

To the Editor Charlestown Patriot Bridge

Housing the Homeless in Charlestown: Truths and Transparency Needed

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I'm writing in response to the letters to the editor in the March 9th edition of the Patriot-Bridge advocating greater community communication about the Constitution Inn Housing Project (The Helm on Third). Much of what has been presented about this venture by the proponents – St. Francis House, the Planning Office for Urban Affairs of the Archdiocese (POUA) and the YMCA – is distorted and misleading. Residents of Charlestown, our public officials and our elected representatives need greater clarification and understanding of the elements and the profound impact on our neighborhood and community.

A key, misleading and disturbing aspect of the proponents' presentations is the *intentional mixing and substitution of Permanent **Affordable** Housing for Permanent **Supportive** Housing*. The former most understand. The latter, poorly understood, is a specific model for housing the homeless *without preconditions* for treatment of addiction, substance abuse, mental illness treatment or other behavioral compliance as described in extensive medical literature. Further, by definition, tenants are "encouraged, but not required, to receive treatment and maintain sobriety."

Charlestown lacks access to services needed by this population to include public transportation, primary care, urgent care, first provider response, addiction and mental illness treatment, full police presence, affordable shopping, food shopping and employment. Permanent Supportive Housing where deployed in other cities and regions has not reduced homelessness, addiction or mental illness. Any level of success requires Intensive Case Management to include primary healthcare, specialty care, social service, life skills training and employment services.

The community as well as the homeless need consideration. The project would bring to Charlestown and the residential areas of the Navy Yard new fears of safety and security in a neighborhood lacking the infrastructure to respond. The proponents in their small information sessions have provided no guidelines for housing compliance or behavior and no criteria for non-compliance eviction. Security planning for the project lies with an outside consultant. This message needs to be heard and understood directly and in open public meetings.

Charlestown is the wrong place for the proposed Constitution Inn project and should be denied approval based on its flawed design, concepts and proposed implementation. We need the understanding and support of our public officials and elected representatives to advocate for the population they were chosen to serve. We need the residents of Charlestown to understand what they have been asked to accept. We need to provide an environment which includes the needed services and resources for the homeless that truly fosters their safety, security and recovery from their illness and impairment. The science of treating the homeless is complex. A roof is not the sole answer.