

Hayward begins steps toward building new youth and family center

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HAYWARD -- A plan to help revitalize South Hayward with a new youth and family center was met last week with enthusiasm by the City Council, activists and local officials.

The unity at a City Council work session was a far cry from the anger that swept through the community after the city released a staff report that repeatedly criticized Eden Youth and Family Center, a nonprofit that has run programs at the site for decades. City Manager Fran David stepped in, issuing a supplemental report to refocus attention on the new project.

"I would like to attempt to define a productive path through the emotion and potential conflict," David wrote in her report.

She followed that up by making the staff presentation herself.

Her damage control succeeded, with speakers at Tuesday's session promising to work together to see the project through.

Alameda County Supervisor Richard Valle has pledged of \$16.8 million for a new center at Tennyson and Ruus roads. That includes \$9.6 million from Alameda County, \$5 million from Kaiser Permanente and \$2.2 million from the county Office of Education. The county will add \$1.5 million more, it was announced at Tuesday's meeting.

The current center is in an old city-owned converted elementary school that needs to be replaced.

Longtime activist Betty DeForest told the council she had attended numerous meetings and served on panels and committees focused on how to help South Hayward, with few results.

"This is as close as we have gotten," she said. "Maybe we are going to get something in South Hayward."

Planning is in the early stages, but the pledged funding energized the council and speakers.

"Thanks to Supervisor Valle for taking this project on and putting together the funding," Mayor Barbara Halliday said. "It's a great start."

The county loosely estimated \$24 million would be needed, based on construction costs of the REACH Ashland Youth Center, but that's a high estimate, said Ginny DeMartini, of Valle's office.

The Hayward center will not be another Ashland Youth Center, Valle told the council.

"That's not appropriate for this area," he said. Rather, he expected it would reflect what's unique about the Tennyson Corridor.

Next to the current center is a community center, and behind it is Tennyson Park. A fire station and health clinic are being built across the street from the park on Huntwood Avenue.

The report touched on ways to better integrate the youth and family center, the community center, the park and the new health clinic, including possibly moving the center into the park. Hayward Area Recreation and Park District owns Tennyson Park.

"We want to be a partner in this," said John Gouveia, park district general manager. "We want to make sure it works."

The center houses Silva Pediatric Medical Clinic, a tattoo removal service, a child care center, a youth employment service, a computer clubhouse, diversion classes for juveniles on probation, and a school for at-risk students. A day labor center also is located on the 2.5-acre site.

Deciding what services the center will house is far down the road. First, it needs to be decided which government entities will be in charge.

How to pay the cost of running the center also needs to be figured out. The city and park district have said they have no funds available, and the county currently has none, either. More money may be needed to build the center.

Eden Youth and Family Center was started in the 1970s by some residents, including former county Supervisor Gail Steele, who sits on its board. Its focus has been at-risk youths in the neighborhood with many low-income residents.

The report said Eden "is in poor organizational shape." It also said Kaiser's donation stipulated that Eden Youth and Family Center not run the new center.

Kaiser disagreed.

"The selection of the center's operator is not a contingency of this grant," the health care provider said in a statement.

Steele was angry about what she called a scandalous report.

"We feel pretty insulted, to put it mildly," she said. "It's hard to have something that is basically successful and has done a lot of good be treated as if we're totally incompetent and couldn't sweep the floor."

The report's author, Sean Reinhart, acknowledged portions were inaccurate or "insensitively" worded. Reinhart is the city's director of library and community services.

"Eden Youth and Family Center does a lot of good," he said. "It was never our intention to suggest that they're anything but a dedicated community organization.

"I have great respect for former Supervisor Steele. For her to feel insulted in any way -- for that, I'm deeply sorry," he said.

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