Refuge from the Storm

“Solutions to the Problems of Drainage, Leakage, and Seepage in the Facility of the Radford-Fairlawn Daily Bread

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Students of POSC 300 Public Administration
Radford University | Fall Semester 2015
Have you ever needed a shelter from the storms of life?

That safe haven you seek when life gets hard? The sanctuary of light during times of darkness? That is how Barbara Shelor described the Radford-Fairlawn Daily Bread in her life. One of the worst storms a person can go through is the death of a loved one. After losing her husband, Barbara found hope in serving at the local nonprofit, and in turn, find a quantum of solace. Although it is small in size, this soup kitchen and food pantry in Radford, Virginia has made an immeasurable impact on the lives of those it serves.

Radford, Virginia is a small town established in 1762 under the name of Ingles Ferry. This town thrived on industrial business such as Virginia Iron, Coal and Coke Company. Radford University was founded in 1913 as the industries began to fade. Now the city is home to about 16,500 people. Every year, approximately 20,000 meals are served to residents who are hungry and in need, through the open doors of the Radford-Fairlawn Daily Bread. There is no other five-day-a-week free meals program within a 20-mile radius from the Radford city center.

The nonprofit continues to serve free meals and deliver food to the immobile – through rain, sleet, or snow. However, recently, the weather brought with it problems that could no longer be ignored. As the weather began to gain momentum, it was clear that the rented premises from which the volunteers serve daily meals to the community was in need of repairs.

Water seeped through the walls. Leakage of heat is evident through the doors. In the aftermath of heavy rain, water began seeping into the building when torrents from a hill directly behind the building were not properly drained. On several occasions, the conditions inside the building were so severe that the volunteers have to suspend the noontime meal service. Water also entered the food pantry space, threatening to compromise the store of food donated by organizations and individuals.

In mid-August 2015, Ms. Donna Fern, the Director of the Radford-Fairlawn Daily Bread, drafted a proposal to seek technical assistance from Radford University (RU) to address this persistent problem. The proposal was referred by Dr. Jeanne Mekolichick at the Office of High Impact Practices to Dr. Tay Keong Tan of the Department of Political Science. Following an interview with Ms. Fern and a preliminary appraisal of the situation at the premises of the Radford-Fairlawn Daily Bread, Dr. Tan decided to form a team of student consultants to address the problems over the course of the Fall Semester.

A five-member consultant team made up of undergraduate students--Tiffany Farmer, India Martin, Mike Wilson, Lawrence Davin, and Chris Barton--signed up for this project. They were students of a course in Public Administration (POSC 300) in the Fall Semester of 2015. A graduate assistant,
Katie Littleton, funded by RU’s Office of Sponsored Programs, was assigned to help back-stop this project. The project was supported by the Scholar Citizens Initiative and Center of Innovative Teaching and Learning at Radford University.

The student consultant team got to work immediately with a site visit to assess the problems faced by their client organization. They discovered *two major barriers* they would have to overcome in order to come to a solution that work for the Radford-Fairlawn Daily Bread. First, the budget with which the nonprofit operates is lean and offers little resources to make expensive repairs. Second, the owners of the rented facility are a similarly small community organization with a limited budget. The rental agreement between them is not a written contract and consists solely of an agreement on the monetary exchange of the modest rent of about $350 a month. This informal contractual agreement makes it difficult to legally assign responsibility for the repairs and upkeep of the facility. With passing time, the problems with drainage, leakage, and seepage could only get worse.

Taking these concerns into consideration, the student consulting team spent several weeks interviewing, reviewing documents, and trawling for solutions. Eventually, they compiled *four options for their client organization*: (A) negotiate with the landlord; (B) relocate to low-rent premises; (C) raise funds for the repair of current facilities; and (D) launch a capital campaign for a brand new building. To determine *the best solution*, the consultants analyzed and ranked these options according to four important criteria: (1) Cost in Time; (2) Cost in Money; (3) Acceptability to the Beneficiaries (the people being served); and (4) Acceptability to the Stakeholders (volunteers and staff of the nonprofit).

The team recommended that the client organization pursue the first two options simultaneously - *negotiating with the landlord* and *searching for low-cost premises*. If these first two options do not pan out, the third highest rated option was raising funds for repair of current premises. Finally, if all three options failed, the last resort is the final option of a *capital campaign for a new building*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Description of Option</th>
<th>Cost in Time</th>
<th>Cost in Money</th>
<th>Acceptable to Beneficiaries</th>
<th>Acceptable to Stakeholders</th>
<th>Total Score</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Option A</td>
<td>Negotiate with landlord</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Option B</td>
<td>Relocate to low-cost premises</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option C</td>
<td>Fundraise for repair of premises</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option D</td>
<td>Full Capital Campaign</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
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The consultants participated in several preliminary presentations of their findings and recommendations. They presented to faculty members and students at the Scholar-Citizen Symposium in RU on October 23rd, 2015, as well as a half-day retreat at the Selu Conservancy. Finally on November 19th, 2015, the team’s final report was presented to the leaders of Radford-Fairlawn Daily Bread: Donna Fern, Chairperson of the Board of Directors; Karen Jones, Meals on Wheels Coordinator; Robert MacLeod, Board Member, Secretary, and Feeding America Representative; and Frank Herzog, Board Member and Driver Coordinator. Their presentation was attended by RU administrators and faculty members, including Dr. Dennis Grady, Dean of the College of Graduate and Professional Studies; Dr. Paige Tan, Chairperson of the Political Science Department; and Mr. Charley Cosmato, Director of the Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning.

The consultants’ recommendations were well-received by the representatives of the Radford-Fairlawn Daily Bread. On November, 25, 2015, in a letter of appreciation of the student consultants, Ms. Donna Fern wrote:

“I would like to commend each member of the Project Team for the value of the work performed and quality of the presentation of results. The oral presentation of your findings and recommendations was well planned and executed. The written report presents the information in a structured format that is easy to follow and includes useful references... The Report will be a valuable tool for our board members to use as a starting point in developing a strategic plan for our organization. The document provides a clear definition of the problem and develops realistic options. The evaluation of alternatives is based on pertinent criteria and is presented well both as a discussion and in graphics. I appreciate the consideration of implementation challenges included in your recommendations.”

In giving further feedback to the students, she commented:

“I felt that the students performed their tasks well in general. The results were well presented orally and in the written report. I appreciated the thoughtful consideration of the options as well as the challenges related to implementation. Realistically, the short term options offered are feasible and are part of our current strategy to deal with management of the facility challenges. We do require a more [in-depth] study of the option of relocating to a different facility as it will likely be required in the next three to five years.”

Since the inception of this study, the landlord has begun correcting some of the problems with the facility. New gutters and drains have been installed on the building and an opening in the external wall has been sealed. The problem of drainage around the perimeter of the building is yet to be rectified. Donna Fern has also begun the search for alternative premises from late 2015. Meetings have been arranged with the Radford-Fairlawn Ministerial Association and the Radford City Planning Commission. Will these be sufficient to address the persistent problems plaguing Radford-Fairlawn Daily Bread? Only time will tell.