

Statement by Steven J. Schooler Executive Director of Porchlight, Inc.

Porchlight provides housing and services for homeless persons. Porchlight relies on the following facts as the principal basis for its Notice of Interest for the Truman Olson Reserve Center:

(1) There is an acute need for housing for homeless persons with disabilities, particularly mental illness. The need for this housing will grow significantly in the next several years as many veterans will return from the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

(2) Porchlight's proposal will serve homeless persons with disabilities and is consistent with and furthers the specific objective of the Community Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness in Dane County (January 2006) by increasing the number of housing units available for low-income adults coupled with supportive services; Porchlight's proposal is supported by the Dane County Homeless Consortium.

(3) Porchlight has had long-term successful experience in this community providing low-cost housing combined with support services for individual adults suffering from mental illness.

(4) National studies have demonstrated that low-cost housing combined with support services is successful in assisting homeless persons off the streets and maintaining them in housing over the long-term.

(5) New construction provides the opportunity to design and construct buildings that are highly energy efficient with features that minimize maintenance expenses, assuring that housing will be truly low-cost for decades into the future.

(6) The Truman Olson Reserve Center on Park Street offers the following advantages for Porchlight and the homeless persons it serves:

(a) Undeveloped site suitable for building at least two new buildings (14-unit single room occupancy building for Safe Haven and a 24-unit efficiency building for permanent housing). Buildings should be in close proximity to one another but not attached. Size should be sufficient for parking although not necessarily the same number of spaces as would ordinarily be required by City planning.

(b) Proximity to local bus lines that operate over extended hours on nights and weekends for residents and staff without access to automobiles;

(c) Proximity to local commercial amenities, particularly grocery and drug stores and post office;

(d) Proximity to medical services;

(e) Proximity to Porchlight services, main office and maintenance; and

(e) No environmental issues regarding contamination or noise levels.

These are the undisputed facts.

Porchlight's proposal for the Truman Olson Reserve Center is consistent with the Wingra Creek Market Study and Conceptual Redevelopment Plan (Wingra Build Plan) (2006), the City's Comprehensive Plan (2006) and the South Madison Neighborhood Plan (2005). The only difference between the Porchlight proposal and these plans according to the Planning Division Report, Department of Planning and Community & Economic Development (April 4, 2008), is that Porchlight's proposal provides for "special purpose housing" for persons with mental illness as opposed to "work force" housing. (p. 7.)

Porchlight has substantial support from the neighborhood and neighboring developers for its proposal. Porchlight has met with the leadership for both the Bay Creek and the Bram's Addition neighborhood associations. The Porchlight proposal also is supported by Eric Schwartz, a participant in the Wingra Build Plan and a principal in the real estate development company, Sara Investment Real Estate, which owns property directly adjacent to Truman Olson and the shopping center two blocks further down parking street.

Porchlight is mindful of concerns about concentrations of low-cost housing in certain sectors of the City. Porchlight, has in the past, attempted to locate housing consistent with the Fair Share Plan. However, the Fair Share Plan does not bar the location of any type of housing in any particular area, but rather attempts to assist and encourage non-profit groups with special funding and technical assistance to locate housing consistent with a scattered site model. Porchlight has done precisely that in the past. The data recently prepared by the City of Madison Department of Planning and Development does not demonstrate a concentration of low-cost housing or services in the nearby vicinity of the Truman Olson facility. In some respects the reported data overstate the limited concentration by failing to recognize that many areas of the City are zoned only for single family residential and have inadequate public transportation. In addition, certain facilities, such as the Romnes public housing facility located in the same census track as Truman Olson, include substantial housing for senior citizens.

It is extraordinarily difficult to locate suitable site for low-cost housing in Madison. Porchlight's most recent project took four years to find a location (that was ultimately outside the City of Madison).

In many respects, the Truman Olson Reserve Center is the perfect location for the housing proposed by Porchlight.

Regardless, and in the spirit of compromise, Porchlight is willing to consider an alternative site to this location on Park Street and enter into a swap for another site, in particular for the advantage of developing that site much earlier than the contemplated date of 2011 for Truman Olson and with the hope that such a site may be able to accommodate a greater number of housing units than proposed for Truman Olson.

Such a site, however must meet the following conditions:

(1) Offer comparable advantages to the Truman Olson site as identified above: undeveloped land suitable for building consistent with Porchlight's proposal, proximity to extended bus service, grocery and drug stores, medical services and Porchlight's services;

(2) Be Environmentally suitable for development;

(3) Approved by the City for the development as proposed by Porchlight;

(4) Approved by any other regulatory or governmental body for development as proposed by Porchlight; and

(5) Land ownership by Porchlight in fee simple without cost to Porchlight.

In summary, the Truman Olson Reserve Center provides a tremendous opportunity to meet an ever growing acute need. It provides for free undeveloped land that Porchlight can utilize to provide successful housing programs that will serve those most in need for decades to come. It is critical that the City and the Community Development Authority recognize that opportunity and fulfill the federal mandate to help those who need it most in this community.