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Fighting Bedford-Atlantic Shelter Plan

By ANNA MARRIAN

No more homeless services please: opponents of the city's plan to open an intake center at the men's homeless shelter at the Bedford-Atlantic armory met last night to formulate strategy

Update | 6:41 p.m. *Our Brooklyn neighborhood is oversaturated and overburdened with homeless shelters and other social services.* This was the resounding echo from residents and state and city officials at a town hall meeting last night to oppose the proposed opening of a homeless men's intake center at the shelter in the old armory at Bedford and Atlantic, on the border of Crown Heights and Bedford-Stuyvesant and a few blocks east of Clinton Hill.

"North Crown Heights already has six times the median number of social service beds in Brooklyn," said a representative from the [Crown Heights Revitalization Movement](#). "The plan breaks the city's fair share law."

The meeting in the auditorium of St. Peter Claver Roman Catholic Church near Classon and Fulton, organized by CHRM, drew more than a hundred community residents, plus city and state officials, including Council Members Letitia James and Bill de Blasio, Assemblyman Karim Camara, and borough president Marty Markowitz.

"First and foremost, we're here to say no the mayor," said Mark Winston Griffith, meeting moderator and a member of CHRM, in his opening remarks. "And to affirm our support of homeless men who need better services, not to be crowded into the shelter and further into despair. And to affirm our statement that people of all generations, all stripes come together to form a common strategy."

Speakers and audience members were highly critical of the existing Bedford-Atlantic Shelter, which already houses more than 300 homeless men.

"It's the worst in the system," Mr. Griffith, a city council candidate, said in a brief interview. "Notorious. Known for illicit activities: drugs, prostitution, violence." He added, "It is bad homelessness policy: to make this current shelter an intake

center intensifies current problems and has a negative impact on the homeless population it's supposed to serve.”

Although opponents of the plan believe the city plans to move its one intake center for homeless men from Bellevue on East 30th Street in Manhattan to Bedford-Atlantic, the Department of Homeless Services says that it plans to keep its main intake center in Manhattan, and that when it does open an intake center at Bedford-Atlantic, it will also reduce the number of beds there from 350 to 230.

DHS says that it wants to set up Bedford-Atlantic as a secondary intake center to deal with the fact that 30 percent of the homeless adults entering the city's shelter system are coming from Brooklyn. “By providing an additional site to serve the intake function, we will make services more convenient and accessible to those who need it most,” DHS spokeswoman Kristy Buller said in a statement.

Mr. Camara cited a different statistic, claiming that while only 16 percent of the homeless are in Brooklyn, 60 percent are in Manhattan.

DHS does plan to close the Bellevue center, but vows to open its replacement in Manhattan and says it has no plan to make Bedford-Atlantic the main intake center even temporarily. Ms. James said she'd seen nothing about a new Manhattan center in the budget.

Meeting organizers said that the Bedford-Atlantic Shelter has no medical facilities, unlike Bellevue, and that it turns out the men at 7:30 a.m. to wander the community until the evening.

“They just put them out,” said Natasha Monroe who grew up a block from the shelter, has lived in the neighborhood for 30 years and has seen nothing change despite promises. “They should be teaching them how to get skills, get an apartment, how to live in the community.”

Ms. James noted that a shelter in Park Slope has a recreation center. “Wouldn't it be good if we had what they have in Park Slope?” she asked. DHS says it has proposed making the drill floor at Bedford-Atlantic available to the community for a recreation center, with DHS putting up half of the funding. The proposal is still on the table.

The DHS plan requires state legislative approval, and local state legislators like Mr. Camara have vowed to fight the plan in Albany. But Jim Walden, a lawyer at Gibson Dunn and Crutcher which is working pro bono to help CHRM fight the shelter, said state approval was likely. So CHRM also plans to sue the city to block the intake center, based on “fair share” analyses, land-use review and safety concerns.

Mr. Camara said that in addition to legislative and court efforts, community activism would be needed to block the intake center. Opponents plan a phone-in this Monday to elected officials, including the Mayor and Deputy Mayor. CHRM provided an action list and petitions to local residents.

A CHRM representative said the Mayor refused to send a delegate to receive 2500 letters written from aggrieved residents of Crown Heights. But Ms. James urged opponents to keep fighting.

“We have the power to protest, to stand up to government when they’re not representing our interest,” she said. “This is about politics. The Mayor doesn’t care about Crown Heights and Bed-Stuy.”

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