



*Providing care and compassion to our neighbors in need*

June 5, 2023

Esteemed Members of the Colorado Springs Planning Commission:

I regret that I cannot be there with you in person to express my unmitigated support of the Launchpad PSH project as proposed by The Place, and I hope this letter will suffice.

We are all complex people, with many identities that inform our approach to community-building.

For the purposes of this letter, my first relevant identity is one of a resident of the west side. My home is less than a mile away from the proposed Launchpad site, and I wholeheartedly welcome its development and fruition in my community. I would say the same if the Launchpad was literally next door to my home. The vibrancy of the west side community is rooted in its mixed-income composition, its quirky neighborhoods, and the availability of services and support for local residents to fully flourish.

I also write as a collaborator of The Place. As an administrator in the social service sector, I see a lot of organizations that cherry-pick folks who are the easiest to work with, who drop the ball on promises made, and who abysmally fail at keeping people housed by failing to support them. The Place is a standout in a sea of mediocrity – their housing rates often exceed 90% retention, and their ability to leverage adequate supportive services and deliver as promised are unparalleled. I trust them implicitly at the organizational and individual levels: they will do what it takes to make the project a success.

Another relevant identity is one of caseworker. Far from yelling and screaming at about what others should be doing to address “the homeless problem,” I am literally in the trenches every day trying to solve one of our society’s most vexing and complex problems. This gives me a unique vantage point: although I am still learning after 6 years at Westside CARES, I have personally facilitated housing or healing or both for at least two dozen people. I have a sense of what works, both in terms of getting an individual off the street and walking alongside them as they begin to achieve their goals, but also in terms of getting the most visible, most vulnerable people from crisis to safety. The latter piece, of course, is the community piece; the place where the community sees impact in terms of reduction of emergency service calls and reduction in “rough sleeping.” As outspoken and sometimes profane critics of “the homeless,” I can’t imagine why the petitioners would obstruct evidence-based practices to improve the community – and individual lives.

Let me state it plainly: **permanent supportive housing works**. It works to transform lives, and it works to improve the community. The evidence supports it, and any claim to the contrary is hogwash.

Opponents of the Launchpad have implied that there is no community benefit to transforming fallow, litter-ridden fields and dilapidated buildings in to a modern, fully supportive housing community. Other than the obvious aesthetic improvements of such a transformation, the potential upsides are numerous.

First, there is the upside at the individual level, the possibility of hope and transformation for vulnerable youth. Young people who have been abused or kicked out by their families; who have been trafficked; who have been exploited in ways I hope you can't imagine. So many of these young people just need a chance; a safe place from which to launch brighter futures.

Second, there is the upside of connecting these vulnerable youth to the services they need to heal. Too often, we hear critics of people experiencing homelessness alleging behavioral health or substance use disorder as the primary culprit of someone's homelessness. These allegations, beyond perpetrating fundamental attribution error, are aimed at bifurcating people, human beings, into the categories of "worthy" and "unworthy." As practitioners, we do not see the neighbors we serve through this troubling lens: we believe that everyone deserves help. And guess what? The Launchpad's supportive services will include substance use and behavioral health interventions, for those who need them.

To illustrate the third benefit, I'd like to tell you about a young woman I'll call D. D's parents left her in Colorado Springs so they could travel the country alone in an RV. She was trafficked, exploited, and explosive when we met her. She was responsible for at least 30 emergency calls a year and kept an incredibly messy camp. When D. was identified for housing two years ago, we were excited to usher her into permanent supportive housing. Today, D. has a job. And in the last two years, she has had not one single call to emergency services. She hasn't had a single altercation with anyone, and – needless to say – the spot where she used to camp is pristine: flowers have grown over the patch of dirt she called home. This is taxpayer savings to the tune of \$40,000, or more. And D. is just one person. The Launchpad will house at least 50.

Finally, I cannot understate how fortunate we are – as a community – to have The Place. While other service organizations are squeamishly distancing themselves from the people with the most complex, intractable challenges, while vituperative rhetoric about "those people" fills our inboxes, social media feeds, and editorial pages, The Place doubles down every day to serve "the least of these."

Far from armchair-quarterbacking, The Place in general and the Launchpad in particular make good on the early promise of America, as captured in Emma Lazarus' famous sonnet:

"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

Planning Commission members: please lift your lamp beside this golden door.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kristy Milligan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kristy Milligan