

PROPOSAL FOR COLUMBIA CITY COUNCIL  
REGARDING DOWNTOWN SAFETY AND SECURITY

WE ARE HERE TODAY TO DISCUSS SAFETY AND SECURITY ISSUES IN THE DOWNTOWN AREA AND TO MAKE A PROPOSAL THAT CAN ALSO SERVE AS AN AID TO BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT IN THE AREA.

HOLY TRINITY GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH, MAIN STREET METHODIST, AND EBENEZER LUTHERAN HAVE FORMED A SECURITY TASK FORCE WITH PARTICIPATION ALSO FROM THE DOWNTOWN NEIGHBORHOOD ASSO. ALL ARE REPRESENTED HERE TODAY.

PROTECTING CITIZENS AND PROVIDING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT IS EVERY LEVEL OF GOVERNMENT'S FIRST PRIORITY. NO COMMUNITY CAN BE SUCCESSFUL AND INCREASE THE VOLUME OF BUSINESS INVESTMENT WITHOUT A BASIC LEVEL OF CITIZEN COMFORT AND CONFIDENCE WITH THEIR SAFETY.

HOLY TRINITY NOW OWNS THE ENTIRE BLOCK BOUND BY MAIN, SUMTER, RICHLAND AND CALHOUN. CONSTRUCTION IS WELL UNDER WAY ON A NEW \$6 MILLION PLUS CATHEDRAL AT THE CORNER OF MAIN AND RICHLAND. THE GREEK FESTIVAL CONDUCTED ON THAT PROPERTY IS ARGUABLY ONE OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL IN THE DOWNTOWN AREA. WE COULD HAVE MOVED OUT OF THE CITY BUT CHOSE TO INVEST HEAVILY AND FOR THE LONG TERM ON MAIN STREET.

MAIN STREET METHODIST IS IN THE NEXT BLOCK, HAS EXISTED THERE FOR MANY YEARS AND OPERATES A DAY CARE CENTER. EBENEZER LUTHERAN IS ON ANOTHER ADJOINING BLOCK AND HAS RECENTLY COMPLETED A NEW CONSTRUCTION PROJECT. EACH OF OUR CHURCHES CONTRIBUTES FUNDING AND SERVICES TO HELP THE POOR AND NEEDY. IT IS OUR CHRISTIAN DUTY AND RESPONSIBILITY TO DO SO AND WE DO IT JOYFULLY. WE BELIEVE WE ARE OUR BROTHERS KEEPER AND ALWAYS WILL ASSIST THOSE IN DISTRESS. HAVING SAID THAT, IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT WE PROVIDE SECURITY FOR THOSE WHO PROVIDE MONEY AND ASSISTANCE FOR OTHERS IN ORDER THAT THE CHURCHS' FUNDRAISING ENDEAVORS CAN CONTINUE SUCCESSFULLY.

SAFETY AND SECURITY CONCERNS HAVE BECOME A MAJOR ISSUE IN THE AREA. PROBLEMS INCLUDE BURGLARIES, AGGRESSIVE PANHANDLING (EVEN DURING SUNDAY SERVICES), PERSONS SLEEPING IN BUSHES AND DOORWAYS AND ACTUALLY DEFECATING ON CHURCH BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS. OUR PRIEST EVEN WALKED INTO A BURGLARY IN PROGRESS AT THE CHURCH. FORTUNATELY HE WAS NOT INJURED AND THE PERSON WAS ARRESTED BY POLICE. MENTALLY ILL PERSONS ARE ROAMING THE AREA AND VERY RECENTLY A FIRE WAS SET IN PINE STRAW AROUND THE LUTHERAN CHURCH. CRIMES CLASSIFIED AS STRONG ARM ROBBERY AND AGGRAVATED ASSAULT HAVE INCREASED COMPARED TO A SIX MONTH PERIOD THE YEAR BEFORE. THE COUNTY DETENTION CENTER DROPS PERSONS RELEASED FROM CUSTODY APPROXIMATELY FIVE TIMES A DAY FROM MORNING TO NIGHT AT THE BUS STATION AT LAUREL AND SUMTER TWO BLOCKS AWAY. WE RECENTLY NOTED AND UNDERSTAND A COUNCILMAN'S CONCERN WITH POSSIBLE PROBLEMS THAT COULD OCCUR IF A CERTAIN ORGANIZATION RELOCATES TO FARROW ROAD. THESE SAME POSSIBLE CONCERNS ARE ALREADY A REALITY TO US EVERY DAY.

HERE IS THE PLAN. ALL AGREE THAT THE YELLOW SHIRT PROGRAM OPERATED BY THE CENTER CITY PARTNERSHIP IS PROFESSIONAL AND HIGHLY EFFECTIVE IN DEALING WITH THE SAFETY ISSUES IN THE AREA. THEY KNOW MANY OF THE PERSONS WITH WHOM THEY COME INTO CONTACT DAILY AND ARE COST EFFICIENT. IT TAKES APPROXIMATELY \$28,000 PER YEAR TO EMPLOY, TRAIN, AND EQUIP A YELLOW SHIRT. IT WOULD TAKE MORE THAN DOUBLE TO HIRE A POLICE OFFICER. THEY CAN HANDLE ABOUT 80% OF THE PROBLEMS THAT HAVE BEEN DESCRIBED. HOWEVER THERE ARE ONLY 10 FOR THE ENTIRE BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT BETWEEN GERVAIS, MAIN, ELMWOOD AND MARION STREETS. WITH SCHEDULING OF SHIFTS THAT MEANS USUALLY THERE ARE ONLY A MUCH LESSER NUMBER ON DUTY AT ANY TIME. WE PROPOSE THAT OVER A PERIOD OF TIME 10 MORE BE HIRED SO THAT AN ADEQUATE NUMBER ARE ON THE STREETS. OUR CHURCH WOULD BE PLEASED TO FURNISH COST FREE AN OFFICE FOR THEIR USE AT THAT END OF MAIN STREET. THEIR SINGLE CURRENT OFFICE IS ON WASHINGTON STREET.

