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A welcome expansion

Our view: Though neighbors resist soup kitchen addition, It's wrong to blame Beans & Bread for causing a problem — homelessness — that it's working to solve

Beans & Bread, a soup kitchen in [Fells Point](#), feeds 300 people a day. That's not expected to change, even if Beans & Bread wins city approval to build an addition. What would change is that the people who already line up for food would get to queue up inside the building instead of out on the sidewalk. Some of them would have a place to shower and wash their clothes. The expansion would also give Beans & Bread staff offices rather than cubicles, so when they're trying to help someone find services for, say, AIDS treatment, they can discuss that in private.

The proposed \$4.5 million brick-and-glass addition would replace a cinder block garage in an area dominated by warehouses, small auto shops and Perkins Homes, a public housing development whose tenant council has come out in favor of the expansion.

But other neighbors and nearby businesses fear a bigger Beans & Bread will draw more homeless people to the area.

St. Vincent de Paul of Baltimore, which has operated Beans & Bread at Bank and South Bond streets for the past 17 years, insists that will not happen. The dining room will not grow, it says. The showers and other services will be available only to about half the people who eat there, the 150 or so who are working with case managers to find jobs, housing or health care.

The homeless aren't about to go away. What's the downside to getting the line off the sidewalk, helping people clean up and getting them services that could get some off the streets?

Jason Sullivan, executive director of Fells Point Main Street, predicts an "if-you-build-it-they-will-come kind of a situation." He and the businesses his organization represents simply do not believe the numbers won't rise.

It's also clear that he and others are fed up with what's already happening, that 300 people a day are turning up at Beans & Bread for a meal. They think social services are the problem, not the solution.

"There is a deteriorating quality of life in the Broadway corridor," Councilman [James Kraft](#), while officially neutral on the plan, wrote in an e-mail on Beans & Bread last week. "It's a mess. ... [O]ne of the first steps in addressing this entire situation is for the City to stop supporting the growth and expansion of social service agencies in these neighborhoods."

Neighbors and businesses who feel the homeless population is growing and dragging the area down are understandably wary. But we think it's wrong to blame Beans & Bread for causing a problem - homelessness - that it's actually working to solve.

We also commend Beans & Bread for making a good-faith effort to work with the community. It first presented its plans to neighbors in 2005. It has been in regular contact with Fells Point Main Street. It agreed to scale back the addition from two stories to one.

Relations have nonetheless soured to the point that a neighbor recently reported Beans & Bread to city code enforcement for peeling paint.

The plan, which would require some building variances, comes before the Board of Municipal and Zoning Appeals Sept. 1. Opposition to the project seems only to be stiffening as that date approaches.

Beans & Bread and four nearby community associations recently started working with a nonprofit community mediation program to try to settle their differences. Let's hope they can find a way for this worthy project to go forward.

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