

Sleep-off center fails in bid to get zoning change OK

by Holly F. Reimer

Tundra Times reporter

If a new location isn't found by Dec. 31, Anchorage's sleep-off center will have to close its doors to the nearly 90 inebriates who sober up there every day.

According to the director of Health and Human Services, Bert

Hall, the Municipality of Anchorage is desperately trying to find a solution, especially since winter is here.

And if a quick solution isn't found, Hall said, the center will file for a temporary extension to stay where it is a while longer.

After a meeting last week and ob-

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jections by the Fairview Community Council, the zoning commission decided the sleep-off center didn't belong in that zone and decided not to change zone codes so the center could stay.

During its first two years, the center was open under the mayor's health emergency code and was funded by a federal grant. Since then the grant has expired and the Municipality of Anchorage has taken over funding.

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—Ray Dexter

Some of the solutions being considered by the municipality include leasing space on the Alaska Native Medical Center's grounds, which is just up the hill from the sleep-off center, building a new building in an authorized zone, leasing an appropriately zoned property or trying a last plea to the zoning commission for sympathy.

"The center is in the geographic boundaries of the Fairview community. People get their liquor from Gambell (a street located in the heart of Fairview), and they're not going to walk all the way to Point Woronzoff, they'll stay in the neighborhood," Hall explained.

Ray Dexter, administrator at the Salvation Army's Clitheroe Center located at Point Woronzoff, agreed with Hall. He said the facility out there couldn't handle the amount of people which downtown gets anyway.

"We wouldn't have the space on the facility to take care of them, and plus there's no way of getting them out here," Dexter said.

Clitheroe Center is located in

Southwest Anchorage near the airport and away from any houses.

Dexter said where the center is located right now, adjacent to the Brother Francis Shelter on Third Ave., also gives the drunks other support services nearby, such as the shelter and Bean's Cafe.

A meeting is going to be held Tuesday so the municipality can try to appeal the Planning and Zoning Commission's decision to not change zoning regulations, although Hall doesn't think this meeting will change anything.

"It's a chance to try and change their minds one more time," he said.

"I have very uneasy feelings about what would happen if it closed," Dexter said.

"Two years ago, before they had the sleep-off center, some people would sleep in steam vents and some died of hypothermia," Dexter said.

"I can't imagine they would close it just because of bureaucratic procedures. I think they'll cry in the face of compassion," Dexter said.