

Businessman pitches bowling alley for Daytona homeless shelter

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The latest idea in the search for a Volusia County homeless shelter is to use a vacant bowling alley on Mason Avenue.

By [Eileen Zaffiro-Kean](#)

DAYTONA BEACH -- First there was the plan to build a new homeless shelter on county land west of Interstate 95, then a proposal to use city land west of 95.

Next came the idea to expand a shelter on North Street, and last week there was the nebulous suggestion to use county government money to run shelters in buildings somewhere in the area.

Now comes idea number five. Synergy Billing owner Jayson Meyer has put together a detailed plan to transform a vacant bowling alley on Mason Avenue into a 100-bed homeless shelter for adults.

The plan sent this week to dozens of local leaders relies heavily on \$2 million of Volusia County money to get started, and \$400,000 of Daytona Beach city government money every year to stay open. The New Life Shelter would also require the city government to rezone the 2.4-acre bowling alley property and fast track permits and other approvals.

While some in the community see it as the best solution offered in the three-year debate over shelter, some people who live near the building are already fighting the plan and several city government officials vital to keep the proposal alive see too many problems.

At least three city commissioners don't expect to cast yes votes on the plan, and the city manager has deep concerns.

"The proposed location you have identified is not one acceptable to the city of Daytona Beach and requires approval by the city," City Manager Jim Chisholm wrote in an email sent late Wednesday afternoon to Jeannette Duerr, Synergy's director of corporate communications.

In his email, Chisholm raised questions about the operational credentials of those behind the proposed shelter, the operational budget and operational policies. He also said "the financial commitments required from other agencies seem to be problematic" and he repeated that the biggest problem is the location and the impacts the homeless there would have on the area.

Last month, city staff suggested using an old armory building on the river or the 56-year-old bowling alley as a temporary shelter until a permanent shelter could be opened. But city commissioners shot down both ideas.

City Commissioner Rob Gilliland still thinks the bowling alley is the wrong way to go. The \$500,000 annual operating budget sounds unrealistically low for 100 beds, Gilliland said, citing the operating budgets in other plans that are hundreds of thousands of dollars higher. County Chair Jason Davis also said the \$500,000 sounds insufficient, and County Manager Jim Dinneen said he sees "no way" a shelter that size could run on that amount of money.

Gilliland sees trouble as well with getting the county government to give \$2 million to purchase the property and renovate the aging bowling alley building east of Nova Road. Davis said he doesn't know enough about the plan yet to say how he'd vote, but Councilman Doug Daniels said he likes the location and "it sounds like an interesting proposal."

"I know Jayson and he has a big heart, but he's way behind on" the flurry of debates and decisions on homelessness over the past three years, Gilliland said.

Meyer, however, believes he's come up with a plan that will break through the shelter deadlock.

"I have applied solid business principles that have helped me to be successful," said Meyer, whose Volusia County-based company provides revenue optimization services to federally qualified health centers nationwide.

Meyer said he's been watching competing plans pulling in different directions, so he's jumping in with something he thinks can be a unifier.

'GEARED TOWARD PERMANENT HOUSING'

Meyer's plan is ambitious. He thinks the bowling alley, which has been vacant for six years and needs everything from new flooring to a new electrical system, can be overhauled and ready to help its first group of homeless people in eight to 10 weeks.

The man asked a week ago to be the director of the facility, Mike Cornell of the local Salvation Army, has an even loftier goal. He thinks the new program could nearly wipe out homelessness in Volusia County in three to five years.

"If I'm involved, it will not be a permanent shelter," Cornell said. "Everything will be geared toward permanent housing and self-sufficiency."

Cornell said it's "the best solution I've seen since I've been here."