

I'm Debra Wade, director of the City Community Development Department. Development of affordable housing and coordination of Homelessness services come through my department.

We are requesting that Council postpone a vote on Ordinance 134, the closure of a section of Myrtle Street at east Fifth Avenue, for 12 months.

I want to provide a little background and context of what's being proposed at this site, which is comprised of three City-owned vacant lots next door to Peacefully Living.

The City acquired this tract years ago, after the Braves (formerly League Baseball team) left and the Council Park was being developed as a recreation square and public park. However, located on this property on East Fifth Avenue were businesses that made room for the park, and ultimately, this specific tract became cut off from the park by the railroad tracks of the softball fields. This site and not used by Parks and Recreation, but it is zoned as open space.

Recently, Volunteer Ministry Center approached the City with an idea to design the property and develop all permanent supportive housing units there. There is a great need in Knoxville for these units, which serve extremely low-income residents – the poorest of our poor.

It's very early in the planning process, and these units are extremely expensive to build and manage, but VMC is working on its plan and exploring the availability of grant funding.