

## ***Mayor allegedly to Propose Cancellation of Shelter Lease Without City Council Vote***

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**Press Contact: Korina Lopez,**

It has come to the attention of the Board and Management of the Interfaith Community Shelter that a City Council Executive Session will be held on Wednesday to discuss the “premises located at 2801 Cerrillos Road currently leased to the Interfaith Shelter Group.” We understand that the intent of the discussion is to terminate the Shelter lease (presumably with a 1 month notice), and we have reason to believe the mayor thinks he can do this unilaterally, without a vote of the City Council. Furthermore, we have reason to believe the mayor intends to install an out-of-state organization at the same location to provide homeless services.

**The reason we do not know the specifics about what is being contemplated is that we have not been informed, advised, consulted or otherwise apprised, nor had the opportunity to respond to any plans under consideration by the City regarding changes to our lease, despite having met with City officials as recently as last Thursday, May 22.**

Obviously, there is much frustration with the general sense of disorder on Harrison Road and the Cerrillos corridor more broadly. **Nobody is happy with the status quo, including the Interfaith Board and Management.** It affects our staff, our volunteer community, and, most importantly, the homeless guests we serve daily, who are preyed upon by bad actors who are not allowed onto the Shelter property. **In attempting to improve these conditions, Interfaith has (at our own cost)**

- hired increased **security** personnel to maintain better order inside our fence;
- installed large **rocks and boulders** outside our fence line to discourage loitering;
- strengthened our **zero tolerance** policies to discourage our clients from loitering along Harrison and Cerrillos;
- piloted a program that **allows individuals to stay on our premises 24/7** if they CHOOSE to do so; and
- submitted, months ago, a grant request to the City to fund a **street outreach case manager** position targeted specifically at Harrison Road and the Mobile Hygiene Unit, which to date has been ignored.

All of the above has been at a **substantial out of our pocket cost**, funds that we have had to raise that otherwise would go to serving our homeless guests.

- Perhaps most importantly, ICS proposed to the City that a Santa Fe **police officer be co-located at 2801 Cerrillos Road and assigned to the immediate neighborhood at ICS's SOLE COST.** This offer was made verbally months ago and reiterated in writing at the May 22 meeting cited above. This is money that we can ill afford, that would otherwise be spent on homelessness services, but we are prepared to do it because we have run out of options within our fences and do not have any authority to enforce law and prevent illegal behavior outside the gates of 2801 Cerrillos Road - behaviors which are largely driven by the fentanyl crisis in Santa Fe. Our community has been hit harder than many others by this scourge.

We all know that 2801 Cerrillos Road is no longer a desirable location for a minimal-barrier emergency shelter. That's why **ICS has contracted with the Denver-based architectural firm Shopworks and local architects** to reimagine a 24/7 one-stop-shop for homeless services that's designed from the bottom up to suit Santa Fe's specific needs, bringing in best practices from other locations who have had success in this area.

We call this the ROCK, the Resource and Opportunity Center. A Phase 1 report has been delivered and architectural renderings are underway, as is an active real estate search for a more suitable location. This effort is in full swing. **Nobody, least of all us, imagines ICS staying at 2801 Cerrillos Road indefinitely.**

Let's be clear: **a decision to terminate our lease is a decision to disband the Interfaith Community Shelter.** Not the building, but the 501(c)(3) organization that has been **built over the last 2 decades through the toil and treasure of thousands of volunteers, funders, and faith and civic leaders.** An emergency homeless shelter organization without an emergency shelter is just an idea. Dedicated **staff** will be let go. Our community of roughly 2,000 **volunteers**, which has been assembled and cultivated over a period of many years and who believe passionately in our mission, will be cut adrift. **Planning** for the ROCK will come to a screeching halt. Most importantly, the **80 or so guests** who we serve a hot, nutritious, homemade meal to on any given night - a substantial portion of whom are seniors - will not know where they will eat on Day 1 after our lease is terminated. Who will prepare their dinner that night?

ICS is not and was never intended to be the "answer to homelessness." It was an **emergency response to the horror of our fellow citizens freezing to death** on the streets of Santa Fe. Today, a more comprehensive homeless response system exists in our city, just as other systems have emerged in other locations - systems where various organizations play particular roles. In the best systems these organizations avoid overlapping services and work together in a coordinated fashion, often co-locating their employees - as The Life Link does, for example, at Interfaith.

Judging from letters published in the *New Mexican*, many citizens seem to think that Interfaith is meant to be THE response system. It is not. But it **plays a crucial role in the system** by providing something that no one else does - a low-barrier place of shelter where people can be redirected toward a brighter future.

And all of that is currently being done, for all intents and purposes, FREE OF CHARGE to the City of Santa Fe, other than the provision of 2801 Cerrillos Road and modest grants that make up less than 10% of our operating budget. We raise the money. We find the volunteers. We secure the food and cook the meals. Gratis to the City. **All we need is their help in policing the sidewalks outside our gates to combat illegal behavior** in a cooperative fashion that serves the needs of our clients and our neighbors.

The Shelter has responded to suggestions for improvement. And **we need more time to respond to other ideas that might be put forth for this location, while we work purposefully to build a better model at a new location.**