilities in the county).
- Unreinforced block masonry in poor condition.
- Toilet and shower facilities are in poor condition and there are simply too few to accommodate such large numbers of users.
- There is no kitchen or food preparation area.
- Little to no prior outreach and notification within the neighborhood or surrounding businesses.
- Asbestos throughout the building and within cracked, crumbling, and wrapped areas.
- Electrical wire has a history of burning and smoldering creating fire safety and odor concerns.
- Sewer fly infestation.

The safety of our most vulnerable will be put at risk if the Hansen Building is occupied as a homeless shelter. We should not squander the opportunity to move our employees out of the building only to move less fortunate people in. As serious as the need for shelters is and if this is the best option you see, then we must have a far more transparent and deliberate discussion about the opening of the Wapato facility as a shelter.

Wapato offers us the real possibility of a campus model to help our homeless gain shelter, access to services, and a path toward transitional housing. That facility may have challenges that pinch our budget, but it does so without putting the safety of our residents at risk. Wapato offers large spaces, capable of housing hundreds of homeless, and exceeding our goals for increased shelter beds. The optics, the location, transportation, and hand wringing are all just excuses but none of these challenges give up on the priority of safety for our residents the way the Hansen Building solution does. The Hansen Building shelter is not a solution.

We urge you to reconsider the occupation of the Hansen Building and commit to never housing or employing anyone in such a dangerous space. We ask that you allow our Board of County Commissioners to openly discuss and consider Wapato as a homeless services campus and shelter solution so we can begin working through the challenges of the site rather than just accepting them.

Respectfully,



Loretta Smith  
Commissioner  
Multnomah County, District 2



Diane McKeel  
Commissioner  
Multnomah County, District 4