

Split commission approves funding for homeless shelter

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The Lee County commissioners narrowly agreed Monday to provide \$315,000 to Outreach Mission Inc. to go toward a new homeless shelter but it wasn't without some dissent.

Commissioners Mark Lovick, Robert Reives, Cameron Sharpe and Bill Carver voted to provide the money; commissioners Arianna Lavalley, Kirk Smith and Andre Knecht rejected the request that came from the City of Sanford.

The proposed shelter is being built through the auspices of Outreach Mission, located at 705 Chatham St.

The total cost of the project is estimated to be about \$2 million, County Manager John Crumpton said.

"A group of people have stepped forward and are putting up \$1.1 million to honor the memory of Sam Wornom," he said.

Samuel Joseph Wornom III, best known as one-half of the founders of The Pantry convenience stores, was a community philanthropist who devoted time and money to numerous civic boards and organizations.

Upon his death in January at the age of 79, he was remembered as a civic leader who "left a legacy that is almost unparalleled," a close friend recounted.

Crumpton said he has talked with city officials about funding and grant options, but there is a shortfall of about \$630,000. The county has been asked to split the cost with the city. The Sanford City Council approved its share last week, Crumpton said.

The building is slated to be built on South Third Street behind the current women's shelter, Crumpton said.

Commissioner Andre Knecht said residents in the area have in the past voiced concerns about the location.

"It makes me concerned, not necessarily the project, but its location," Knecht said.

Another point bothered him.

"We asked the city to help us offset something with economic development when it came to railways and that was to share liability if anything went wrong with a new business coming here," Knecht said.

The county asked the city to pay half of the \$300,000 cost of that project, but the request was denied, Knecht said.

"The city did come back and say yes," Crumpton noted.

Commissioner Bill Carver explained why he supported the plan, even though some people might be uncomfortable living in the area.

“But as we look at the population we’re trying to help, we’re improving their lives and giving them hope and that has a tendency to improve the county as a whole,” he said.

When dealing with these types of issues, Carver said, “we need to lay down the reasons why we need to go there and why we are helping.”

There’s a moral mandate based on the N.C. Constitution he said, and “we’re being asked to give \$315,000 for a \$2.1 million project.”

But most importantly, Carver said, is the need to provide the homeless community with resources to put them on a path to a better life.

“We can have confidence that our investment will result in a positive return.”

Commissioner Robert Reives made a motion that the county appropriate up to \$315,000 to Outreach Mission Inc. once the organization has received grant funding for the new homeless shelter. Once the county’s legal team has reviewed the process, any documents related to the transfer of money will be brought back before the commissioners for final approval.