

November 24, 2017
(November Letter)

Dear Samantha,

Thank you for the interesting and provocative letter. Both Fran and I enjoyed reading the clippings and thinking about the implications of each.

There were several things about the “Call for Compassion” one that caught my attention. The location of the proposed homeless shelter is in the neighborhood where I grew up during my high school days. St. Augustin’s Anglican church is 2 blocks from the apartment that Mum and Dad owned on 72nd avenue, for example. The proposed site for the housing building at 59th and Heather is about a block from my high school (Sir Winston Churchill).

It is sad to see the NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) resistance to the proposed shelter for a number of reasons. First, it is often built on false fears and beliefs about homeless people (e.g. that they are mostly drug addicts and mentally unstable) or that there will be used needles everywhere. I expect that your experience with the “Our Place” centre on Pandora and related housing on Yates will give you a good idea of how these types of places operate.

Second, it is unfortunate that people who are relatively well off are resistant to helping those who are not so fortunate. I remember when growing up in Marpole, that this was stigmatized as the poor area of the region, but as one moved north of 59th street, the housing was more well off and people were richer. It expect that it is these latter people who are complaining since the housing is proposed for 59th. Very often they are willing to support such initiatives for the homeless, but insist that it is located somewhere else. I expect that they might have a false impression and fear of the homeless, but they are likely to believe that the building will also lower the resale value of their homes.

Fran found a similar process emerged in Montréal when there was a relaxing of the laws around sex workers. People from some of the neighbourhoods where street workers worked organized resistance to the initiatives and harassed the workers whenever they turned up. In the end, the biggest challenge came from the strained relationships between the sex workers and some of the NIMBY residents.

It would be nice to see if there is some research on such challenges that could inform us about the best way to deal with the issues. If I were still teaching I would encourage my students to conduct such a study so the we could learn from successful initiatives to overcome the NIMBY response. I looked on Google Scholar and found that there are a number of studies done on the topic. Perhaps if in your studies, you have to do a related research project, this would be a good topic to investigate. For example:

Dear, M. (1992). Understanding and Overcoming the NIMBY Syndrome. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 58(3), 288–300. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944369208975808>

To comprehend and overcome the NIMBY (not-in-my-backyard) syndrome, planners should understand the nature of typical opposition arguments, the factors that determine community attitudes, and the range of alternative community relations strategies available to them. This paper examines these topics in terms of human services planning.

There are also some studies that critique the simplistic notion that the NUMBY response is rooted in the fear of financial decline. For example:

Hunter, S., & Leyden, K. M. (1995). Beyond NIMBY. *Policy Studies Journal*, 23(4), 601–619. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-0072.1995.tb00537.x>

Using survey data, this study tests competing hypotheses about the nature of opposition to a hazardous waste incinerator. Using a multivariate model, we challenge some of the basic assumptions of the Not In My Backyard (NIMBY) label typically used to characterize opposition. We find little evidence for components of the NIMBY label such as concern about property values and

aesthetics, but find instead that opposition is related primarily to trust in government, fear of health consequences, and other ideological or demographic factors. We conclude with a discussion urging facility proponents to gain a better understanding of the nature of opposition and of the complexities of public opinion.

This study suggests that a plan for dealing with the issue must take account of the complexity of the issue, not just dismiss the resisters. The first step would be to find out what their concerns might be so that they can each be addressed in a reasonable manner. Most reporters do not take the time to do this, however, so represent it as a simple conflict about property values or health concerns for the residents or their children (as seen in this article).

The app suggested in the second article is a very interesting use of modern technology. I remember Fran mentioning how bank machines opened up options for sex workers who were working with pimps. It meant that they could deposit their wages in the bank machine rather than turn them over to their pimps. This gave them an option for control that was not available to them before.

This app could be used in some imaginative ways to make their working conditions safer, it seems. I will have to ask Fran if she feels that it would be legal under the new legislation about sex work.

Well, I'm hoping to mail this letter before we head to Mexico. Our flight is at 6 am, and they tell us that we have to be there 3 hours ahead, so this means we will have to wake up about 2:00 am. It will be a short sleep! This means that my first activity in Mexico will be naps.

Love,
Bill