

# Neighborhood Comments on the Good Neighbor Protocol and Responses from the D.C. Department of Human Services and the Ward 3 Short-Term Family Housing Advisory Team

February 2020

1. FYI. A Vaughn Place neighbor, a professional nurse, volunteers at another DC shelter. She says many of the women that are in the shelters have fled from abusive partners. She recommends that for families in which this is the case at the Idaho building, the women should have restraining orders in place. And that the shelter officials should see to it.

Our neighbor w shelter experience suggests we raise this issue w the DC shelter officials bec she says it is imp't that the women who need the restraining orders get them and it will help keep our neighborhood safe. That, the DC officials can and should help the women who need the orders get the orders.

**Department of Human Services (DHS) response:** To support families fleeing domestic violence (DV), the District Alliance for Safe Housing (DASH) is on-site at Virginia Williams Family Resource Center, DHS' central point of intake for families experiencing homelessness. If a family is actively fleeing DV, DASH is able to make a placement in a DV shelter. DHS works hard to ensure that our families are safe, while also recognizing that every individual has choice about important decisions in their lives including about whether they would like to pursue an order of protection against an individual. The provider will also have two security officers on-site 24/7.

2. It seems like a bit of over-regulation to me. I lived across the street from the privately-run women's shelter located at Vermont and N. St. NW for a couple of years, and visited my grown children when they lived there for several other years. The women in the shelter were good neighbors, some were glad to talk a bit but most kept to themselves. The operators responded to any issues, most of which were questions such as how could people donate clothes or other items to the residents. People going to the neighborhood bars and restaurants were much noisier and people adrift on the street were more problematic. I just question whether putting people who lack the funds to own or rent in DC under more or special regulations is necessary or just more harrassment for them, based on an assumption that they need more supervision or policing than other people. What I hope is that there are social workers or other staff to provide assistance to those who are having trouble coping.

**DHS response:** We will have robust program support on-site to support our families.

**Advisory Team response:** The Good Neighbor Protocol includes rules the city has set for residents of its family shelter program because many neighbors of the Ward 3 facility asked what the rules will be and asked that they be reflected in the protocol. Similar rules, which reflect what is in the law, are in place in other city-run shelters. Other requirements listed in the protocol are for the city or the program provider, such as those addressing property maintenance and security. However, because placing the rules at the front of the document sets a negative tone, we moved them to an appendix to place less emphasis on them.

3. Agreed! My sister was on the board there. What a wonderful experience it was, getting to know the residents!

I'd like to know how to donate clothing and toys to the families who move in there. I've been saving a ton of stuff!

**DHS response:** Through a competitive procurement process, Friendship Place was selected as the service provider to operate The Brooks (the name of the Ward 3 facility). If you are interested in volunteering, please contact the program at [TheBrooks@friendshipplace.org](mailto:TheBrooks@friendshipplace.org). More details on other opportunities to meet the provider will be coming soon, including a ribbon cutting and open house.

4. I agree with the comments so far. The policies seem a little granular, but I leave it to DC Social Services to determine the best possible policies.

Still, my copywriter experience tells me that tone and manner are everything. If possible, the developers of this protocol may want to consider how the language will be received. It's always a good idea to meet people where they are and present information in as empowering, positive and supportive way as possible. Perhaps someone on that team can review.

Finally, we in MCLG are also neighbors. How can we best most welcoming and what can we do to help the facility's residents feel at home and succeed at the next stage of their lives?

**Advisory Team response:** The Advisory Team appreciates that a lot of people in the neighborhood want to volunteer and help their future neighbors in the facility get back on their feet. Please recognize that the Good Neighbor Protocol is not an agreement between the neighborhood and shelter residents. It is an agreement between the neighborhood and the city.

As such, it includes factual information about issues raised by residents. The listing in this protocol of what the city is required to do – including maintaining the property, providing security and so forth – reflects the neighborhood's desire to make sure that the city upholds its commitment to ensuring the facility doesn't fall into disrepair and is run responsibly and well. In short, the document is about addressing concerns the neighborhood has about the city upholding its end of the bargain, not about the residents.

That said, to address feedback about the tone of the document, we moved the resident rules to an appendix and strengthened language pertaining to the responsibilities of neighbors.

