

# Behind The City Scene



**Charles "Charlie"  
Richardson  
Council Member  
Ward IV**

When I was growing up in the 1950's the terms describing homeless individuals were: "vagrants," "tramps," "hobos" and the like. These pejorative descriptions have been thankfully replaced with terms such as "urban travelers" or just "homeless". However the phenomenon remains and has exhibited itself in Ward 4 especially along and around South Havana.

Of course there is a fierce debate as to the causes, ranging from unexpected and unanticipated events to a free choice. In my opinion there are a spectrum of causes in relation to each individual. Mental illness, illegal drugs, alcohol, domestic violence, loss of employment and aversion to living in main stream society. Some have suggested that marijuana legalization has contributed. With several states including California now voting to legalize marijuana it will be interesting to see if there is a decrease.

This column is not intended to address causation. The City of Aurora has initially committed to spending approximately 1.5 million dollars each year for 3 years from the marijuana revenues. The City Council has authorized the refurbishing and opening of a day resource center up on the old Fitzsimmons campus. The Center will provide a wide range of services including counseling of all sorts and activities. In addition there will be 2 "HOT" vans put into operation. These vans will be utilized to contact homeless individuals and offer transportation to the Center. The homeless person will obviously need to voluntarily get on the van.

I was the ONLY Council Member to vote against the above. Here is why. The Center closes at 5 pm. Furthermore I have just received confirmation that the "HOT" vans will, upon request, return individuals to their original location. I recently spoke to an owner of an auto dealership on S. Havana who has experienced homeless people sleeping behind the dealership. Let's be clear I am not criticizing this activity per se because when the Center closes it has to be empty. Simply put I voted NO to make a statement. We need to provide places for people to sleep at night even if it is a hostel or dormitory arrangement. I understand the noble hope that the provision of counseling will get the homeless back into society. And I am sure it will for some.

Those wishing more information on this subject and my position on the need for housing are invited to visit [www.liveaffordablycolorado.org](http://www.liveaffordablycolorado.org)