

VLL B 1 1:00 pm Brian Smith  
8/28/2018

Letter to  
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
DOUGLAS COUNTY, NEBRASKA  
Regarding proposed Juvenile Justice Center

Submitted August 28, 2018

As representatives of the organizations listed below, we express our disapproval of the process by which Douglas County Board of Commissioners has developed a proposal for a Juvenile Justice Center.

The Commissioners have given no voice to your constituents. The Board has not engaged the appropriate people in this process, including people who have been detained in the Douglas County Youth Center, youth-centered nonprofit organizations, concerned community groups, related government agencies, and the general public. We are stakeholders in this community, and we have been excluded.

The Commissioners have prioritized attorneys and judges over juveniles. The original motivation of the Building Commission was to provide more space for County employees, but the proposed detention center threatens our young people. The number of youth in detention has been steady since 2014, and your proposal does not provide any associated plan to reduce that number. Our youth deserve funding for proactive measures that address the root causes of crime. The proposed youth jail funnels \$37M to a building project without satisfying our community's needs and desires for justice.

The Commissioners have not provided transparency in the process to date and threaten to damage the public trust through the use of a private organization to manage the construction project. Representative democracy does not afford elected officials to operate without oversight by the public. You are responsible to us, but you have not made a case to residents of the County why the plan you pushed through without public engagement is the best and only option.

As representatives of the organizations listed below, we not only express our disapproval, but we call for your action. We urge the Douglas County Board of Commissioners to approve the resolution introduced today by Commissioner Cavanaugh to:

- Supercede resolution #503 authorizing eminent domain of parcel number 1515520000
- Supercede resolution #509 appointing the private not-for-profit corporation Unified Justice Center Development Corporation as its owner representative
- Submit a general obligation bond issue question for voter consideration at the November 2018, General Election

- Take all necessary actions by September 4, 2018 to satisfy all requirements specified by the Nebraska Secretary of State for that bond issue ballot question at the November 2018 General Election

Our children deserve the best possible chance at a healthy future. By denying us the right to participate in the process, you deny our children the full wealth of our experience, effort, and love. By prioritizing space for County employees and reducing space for juveniles in detention, you expose our children to potential threats from the system itself, including housing in other counties. By obscuring the process of site analysis, architectural planning, and construction management, you damage the public's trust in our institutions and elected officials.

You can fix this today. We expect you to fix this today.

Thank you for your consideration.

Submitted by:

Willie Hamilton, Black Men United  
Linda Reimer, Omaha Street School  
Claire Wiebe, Planned Parenthood of the Heartland  
Terry Werner, National Association of Social Workers, NE Chapter  
Naomi Hattaway, Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America, NE Chapter  
Jasmine Harris, Nebraska Unity PAC  
Karen Abrams, Policy Research & Innovation  
Samuel A. Bertino, Omaha Children's Choir  
Kevin Flatowicz-Farmer, Mode Shift Omaha\*  
Greg Sechser, Howlin' Hounds Coffee  
Brian Smith, Omaha Public Meetings

Becca Bruner,  
Nebraska Appleseed

Cathy Rauch,  
Lincoln YWCA

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\* Additional notes from Mode Shift Omaha

The development of this block of buildings, in the middle of downtown, will alter the development patterns in the surrounding area for the foreseeable future. Building the Juvenile Justice Center in a manner that consumes the majority of a city block, and "require" a parking garage, will adversely affect the usable fabric of the built environment. This approach is short-sighted.

The Commission needs to look beyond the advantages of the placing the Juvenile Justice Center in close proximity to the City/County building and the Court House. Consider how this development will affect the not only the connection of Midtown to the Old Market, but the revitalization of western downtown. What are the long term consequences to private real estate development in the immediate vicinity? Is the development of yet another parking garage the best public investment in light of the decline in single occupancy vehicle use in the immediate future?

When the city and county should be investing in active forms of transportation, and a walkable, livable urban environments, in order to attract the next generation of tax payers, we are instead seeing the Commission propose a short-sighted, costly plan for a Juvenile Justice Center whose positive contributions to children's outcomes could be achieved at another site where the demolition of historic buildings and the degradation of the walkable environment would not be necessary.

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