

Letter: Shelter shouldn't be forced on people

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To the editor:

There is no one who doesn't want to help the homeless or people in need. But where does a homeless shelter belong? Does it belong in a residential location or does it belong in an area that will have no detrimental effect on a neighborhood?

If you locate a shelter in a residential neighborhood, near downtown or a school, it will without a doubt impact negatively on that neighborhood. It is quite evident that there will always be a community opposition to a shelter located in the wrong place, and the former St. Mary's Church is the wrong location.

A shelter should never be forced upon people. There should be a number of public meetings with the residents and concerned citizens and elected city and state officials, before it is a done deal. The sad part about it is that it usually is controlled and funded by the state.

In retrospect, there was plenty of opposition to the second shelter in the Crombie Street Church and rightfully so, since it was located downtown where the homeless in the previously managed shelter had been guilty of loitering, drinking, urinating in public and panhandling. It was not good for business or the community.

So it is with the former St. Mary's Church on Margin Street. The people living in the neighborhood near the High Street playground find the shelter not conducive to bringing up children. The homeless can often be seen sitting on Riley Park benches passing the paper bag around. I don't know what is in the paper bag, but I bet it smells like alcohol.

The shelter is the main reason that the people living near it have formed a neighborhood association to discuss the concerns of the neighborhood and to find solutions to those concerns.

I understand that the mission plans to spend \$3 million to renovate St. Mary's Church into affordable-housing units. Not only that, they intend to expand into the neighborhoods. Where will the next location for the homeless be? Isn't Salem already doing more than its share? Look at the cities and towns that surround Salem. Do you find any homeless shelters equal to Salem's or the number of affordable housing equal to the number Salem has? The answer, of course, is no. Do Marblehead or Swampscott have a homeless shelter? Perhaps they do, but I have never seen one.

At 50 Palmer St., there are already a number of homeless units that have been for sale over two years, and they haven't sold one. It is my opinion that the Mission should purchase those for a much lower price of the \$3 million that it will take to convert St. Mary's into a homeless shelter.

There is something about this conversion that just doesn't add up.

Since Salem is already doing more than its share, wouldn't it be a gesture of gratitude if the Mission would give St. Mary's to the city as a gift for all it has done for the underprivileged through the years?

I agree with Joe Cultrera that St. Mary's would better serve the city as an art center rather than more affordable housing.

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Salem