

Letter to Editor:

On April 7th the City Council adopted an order "That the City of Holyoke through the Mayor reach out to the Sheriff's department for the possibility of relocating the Howard Street program to the site of the former GAH building."

This order was redundant since the Mayor had already contacted Sheriff Ashe two months prior to the order, when it was noted the renovation costs might be too costly per the Sheriff's department. (April 13th Republican article).

It was understood that a proposal would come before the City Council for review prior to any approval. However, on April 16th it was announced that a lease arrangement had been completed. Then on April 21st the City Council was given a legal opinion that the Mayor did not need to come before the City Council as the agreement is NOT a lease, but a license to use the property. At that same meeting Sheriff Ashe made a statement indicating the space needed very little renovation.

What happened to the promise of transparency made by Mayor Morse? Again, a lack of transparency by this Mayor and his administration is the rule when doing business in Holyoke.

Then, on April 23rd at the neighborhood meeting at Devonshire, a resident asked for a traffic study for the intersection at Lower Westfield Road and Holy Family Road as that intersection was already problematic when the Geriatric Authority was open. A review of the Western Massachusetts Correctional Alcohol Center website indicates there will be 182 inmates the former GA building (164 men and 18 women), twice the number of residents when the GA was open. While it was stated that a traffic study would not be completed, the increase in residents and trips indicate that this request is reasonable. As a good neighbor, maybe the Sheriff's department can assist with this matter, perhaps with the \$120,000 annual savings they will realize with the agreement the Mayor has approved.

If the City Council had an opportunity to review this deal some questions I would ask include:

- 1) What is the safety plan?
- 2) What is the mitigation plan for increased traffic at an already problematic intersection?
- 3) Why is the agreement providing a \$120,000 savings per year for the program when we are in a \$3 million dollar deficit?
- 4) What assurance is there that this program will vacate the property in 18 months?
- 5) What steps will be taken in the next 18 months to ensure that the highest and best use of the former GA property will be realized?

While we can all agree that we need added revenue, can we also agree that it is better to do the business of the city in public?

Submitted by
Linda Vacon

City Councilor, Ward 5