

Social Services. There has certainly been a great deal of fear and frustration regarding where we put these facilities that serve the less fortunate. In order to better understand this challenge, I have teamed up with two citizens who will be gathering information regarding some of the perceptions involved. We certainly are not finished, but there is one essential concept that I think has revealed itself along the way.

Although there are many different opinions regarding this debate, there seems to be two very different perspectives.

If you are a volunteer or a member of an organization that renders aid to the needy you probably feel that there simply isn't enough being done and that some people lack compassion for the less fortunate and simply don't want these activities or facilities in their back yard. You love your City and you work hard to help others. This represents a substantial investment and commitment to your community. You feel strongly about where these facilities should be placed and it tends to make you angry and frustrated when these plans meet resistance. But, it's your passion... perhaps it's your calling.

Then again, you may be someone that lives or has a business in the area near where these facilities are proposed. You love your neighborhood or business and you have worked hard to make it safer... the quality of life better. This represents a substantial investment and commitment to your community. When a site near you is mentioned as being suitable for the building of social services, you feel that your efforts to improve your community are being threatened and that if the facilities are built near you, that crime will increase, property values will plummet, your friends and customers will disappear along with all hope for a better neighborhood and future. The thought that someone would do this to you makes you feel angry and frustrated. But, it's your passion... perhaps it's your calling.

I know this is over simplified, but it may help demonstrate the dilemma. I think that, considering these two points of view, it would be better if we started with respect and ended with balance. After all, if we respect and care for the less fortunate, then shouldn't we offer that same respect to those who have a vision and love for their neighborhood or their business area? And if we want others to respect our neighborhoods and business areas, shouldn't we offer that same respect to those who are less fortunate and to those that dedicate their lives to them?

Very few communities are able to demonstrate this type of mutual respect, but we are Bonita Springs; a City of people who are capable of great compassion and respect for our neighbors right to the pursuit of happiness and a better life. I am convinced that we will find that balance that allows our citizens to create a compassionate social safety net while not interfering with, but improving the quality of life of our neighborhoods and business community.