



Amtrak: Station Parking to Shrink. Trolley Cars Anticipated

Following are Amtrak's responses to an inquiry from *NewsLanc.com*:

- *Current expansion plan will take the number of spaces from 169 to 300, almost doubling the size of the lot – we are maximizing the available space*
- *Construction will take approximately 2 years and during that time available parking will be limited to allow for construction equipment*
- *Long term plans include the possibility of a street car system which would travel between the train station and the convention center, making local stops but this option is years away – we do have a representative on the committee considering this project*

Amtrak did not respond to *NewsLanc's* inquiry as to why short term and commuter parking was being moved from near the station to half a block or more away.

Authority Board Upheaval: Forward to the Past

At the County Commissioners' Tuesday work session, the three commissioners – Republicans Dennis Stuckey and Scott Martin and Democrat Craig Lehman – agreed they will be looking for a “consensus-builder” to replace Thomas LeCrone, who tendered his resignation effective no later than Feb. 13.

Almost at the same time, Mayor Rick Gray announced the re-appointment of former Authority Chair Ted Darcus and Julianne Dickson, like Darcus also a former City Council president. Dickson will replace Joseph Morales.

“We're not looking for anyone who would be divisive in any manner” Commissioner Martin said.

At Thursday's County Commissioners meeting, Robert Edwin Field, *NewsLanc's* president, urged the commissioners to follow the recent precedent of soliciting applications and publicly interviewing finalists before making their decision.

Hopefully, the Authority Board will not revert to the past practice under Ted Darcus, whereby a majority of the members usually unquestioningly went along with what was handed down by the chair and executive director. They were stooges for adjacent hotel developer Penn Square Partners.

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Community Homeless Outreach Center Nearly Triples Services

By Matt Henderson

A visit to the Community Homeless Outreach Center (CHOC) on the premises of the Water Street Rescue Mission reveals that the number of homeless and vagrants using that facility has appreciably increased since the facility's debut in late November.

CHOC Director Adrian Rodriguez reports, "We are actually averaging, as of last week, about 64 drop-ins per week."

Rodriguez went on to say that Tuesday was their busiest day so far, with 79 different people using the shelter.

The center is a daytime drop-in facility, open from 9:30 am to 4 pm offering showers, bathrooms, laundry facilities, water and coffee, small-item storage, and just a warm place to sit down for anyone in need of such services.

"We help fulfill some of the gap needs," Rodriguez explained, including assistance finding a job, referral to other social service providers, and securing housing.

Indeed, "Both national and local studies have shown that the quicker you get them into housing, the quicker everything else in their situation gets better," said Lenny Walton, Chair of the Center's Steering Committee.

"One thing that people need is small, affordable rental housing and we really don't have that here in Lancaster County," he said.

"The idea [of the Center] is to provide that linkage to the services that are already there," Walton continued. Users of the facility are appreciative of having a place to come inside and hang out.

One gentleman indicated that his stay at the center is a "stepping stone" for him, as he recently moved to the area from Reading and is trying to find a place to live.

When asked where he goes at night, he indicated that some of the Center's partner organizations - mostly local churches - offer overnight shelter on a rotating basis. This week it's at James Street Mennonite Church in the City's northwest.

It is also primarily the churches and partner organizations who offer free meals. Water Street Rescue Mission also offers meals to residents enrolled in some of its programs. "Non-residents need a meal ticket by going to Chapel at 7:30 pm." an information sheet explained.

Another person, who has been without a home for about 3 weeks said, "I can take a bath, get coffee," and "they have mental health assistance."

"On Friday, Adrian brings out the big TV screen and we can watch movies," he added.

A middle-aged woman said she has been using the facility since January 14th, after having lost her home in a legal dispute.

Authority May Contest Naming Rights Contract

At a recent Marketing & Hospitality Committee meeting of the Lancaster County Convention Center Authority, Chair Art Morris announced that the Authority will revisit the controversial contract that awards certain naming priorities for the Convention Center to S. Dale High and shares 50% of the resulting revenue with Penn Square Partners.

Board member R.B. Campbell, in attendance but not on the committee, added "I don't think it's appropriate for us to assume that this is a legally binding contract..."