



MIAMI UNIVERSITY'S  
**CENTER FOR COMMUNITY  
ENGAGEMENT  
IN OVER-THE-RHINE**

Thomas A. Dutton, Director  
[duttonta@miamioh.edu](mailto:duttonta@miamioh.edu)  
<http://arts.muohio.edu/cce>

**FROM THE CONTINUUM OF CARE TO STRATEGIES TO  
CARE LESS:  
...From the Anna Louise Inn to the Drop Inn Center...?  
A Working Paper**

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Thomas A. Dutton, Miami University Center for Community  
Engagement in Over-the Rhine  
Christopher Wilkey, Northern Kentucky University

Why is Western & Southern, in its pernicious success to take over the Anna Louise Inn, rightly seen as the corporate bully while 3CDC's push to relocate the Drop Inn Center gets a free pass?

As the dust settles on the tragedy that has befallen the Anna Louise Inn, we should take stock on how this story is already being framed and brace for what we fear will be the next round.

A lot of words have tumbled out over the pages of the *Cincinnati Enquirer* to characterize the situation—"The conflict has been resolved," "the battle is over." Closer to the truth is the portrayal of John Barrett and Western & Southern as a corporate bully. Councilman Chris Seelbach was right when he characterized the news—"Can't help but feel that Goliath just won." Rightly so. But there is something far more egregious here.

According to both Barrett and the *Enquirer*, the public should see this as a "win-win."

Really?

Let's call this out for what it truly is: Western & Southern's behavior was not a conflict, or battle, or an ugly protracted struggle. It was an ASSAULT. And if the irony here doesn't hit you, let us make it perfectly clear: How many assaults do the women of the Anna Louise Inn need to bear?

No one would ever characterize a settlement reached by a woman with her abusive partner as a win-win. You don't sugarcoat

assaults by rhapsodizing about win-win. The idea that win-win can be an outcome of corporate assault is both shameful and insulting. By portraying corporate abuse of the first order as a win-win, all semblance of logic has been lost. It's this kind of perverted logic that considered Jim Crow's "separate but equal" as a win-win. Why not proclaim the Trail of Tears as a win-win because, after all, the Cherokee people got new land of their own in Oklahoma!

There are other perversities. Consider the view of Kevin Finn, director of Strategies to End Homelessness, as characterized by *Enquirer* reporter Dan Horn (May 14, 2013): "the deal allows the inn to remain true to its mission and gives Western & Southern a chance to *improve* [emphasis ours] an important part of the city." Vice Mayor Roxanne Qualls expresses a similar sentiment, again through the words of Horn: "the settlement will provide 'top-notch' housing for low-income women and will allow Western & Southern to 'lead the way in *revitalizing* [emphasis ours] the Lytle Park neighborhood.'"

Could this be more blatant? Now with "those women" of the Anna Louise Inn out of the picture, Western & Southern can now "improve" and "revitalize" Lytle Park. With friends like these, who needs enemies?

A hearty thanks goes out to Mark Curnutte and Krista Ramsey for their respective articles in the *Enquirer* that offer a more compassionate, human understanding of the situation completely counter to the views of Finn and Qualls. Curnutte (May 14) cites Troy Jackson, "a former University Heights church pastor and now statewide official with the Christian-based social action group Ohio Prophetic Voices." Jackson says: "I don't want the women who live at Anna Louise [Inn] to be viewed as a negative by our city. These women, low-income women, low-income people, they all have value. They are an asset to our community. I hope through all of this that they can see they matter to people of faith and to many people in the city."

Ramsey's story (May 15) beautifully captures the powerful role of Lytle Park itself in the lives of the women of the Anna Louise Inn: "After the chaos that most had faced—poverty, abuse—the park was sanctuary and solace." Will the women of the newly-located Anna Louise Inn be able to find sanctuary and solace in Lytle Park? Yes, possibly. But they will have to travel there, a place from which they were displaced, erased. Instead of a park that was intimately part of their lives, right outside their front door, they will now face a parking lot and high-speed traffic on Reading Road.

### **Beware Drop Inn Center—You're Next**

Cincinnatians may remember that not so long ago 3CDC bellied up to the public trough to request financing to remove homeless shelters from Over-the-Rhine, particularly the Drop Inn Center. On November 7, 2012 City Council voted to pursue a loan from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for \$37 million, \$7 million of which would be used "as part of the financing for the

City's Homeless to Homes program, to support the construction of improved shelters and homeless prevention facilities within the City" (Ordinance No. 405-2012). So, the city administration, in cahoots with 3CDC, wants to utilize CDBG monies just to move shelters out of Over-the-Rhine.