5. Hi all,

First off, thank you Angela for your work on the protocol. I'm sure that incorporating everyone's suggestions is not an easy job and I genuinely appreciate what you do for our community... That said, I agree with the other comments that there are important issues with both the tone and content of the protocol. More specifically,

- **Lack of parallel language:** The “good neighbor protocol” feels less about outlining shared commitment and responsibilities to the neighborhood and more like top-down regulations for shelter clients. It seems that every other ward’s protocol has parallel language for neighbors. I’m attaching Ward 4’s as an example – Ward 4’s protocol clarifies that existing residents also have responsibilities such as keeping the property clean, reporting crime, etc. Being “good neighbors” should be a mutual, two-way street. Just as another example, the protocol says that the provider will “Prohibit loud music, threatening language and behavior, and weapons in and on the property”. Are residents of McLean Gardens and the surrounding neighborhood subject to these same rules?
- **Vague, non-measurable terms:** The program rules stipulate that clients must “maintain clean sleeping and living areas” and “must use communal areas appropriately”. These are subjective terms and honestly feel paternalistic and unnecessary. Besides, the service provider that operates the shelter will have their own set of rules for clients. I don’t really see the point of including this language, especially since residents of McLean Gardens and the surrounding neighborhood aren’t required to agree to the same terms.

I also don’t know enough about McLean Gardens’ HOA rules, but I would hope that the protocols are consistent with what’s required of the HOA. For example, the contracted provider will “Develop a schedule and plan for pest control that includes onsite inspections by licensed inspectors and make that schedule and plan available to the community” and “Make any necessary structural repairs to the building as quickly as possible”. Is McLean Gardens subject to these same rules? Do McLean Gardens residents have to notify the neighborhood if there’s a block party? Maybe so – I honestly don’t know, but I think it’s worth thinking about and questioning if the rules are inconsistent.

Overall, if we want to ensure that our new neighbors at the shelter feel welcome, this probably isn’t going to help us get to that goal unless we make some changes.

**Advisory Team response:** Please see answers to Nos. 2 and 4. Note that to address concerns raised about the tone of the document, we moved the resident rules to an appendix and strengthened language pertaining to the responsibilities of neighbors. Regarding McLean Gardens, residents must abide by host of condo association bylaws and rules that regulate noise (outdoor and indoor), the generation of cooking odors, where people can smoke and more.

6. Angela, Deborah, Nancy, and Maureen,

Before the week comes to a close, I just wanted to drop you a note to say that I made a preliminary review of the protocol a few days ago. I think you did a good job of addressing the concerns of the surrounding community that you represent. I do not think it was overreaching in any way.

Personally, I am extremely relieved to read that marijuana use will be prohibited. That smell is both disturbing and arguably harmful to surrounding neighbors and their families as well as to other moms and children that will be residing in the shelter.

Thank you for your hard work.

**DHS response:** Yes, we are grateful for the hard work of the Advisory Team too!

7. I live [on Idaho Ave NW] and please find below my comments, which I would like to submit anonymously. Please let me know if there is any issue with this.

- I see that background checks and another safety measures are required for employees. Not sure if in the protocol, but there should be an assigned responsibility to the adequate entity to undertake similar tasks background and safety checks to residents of the STHF.

- We are concerned that kids/teenagers in the neighborhood may be a nuisance for neighbors (even clients). There must be a accountability for client's actions and behavior in the vicinity of the facility affecting neighbors. The document does not address this and I believe it should. If clients decide to act in a way that is not proper and causing disturbances, repeatedly, perhaps that may need to be relocated in other STHF.

- The protocol shall be more detailed about security and patrolling of the facilities. "Frequently enough" is not enough. Patrol schedules should be more frequent. as well as act more quickly on any investigation on client-related concerns; three days is not acceptable.

- The document does not specify what protocol will be in place to receive and address concerns. For example, what if there is a group of people repeatedly violating this protocol? As it reads now it seems that there will be no consequences; which will make this protocol practically useless.

- Either the DGS, the operator of the facility or whoever is the adequate entity, shall ensure that all clients are on-boarded on what the expectations are specified on this protocol. If this is going to be posted on board that no one would see or be added to a stack of forms, it will not be effective. Concerted efforts to deliver the contents of this protocol as well as acknowledgement client's accountability is key.

- The document should also specify what actions will be taken if clients are identified as repeat offenders in terms of safety and security and conduct and behavior expectations presented in the protocol.

**DHS response:**

- District law prohibits DHS from relying on a client's past criminal activity to determine eligibility for a service or program.
- DHS, with our provider, develops rules that can be applied in our programs. We are not able to develop or enforce rules for how people behave in the public space. We would, however, absolutely talk with a client if their behavior was having an adverse impact on the neighborhood. We also hope that kids and teenagers in the neighborhood will be friendly to the families we serve.
- Once a provider is selected, they will hire a security company to provide security on-site – and the security company will develop post orders. At that time the frequency of security patrols will be firmly established.
- At intake, families review and sign program rules. DHS will ensure the program rules also include the restrictions outlined in the GNP.
- The protocol will list contact information for staff at DHS, DGS and the provider who will respond to concerns.
- If a client presents an imminent threat to themselves or to someone else, DHS is able to transfer or terminate the client immediately. If a client violates program rules

repeatedly, DHS is able to issue a 15-day transfer or termination notice.

