

CITY WON'T RENEW LEASES FOR SHELTER AND SOUP KITCHEN

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Mayor Edward J. Clancy Jr. has told a homeless shelter and a soup kitchen that the city will not renew their leases at the city-owned Lynn Multi-Service Center on Washington Street, calling them a "nuisance" in a resurgent downtown.

The Lynn Shelter Association and My Brother's Table still have two years left on their leases, which were due to automatically renew on Thursday for another five years to 2012. But Clancy said the nonprofits have not done enough to crack down on approximately 30 homeless people routinely found drunk, loitering, and begging for money downtown.

"Very frankly, I have been dissatisfied over a period of time with both tenants and their lack of responsiveness to complaints about how the serial inebriate population is affecting the surrounding neighborhood," Clancy said.

The two nonprofits now have two years either to negotiate new leases with the city or look for new homes. Officials at the Lynn Shelter Association could not be reached for comment.

Ilia Stacy, executive director of My Brother's Table, a nonprofit meals program with broad support from volunteers across the North Shore, said she hopes to negotiate a new lease.

"I'd like to sit down with them," said Stacy, who declined to elaborate until she formally receives a letter that Clancy sent by mail on Nov. 22. "We understand there are problems, but we do serve a need in Lynn."

Clancy's decision comes as Lynn adopts an ambitious Bush administration goal to end chronic homelessness in urban areas by 2012. Lynn has a homeless population of more than 800, 667 who have sought shelter services at locations around the city, including the 44-bed shelter at the Lynn Multi-Service Center, according to city research.

The move also comes amid mounting pressure from the Lynn business community, which last month sent Clancy a letter outlining concerns about homelessness in Lynn, a city of almost 90,000.

After many years of decline, downtown Lynn is experiencing an urban revival. A \$30 million condominium boom has brought new residents and businesses downtown, creating tension with the homeless who frequent city streets, parks, and vacant lots. Police are frequently called to the multiservice center for medical assistance and reports of disturbances and fights.

The mayor last week appointed a 23-member coalition of representatives of the public and private sector that will meet over the next six months to develop a plan.

Philip Mangano, a former homeless advocate in Massachusetts appointed by President Bush to oversee the national effort, spoke to the group at its first meeting last week. "For the last 25 years, the best we can say is that we've managed homelessness in the US," Mangano said. "Now we are trying to end a national disgrace."

Mangano urged the coalition to look outside Lynn to find solutions. He cited San Diego, Philadelphia, and New York City, which have reduced the number of homeless by providing better services for people with drug or alcohol abuse problems or mental illness, and creating more affordable housing.

But he also said a community must to have "political will" to change the way it addresses homelessness. "Cities across the country are setting out to disturb the status quo," he said.

Clancy said he is prepared to endure political heat about his decision not to renew the leases. He also said he was not swayed by pressure from business owners in the downtown.

"I am not picking on the poor," Clancy said. "Anyone who says that does not know what the city of Lynn has done, and will continue to do, for people in need. But we need substantial changes in the way those agencies operate . . . before I would even consider a new lease with them."

The Multi-Service Center, located in a former post office at the intersection of Liberty and Washington streets, is the focal point of homeless services. In 1992, the city received \$2.2 million in federal funding to create a center to bring services for the homeless under a single roof.

The Lynn Shelter Association now operates a 44-bed shelter in the basement. My Brother's Table, a soup kitchen that started 23 years ago, is on the first floor. SPIN Serving People In Need is also located there. That agency is not affected by Clancy's decision.

Coalition members said they are eager to get to work on solving Lynn's homeless problem. "This is long overdue," said Kevin Donahue, executive director of the Lynn Area Chamber of Commerce. "We have a downtown now that is on its way back. . . We understand there is an obligation to help people in need, but we need a solution that is acceptable to everyone."

State Representative Steven Walsh, a Lynn Democrat appointed to the coalition, cautioned against taking away services for the needy at the expense of the majority.

"We have to make sure that as we attack the problems of 30 or so people," he said, "we make sure that we protect the population that really needs our help."

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