

Working Towards Worker Center  
Forum plans move from discussion to operation.

By Bonnie Hobbs  
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As a way to help local immigrants find work — and also remove them from the street corners where they stand in droves, hoping someone will hire them — plans are progressing for a worker center in Centreville. And the Centreville Immigration Forum (CIF) is preparing itself to run the facility when the time comes.

"At first, we operated as a discussion forum," said CIF head Alice Foltz at the group's July 27 meeting. "But now, if the worker center becomes a reality, on private property and with private funds, we'll operate it, so we have to get organized — which is what we've done, this summer."

"The purpose of the CIF wasn't to run a worker center, but to help Centreville appreciate our great diversity and find ways for us to work together," she continued. "In fact, U.S. News & World Report rated Centreville 30th of the top 30 places to live in the U.S., and part of the reason was because of its diversity."

Explaining why workers would want to go to the center, vs. remaining on the streets, Foltz said the "big magnet" will be the services available to them there, including shelter from the weather. Because the workers know each other, she said they'll be comfortable using the center. They've also told Foltz they appreciate the CIF's efforts on their behalf and definitely would seek work at the center.

Besides that, added Foltz's husband Jerry, "This'll be more organized and fair. The work would be fairly distributed and, sooner or later, they'd all get jobs."

"Success would be use by the workers and employers — which has happened to centers in other places," said Alice Foltz. "Many employers don't feel comfortable hiring people from a corner, and it's been shown that worker centers attract more employers."

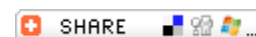
CIF member Mike Morse, of Wellspring United Church of Christ, said peer pressure among the workers, themselves, will also motivate them to use the center. "They know, if the center doesn't work, the system doesn't work and they don't get jobs on a regular basis," he said.



CIF member Terry Angelotti discusses the proposed budget for the worker center.



Stephen Vandivere asked nearby community associations to meet with the CIF.



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Agreeing, Alice Foltz said, "Workers can be abused, mistreated and/or not be paid for the work they've done. A center would help prevent this."

Lisa Johnson, an immigration attorney in Manassas, addressed the CIF on the broader issue of immigration reform and said she's tracking Prince William Board of County Supervisors Chairman Corey Stewart's intention to bring Arizona's tough immigration law to Virginia.

"Immigration law is civil law, not criminal law, so Arizona's law goes beyond federal law, and the U.S. government is challenging it," she said. "In Arizona, if you don't have papers on your person, it's a misdemeanor — but two misdemeanors, and you're deportable. So this law has big consequences. It would also overload the justice system in Virginia."

Johnson said Arizona contacted Prince William County when crafting its immigration law, so she and another attorney have formed the Virginia Common Sense Coalition and will "heavily advocate to the state legislature" for immigration reform and train others to do likewise.

"The CIF is trying to find a local solution to a local problem," replied Alice Foltz. "But we are aware of how the broad, national problem affects us, so it's good to hear about this."

Regarding plans for a worker center here, CIF member Terry Angelotti detailed the proposed budget developed by the budget and finance committee working on that issue. Said Angelotti: "We modeled our budget on Project Hope and Harmony's budget in Herndon."

Total administrative costs are estimated at \$135,500 annually, including \$55,000/year for a full-time director, plus another \$16,500 in benefits. The Virginia Organizing Project would receive \$4,800/year for accounting, taxes, human resources, insurance and similar tasks.

Total operating costs are estimated at \$26,400, but may well be \$16,000 less. "We put in \$12,000 for occupancy and utilities, but we expect this whole amount to be donated by Mr. Dvoskin," said Angelotti. (A.J. Dvoskin, owner of the Centreville Square Shopping Center, proposed the worker center initially). "We also hope to get part of the \$4,000 we figured for the printing of brochures and flyers to be donated in kind."

\$1,500 is also allocated for a computer and printer for the office, plus a laptop for the director, but this amount, too, might be reduced. Total expenditures and income should balance at \$163,400, with income expected to come from grants and donations from foundations, corporations, churches, individuals and special events, plus in-kind donations of goods and services.

"Two, paid, staff people will be there at all times, and volunteers will be needed to run the center," said Foltz. "So we'll need to recruit, train and organize these volunteers. This is just the beginning of the budget process; we're budgeting money we don't have. We're thinking about where we want to be, and it'll be a challenge for us to get there."

Stephen Vandivere, in charge of communication and outreach, suggested the CIF's Web site be bilingual. He also got the contact information for five community associations near the shopping center and e-mailed them.

"I told them we'd like to meet with them about the day labor center and address any questions or concerns they may have," he said. "I contacted Asher View, Centre Ridge, The Meadows, Newgate Forest and Sanderling."

Dwoskin originally planned to put the worker center in a trailer behind Centreville Tire & Auto; but due to opposition from neighboring merchants, it's now slated for an alternate site. Ronnie Robbins, representing A.J. Dwoskin Associates, gave the CIF an update.

"We realize we have some options to initially locate the center within one of our storefronts," she said. "But we need buy-in from the worker community and support from the employers to make it work; our providing the facility is not enough."

Robbins said Dwoskin is also committed to fitting out the space with furniture and computers, plus providing financial support for utilities. "If, during this test period, people see the center works well, we believe we'll be able to get donations for it," she continued. "Then perhaps we'll be able to find another place for a longer run — but we are committed."

Vandivere asked how a storefront location would affect traffic flow in and around the shopping center, and Robbins said it shouldn't be a problem. "The prime, match time for workers and employers is 7:30-9:30 a.m. — when many of our businesses aren't open," she said. "And their peak time is usually around 1-2 p.m. We'll put up traffic cones and do whatever is necessary to make it work."

One thing for sure, said Robbins, "We won't put it directly behind Centreville Tire & Auto because of traffic-flow issues. It's also important to us to support our merchants."



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