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Five Points Business Improvement District Demands Transparent and Inclusive Process for Determining Location of Proposed Homeless Encampment Site Next to Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library

(DENVER) Sept. 15, 2020 - The Five Points Business Improvement District (FPBID) demands an open, thorough and inclusive public comment process after learning this weekend of the proposed site of a new legal homeless encampment at the Charles R. Cousins Plaza in the Five Points neighborhood of Denver.

"The Five Points Business Improvement District's mission is to positively influence financial accountability and cultural responsibility as this neighborhood undergoes redevelopment and growth," said Paul Books, President of the FPID Board of Directors. "Our organization believes strongly in a 'whole-system' approach to revitalizing the Five Points area, going beyond issues like economic development to consider education, transportation, safety, children & families, and public health. We believe we have a responsibility to advocate for our neighborhood and ensure the voices of our community are heard. We don't believe that's happening in this instance."

This summer, a list of 13 potential sites for three proposed legal tent encampments for unhoused residents was presented to the Mayor's office by City Council members. The Charles R. Cousins Plaza was not on that list. Late Friday, the Five Points BID learned that it had nevertheless been the first site selected for an encampment.

To our knowledge, this location had not been previously discussed with local businesses nor neighborhood leaders. On Saturday, Sept. 13, Mayor Michael B. Hancock announced the proposed site via a Facebook post, promising virtual public meetings which the BID later learned are planned for this week. None of this information was posted to any of the City of Denver's websites throughout the weekend.

"This community has demonstrated time and again a willingness to work side by side with our housed and unhoused neighbors to address the challenges of homelessness in our city," Books said. "Five Points is home to a majority of the shelters in the Denver community today. We empathize and bear daily witness to the impacts of this worsening crisis. We have proven to be committed partners in coming up with solutions for years. At issue here is the total lack of transparency and inclusiveness on behalf of the City of Denver and the Colorado Village Collaborative in determining the site of this particular encampment."

The Five Points Business Improvement District believes the Charles R. Cousins Plaza is an unsuitable site for this encampment for the following reasons:

- **This is too close to our community's public library and playground.** The proposed site is right next to the Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library, a vital local gathering place for children and families in our community and a lifeline to resources in this pandemic. In this moment, safe access to local resources like this are essential, especially since children in our neighborhood are already disproportionately affected by the pandemic and the challenges of virtual learning.
- **Five Points is already shouldering the majority of the homelessness and affordable housing crisis in Denver.** Five Points is home to more than half a dozen shelters. We ask that our

neighboring districts step up and demonstrate a similar level of commitment to addressing the homelessness crisis in our city.

- **We have a vision for activating this plaza as a vibrant community resource and asset.** Charles R. Cousins was known for uplifting generations of families in and around the Five Points Neighborhood. His namesake plaza was active pre-pandemic and the BID expects that to continue when the pandemic lifts. We are working on a vision for activations that would honor Cousins' memory and further uplift this community, but will be unable to do so if it becomes a sanctioned camp.
- **The proposed site sits at the gateway to the commercial corridor.** A sanctioned encampment here will negatively impact small legacy and local businesses already struggling in the wake of the pandemic.

The Five Points Business Improvement District requests the following of the City of Denver:

- An open, thorough and inclusive public comment process - beyond the rushed virtual townhalls scheduled for this week with little notice to our community.
- An explanation of how the Charles R. Cousins Plaza was selected for the encampment when it was never on the list of potential sites.
- An understanding what, if any, outreach was done to the Five Points community and businesses in connection with the identification of this site.
- A clear vision for the operation for the encampment, including funding, services, safety and a concrete timeline for opening and closing the camp.
- A demonstrated understanding of and plan for addressing issues surrounding a likely increased police presence in the Five Points neighborhood as a result of the encampment.

"Many in our community are in the fight of their lives as a result of this pandemic and the decisions made right now will have ramifications for decades to come," said Ryan Cobbins, owner of Coffee at The Point in the Five Points neighborhood. "We've seen the result of local and federal policies determined without the participation or consent of this neighborhood. Those decisions have historically resulted in disinvestment, contributed to poor health outcomes, and negatively impacted public safety in our community. We deserve a fair opportunity to advocate for the future of our neighborhood."

Virtual Town Hall meetings were announced this weekend via [Colorado Village Collaborative's Facebook page](#). The Five Points Business Improvement District encourages the community to join and voice your opinion on the proposed plan.

About Five Points Business Improvement District

The Five Points Business Improvement District strengthens and enhances the efforts of business and property owners who live, work in, or contribute to the Historic Five Points neighborhood of Denver. Our District Board's mission is to positively influence financial accountability and cultural responsibility as the area undergoes redevelopment and growth. The Five Points Business Improvement District is a ten-block corridor positioned along Welton Street on the northeast edge of downtown Denver. The effort around Business Improvement Development involves the recruitment of new, relevant, and neighborhood-serving businesses; strengthening existing businesses; and collaborating with property owners, residents, the City, developers, non-profits and other stakeholders to promote and support the development of the corridor. The effort around Cultural Promotion & Preservation involves marketing the corridor as a cultural and tourism destination for arts, culture, and entertainment and that showcases Denver's African American history and the area's rich jazz heritage. To learn more about the Five Points Business Improvement District, visit: www.fivepointsbid.com