As this loan has no source of repayment, the projected annual debt service payment of \$532,000 is pledged to come from future Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) entitlement allocation for the next 20 years—funds that can be used for affordable housing, the lack of which is the primary cause for homelessness. All this is at a time when CDBG monies—which are supposed to be used to develop viable communities principally for people on low- and moderate-incomes—have been dwindling. About 10 years ago Cincinnati's CDBG entitlement was \$22 million, today it's about \$11 million, and most expect the decline to continue.

What compelling public interest is served by removing shelters from Over-the-Rhine, or housing for women with low incomes from Lytle Park? Can't those experiencing poverty and homelessness be part of the new "economic mix?" Or is economic mix merely cover for the gentrification game, as Western & Southern makes evident?

We doubt we will hear any reasons, except perhaps for those unproven vagaries circulating with ever greater frequency nowadays that "shelters slow development" or that "having a shelter in the Washington Park area doesn't produce the right mix of people." For some, myths of shelters impeding development never die. Apparently, the conflation of shelters with affordable housing—and housing that is permanent and properly zoned in the Anna Louise Inn's case—is an effective corporate strategy for ensuring that the latter also gets removed from view.

Enter Western & Southern again, this time Michael Laatsch, Vice President of Public Relations, who was not so vague recently when he said the following on WXXU (November 19, 2012) about the Lytle Park area: "We are perplexed that city planners are not helping relocate Anna Louise Inn like the plans already in motion to help City Gospel Mission, YWCA, and the Drop Inn Center to relocate social service organizations to encourage economic development."

There it is!

Economic development is anything but slowing down in Over-the-Rhine. Last we looked, millions of dollars are still pouring into restaurants and condos, and people from all walks of life are enjoying the park. So, what gives?

We can make many points about why the Drop Inn Center should remain where it is in Over-the-Rhine. But let us make just three for now.

First, actively attempting to remove the Drop Inn Center violates the *Over-the-Rhine Comprehensive Plan* of 2002. The spirit of that Plan is to not displace anyone and that housing-related services

should be available for all residents. We dare say it is not legal for the City to violate its own Plan.

Remember too that the original idea to relocate the Drop Inn Center did not come from the Drop Inn Center. It came from the City, more specifically, the Mayor's office. The Mayor's demand, without the power to do so, was issued on March 30, 2010 (see <http://arts.muohio.edu/cce/papers/District%209%20Over-the-Rhine.pdf>) with Mayor Mallory chairing a meeting at City Hall with city officials and representatives from 3CDC and the Drop Inn Center's Board. Yes, it's true the Drop Inn Center, under this enormous pressure, has played ball with the City and 3CDC to investigate new sites, but judging from the "despicable" sites shown to the Drop Inn Center, there is little reason to believe that 3CDC has the interests of the Drop Inn Center in mind.

Second, it's true that those experiencing homelessness need better facilities. But here's the rub: do "new and improved" facilities have to mean "new and *removed*" ones? To conflate *better* facilities with *new* ones is a mistake. Existing facilities can be improved. So, let's put money raised merely to move shelters towards fixing the Drop Inn's physical plant now. There should be no argument over this; the money is already there.

Using money in more efficient ways brings us to our third point. It is mindboggling to us that few seem to blink an eye to the millions being raised just to move shelters to new locations, and then worse, assume that this equates to ending homelessness. The public should not tolerate this inexcusable expense of money that in no way actually ends homelessness but settles for just moving it elsewhere.

The common ethic of the Anna Louise Inn and the Drop Inn Center is that they make the conditions of those most vulnerable and oppressed our own. Instead of "live and let live," they embody the ethic "live and help live." It would be nice that Western & Southern on the one hand, and the City/3CDC alliance on the other, learn from these organizations and come to work in support of them, not against them. It may be too late for Mr. Barrett and Western & Southern. Indeed, Mr. Barrett thinks that all this will blow over in a couple of years as Cincinnatians will simply forget.

Cincinnatians need to be vigilant to make sure this perverse history does not repeat itself as the City and 3CDC go after the Drop Inn Center.