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City & Borough of Sitka

Members of the Assembly,

With regard to the planned lease extension of the White Elephant Shop (White E) I offer these comments:

The White E. has, and still does a great service to the community and I believe that service is needed. However, I also believe they have outgrown their space. According to the memorandum from wells Williams dated August 5, 2014 they have plans on expanding. As the neighbor directly behind the White E. Shop I am concerned as to whether they plan on expanding upwards or back toward my lot line. The shop has no parking for its current customer base and utilizes any and all available parking spaces along Seward Street. This includes the surrounding businesses parking lots, the no parking zones along Seward Street and, more importantly to me the lane next to the White E. This lane is how I get to my home. The White E. has been in its current location for a very long time. The Shop sits in a Residential (R1) zone and yet I do not believe there are any conditional use permits on file. With any conditional use permit process I believe the neighbors would have a method to weigh in on the issues, parking being one of them. THIS process, the one to extend their lease for 30 years appears to be a work around on the conditional use issue. In looking at old drawings it should be noted that the present day structure is somewhat larger than those on file with the City. The rear of the White E. building is a mere 12 feet from my lot line. Also of note, the access easement to my property is to be 20 feet from the lot line and yet the White E. has painted on its drive a "no parking" space much smaller than the 20 feet required. In fact, it is common and accepted that as long as someone is parking near the building, outside the yellow painted pavement it is ok. This is inside the easement.

As long as there is money to extend (or grants available) I suggest the City lease the White E. a piece of the property as they did with Burgess Bauder. The White E. could ultimately purchase it as Burgess did in 2009 (I believe). There is history with this kind of arrangement. At such a location the White Elephant Shop would have all the parking they would need. A structure could be built that would better accommodate their customers. A single floor where the volunteers wouldn't have to climb the stairs to get the next seasons items would seem to be a good thing. An ongoing complaint by White E. staff about moving is that they would lose "walk-up" traffic. From years of watching the store I can attest to a very limited amount of true walk-up. It appears to be more of people getting dropped off nearby and walking in or people parking in the Seward Square Mall, Salon 264 or Northrim Bank parking lots and walking over. Then there are the people who park within the easement. With cars parked along Seward Street in both yellow, no parking zones (common practice) it is nearly impossible for my neighbor to get his big Ford 250 through and my smaller truck barely makes the turn. We are relegated to waiting in traffic for the vehicle to move. It is not uncommon to see White Elephant volunteers chit-chatting with their customers who are blocking our driveway while we wait to gain access

With a new location, and adequate parking this parking issue would be no issue at all. As for those without transportation the City could put up a bus stop next to the White E's new location allowing people to ride the bus to get to the shop.

In talking with other "thrift" store owners I am told that cruise ship employees routinely hire taxi services to get to their shops. This would certainly be the case with a new White E. location. It should be of note also that all these other thrift or consignment stores do not enjoy the same luxury as the White E in that they are paying the going rate for property and/or rents. I often wonder whether the closing of other long-standing businesses of a similar nature has anything to do with the costs of rent or property ownership. Like it or not, the White Elephant Shop is competing with other like businesses and a \$1.00 annual property lease.

My living room looks out on the back of the White E. It is not uncommon to see men urinating on the building in the rear. At one point, trying to settle the easement dispute with the White E. Shop we had a camera mounted on my fence. It not only caught the parking activity (lots of it at all times day and night) but also those people using the rear of the building as a smoking station and restroom. I pick up cigarette butts throughout the easement and in my property from this activity.

The trash can outside the White E is also an issue to address. This isn't so much a trash can as a place for people to obtain free items and it is common to see it on its side with people rummaging through it. Last week I saw a young man inside the can with a cell phone up to his ear holding items up to show his friend standing nearby. I believe the White E. throws good clothing away because they don't have space to display it. There is no other reason for this kind of activity. Much of what is in the trash can appears to be perfectly good, as evidenced by the sheer number of people who rummage through the can on a near daily basis. Next to the trash can is a "no donations today" sign that mostly goes unheeded. It is my opinion that there should never be a time when "no donations" are needed and that with a larger, single story facility on the old City shops property, with a designated secure drop-off zone and good parking I believe the items wouldn't be picked through before the volunteers get a chance to go through them and it would seem that sales would increase.

There is a well-documented history of infractions within the easement to my house. I went to the police station years ago and was given private impound forms to fill out. I was told by the Chief of Police to call when the lane is obstructed and complete the impound forms. I called and I filled out many of the forms. To the best of my knowledge no one was impounded. I was told people were contacted but who knows? When cars are in the yellow I have called and was told someone would look into it. I have never seen a parking ticket on any vehicle parked in these zones. That being said, to some degree the parking problems shouldn't be placed solely on the individual but rather on the business that is the root cause of these infractions. There are 4 vehicles associated with the 3 families that live beyond the lane (easement) and all rely on this driveway as access to their homes.

In closing I do not believe the White Elephant Shop should have a 30 year lease on this property, let alone expand on the existing structure particularly in a R1 zoned area. It is my opinion that they should move and better support their mission through a larger building with adequate parking.

Norothy Breedlove
319 Seward St B