8. This generic non-binding aspirational agreement ignores the reality of this shelter looming directly over residentially zoned private homes a few meters away.

No floodlights?? The lighting is already invasive and disturbing despite months of pleas by neighbors for relief. 7am to 9 pm curfew? the noise is already unbearable from 7 to 7 pm. Privacy?? The six-story building looks into our homes' windows, towers over our decks and yards. Screening side yard Landscaping was ditched to build a patio. No response if that patio and playground will be made of sound dampening rubberized safety surface. Or if windows will be frosted or have blinds to salvage some privacy of both homeless residents and homeowners.

3-day responses?? Like everywhere else in the city, security concerns are police matters that taxpayers pay for and expect immediate response. I had suggested that neighbors get a direct line to the 24-hour shelter staff security for at least first six to 12 months until a record of compliance and enforcement is established. Noise, light, trash, security issues, parking need immediate corrective action not three-day delays. There are plenty of reports on how that has worked out elsewhere. We need to do better. We were told co-locating the shelter with police would guarantee discipline and no problems.

Delete the false claim of increased property values. The shelter has already resulted in the house at 3310 Idaho next door selling after three painful years on the market for \$300,000 LESS than the DC assessed value. This is a matter of public record. Pretending otherwise won't make it so.

**DHS response:** Our provider will be on-site 24/7 – and DGS will have a building engineer on-site on weekdays. Our experience so far at other sites is that most issues are able to be resolved immediately; others will take some time.

The GNP includes the floodlight language because that is the language that is included in the MOU with the ANC. The rubber surface on the playground is sound dampening and windows will also have blinds.

9. All,

I know our table provided very specific feedback about more that should be expected of both the city, provider and the families as they have moved into our neighborhood in violation of all of the zoning regulations that were completely disregarded by the board and court in the face of an overly broad public interest standard. I am going to reiterate some suggestions with hope that more clear and forceful language will be used. My comments follow the flow of the document. Please let me know if you have any questions.

1. It seems that in the background section residents are not held to a standard when outside the property but only when at the facility. It seems as if they can therefore be allowed to assault someone outside the property but not on it. These offenses must be clarified to encompass behavior on and off grounds. Such a discrepancy installs a definite feeling of lack of safety and security on my street.

2. Again, it seems to me they have the ability to let their children do what they want outside the property and just have to supervise while on. Are teenagers going to be allowed to do whatever off property and the parents aren't held accountable? This

supervision must extend to our neighborhood otherwise it seems as if we will have older children hanging out in groups on our street.

3. Why aren't background checks being done on the residents but only the employees?

4. Under Maintenance of Property, indicating that property values can increase given we all know that our property values have significantly diminished is insulting to all of us who live here. Please remove.

5. Please add a section about use of shades on windows as the light coming from the inside is just as bad as the light on the outside. I'd like to see motion lights used as much as possible so that less lights are invading our homes 24x7.

6. Under Safety and Security, there is too much leeway for how often the security person has to patrol the property especially at night. There should be a minimal standard.

7. Again, why are residents not getting background checks and just everyone else who comes to this facility?

8. Three days when possible for a security concern is too lenient. It's the same about a property issue. We should have a 24-hour response if not sooner.

9. Why do we need to advertise this is a shelter? Significant signage? I understood that this wasn't going to be called out as a shelter. Again, this blatant publication affects our property values and possibly creates more concerns about being and living in this neighborhood.

10. How many cameras are going to be considered enough?

11. Under Communication and Respect, this contradicts the three-day response time in Safety and Security section. Both need to be the same.

12. Are we suggesting that the shelter should be able to host block parties and close off Idaho so I can't access my driveway? I'd like to see that not happen at all and believe the suggestion should be removed.

### **DHS response:**

- DHS, with our provider, develops rules that can be applied in our programs. We are not able to develop or enforce rules for how people behave in the public space. We would, however, absolutely talk with a client if their behavior was having an adverse impact on the neighborhood.
- The windows have blinds that will block light.
- District law prohibits DHS from relying on a client's past criminal activity to determine eligibility for a service or program.
- Regarding property values, we were including that based on information we are aware of, but we have removed it from this protocol.
- Once a provider is selected, they will hire a security company to provide security on-site – and the security company will develop post orders. At that time the frequency of security patrols will be firmly established.
- The provider will absolutely acknowledge concerns as quickly as possible. The three-day window is to provide a response, which could be a plan of action to remediate the issue.
- There will be no signage that indicates that this is a family shelter.
- DHS has hosted a Welcome Party and Resource Fair at each of the five Short-term Family Housing programs that have opened. We will work with the Advisory Team and the provider to decide how they would like to celebrate the opening of this program.