ADDITIONALLY BESIDES POLICE OFFICERS REGULARLY PATROLLING THE METRO REGION, THERE IS ONLY ONE OFFICER ON A THREE WHEELER IN THE BUSINESS DISTRICT FROM EARLY MORNING UNTIL ABOUT MID AFTERNOON. ANOTHER IS NEEDED FROM MID AFTERNOON UNTIL LATE EVENING WHEN MANY ACTIVITES ARE UNDEDRWAY. A RETIRED OFFICER COULD BE UTILIZED BY THE CITY WITH MUCH LESS COST INVOLVED. THE POLICE DEPARTMENT HAS BEEN VERY HELPFUL AND IS CURRENTLY

WORKING WITH THE CHURCHES TO MAKE EVEN MORE USE OF EXISTING RESOURCES.

UNDER THIS PROPOSAL THE YELLOW SHIRTS WOULD HANDLE MOST SITUATIONS AND CALL FOR POLICE WHEN NEEDED. THIS FREES LAW ENFORCEMENT FOR OTHER CALLS FOR SERVICE. DOWNTOWN WOULD NOT BE OR APPEAR TO BE AN ARMED CAMP BUT AN ENVIRONMENT WITH A SENSE OF SAFETY WOULD EXIST THEREBY ENCOURAGING NEW BUSINESSES, RESIDENTS AND VISITORS. THE NEW GENERAL MAST STORE WILL BE A GREAT FEATURE AND THE ADDITIONAL BUSINESSES THAT ARE USUALLY ATTRACTED WILL HAVE A GREATER CHANCE OF BECOMING A REALITY, GENERATING MORE REVENUE FOR THE CITY .

WE KNOW WE MUST ALSO TAKE ACTIONS AND INCUR EXPENSE TO PROTECT OURSELVES. SECURITY FEATURES AND PROCEDURES ARE BEING ADDED TO OF OUR CHURCHS' BUILDINGS AND OPERATIONS. AND YES WE CANNOT AFFORD IT EITHER BUT IT IS A NECESSITY.

WE HAVE ALSO MET SEVERAL TIMES WITH BOARD MEMBERS OF THE MIDLANDS ALLIANCE REGARDING THEIR PROJECT ON THE BLOCK NEAR OUR CHURCH. THIS OPERATION WILL ASSIST HOMELESS PERSONS AND WE DO NOT OBJECT TO THAT. IN FACT WE WANT TO SEE A SUCESSFUL , SAFE PROGRAM. WE JUST REQUEST THAT IT BE OPERATED AS THOUGH IT WERE LOCATED NEXT TO THEIR CHURCH WHERE THEIR FAMILIES WORSHIP AND FREQUENT REGULARLY. WE SUGGESTED THAT A RISK AND VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT BE CONDUCTED BY A PROFESSIONAL , CERTIFIED SECURITY SPECIALIST AND THIS WAS COMPLETED SEVERAL MONTHS AGO. I RECEIVED A COPY THIS WEEK AND UPON FIRST PERUSAL IT APPEARS TO ADDRESS SAFETY AND SECURITY ISSUES ON THAT PROPERTY. ONE POINT OF GREAT IMPORTANCE IS REGARDING THE ALLIANCE MAKING EVERY EFFORT TO PREVENT DANGEROUS FUGITIVES, VIOLENT CRIMINALS AND SEX OFFENDERS FROM INVOLVEMENT WITH PROGRAMS THERE. ANYTHING LESS WOULD ENDANGER THE OTHER PARTICIPANTS, STAFF, AND THE SURROUNDING COMMUNITY. WE ARE CURRENTLY AWAITING THE OPERATING PROCEDURES THAT ARE BEING CREATED TO SEE HOW SECURITY IS ADDRESSED.

IN CONCLUSION, THERE IS A GREAT OPPORTUNITY TO INCREASE BUSINESS AND RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE DOWNTOWN AREA FOR THE GOOD OF ALL AND TO INCREASE REVENUES FOR THE CITY. THIS PROPOSED COST EFFECTIVE AND NON-INTRUSIVE PLAN CAN CREATE MANY BENEFITS TOWARD THE GOAL OF BUILDING A BETTER, SAFER DOWNTOWN COLUMBIA. THE CITY CAN INVEST A LITTLE WITH THE POTENTIAL TO GAIN A LOT. WE KNOW IT WILL HAVE TO BE IMPLEMENTED IN STAGES. IT HAS BEEN SAID THE BEST TIME TO PLANT A TREE WAS TWENTY YEARS AGO. THE NEXT BEST TIME IS TODAY. NOW IS THE TIME.