

Father Lawrence and Michael Kelly dissent for the following reasons:

1. This report recommends that the parish undertake an entirely new mission—to alleviate homelessness by building housing. We question the ability of a small parish with limited resources like St. Vincent's—absent a major initiative by the Archdiocese, or a large inter-faith enterprise or a city government led effort—to contribute anything of consequence to alleviating homelessness. The proposed 30 or so units in the recommendation may be a noble gesture, but the reality is that it is a minute-to-trivial percentage of the unmet need for housing for the homeless in the city. The recommendation assumes that the parish can successfully outsource to trustworthy partners of virtually all the critical work, but the parish will ultimately be responsible for the highly challenging new enterprise of being a landlord to recently homeless people.
2. Our St. Vincent park has never been premised on the false hope of solving the homelessness problem in Baltimore. Rather it addresses the fall out from well-recognized failure of efforts in Baltimore City to house the homeless. The park represents a mission of our parish to minister to people who, for whatever reasons, fall through the social safety net and special programs for homeless individuals. We provide a refuge, a sanctuary, a place of temporary transition for people whom programs to alleviate homelessness do not serve or cannot attract. This mission is indispensable and, by virtue of our location, unique to our parish.
3. Taking on and adding housing development as a mission of the parish is a mistake and diversion at this point in the life of the parish. The parish has not taken seriously of late the crucial importance for the future of the parish of coming to grips with establishing a sustainable structure for the long-term management of the park. If the park is to become, in the words of the recommendation, a "sanctuary," it means addressing the constant problems presented by temporary residents and visitors as well as organizations that use the park as a place to express their own sense of ministry to feed and clothe the poor and homeless. Becoming a real estate developer may be a cleaner, more interesting and more comfortable project for our largely middle class parish. We certainly have parishioners capable of engaging in this venture, but we do so at the real risk of neglecting and failing to focus our energies to address the decidedly un-middle class challenges right on our doorstep.
4. Even assuming the parish makes the decision to become a housing developer as proposed in this report, choosing the park as the site for this new ambition is an extremely poor first step. Numerous difficulties include historic preservation restrictions related to the church building, conditions of the city's transfer of the site to the parish, the ownership interest of the archdiocese, the inability to build housing of any scale on such a limited site, the fact that a construction project would require the park to be closed for a substantial period of time and would result in much smaller slot open area unlikely to offer the modest safety (i.e. high visibility) of the existing location. Before the parish council gives the go-ahead to becoming a housing developer, it should insist that a serious look at more suitable and less challenging and low cost sites in the St. Vincent neighborhood be seriously examined.