

Daily Herald Article

Big crowds expected at meetings for controversial Haymarket Center proposal

By Robert Sanchez

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Large crowds are expected next month when Itasca begins its public review of a proposal to turn a hotel into a behavioral health clinic.

And if yard signs popping up around town are any indication, many of the residents will oppose the plan.

Haymarket Center -- a Chicago-based nonprofit group that provides treatment for substance use disorders and mental health conditions -- wants to buy the hotel on the west side of I-290 and Irving Park Road and convert it into a roughly 200-bed facility.

But Haymarket needs Itasca officials to approve the plans in order for the project to become a reality. The process to seek that approval is expected to begin on Sept. 18 when the plan commission considers the project.

"Haymarket Center is in the business of saving lives and is excited for the opportunity to bring our services to Itasca and nearby communities in a comprehensive and professional manner," Haymarket President and CEO Dan Lustig said in a statement. "We look forward to presenting this project to village officials and Itasca residents so everyone can better understand the need for these types of services and our intentions of being a strong and valuable community partner."

The project already has the support of more than 60 elected officials, government agencies, community organizations and health care providers who say that, among other things, it will help address the suburban opioid crisis.

Village Administrator Carie Anne Ergo said officials decided to have the plan commission meeting at Peacock Junior High School, 301 E. North St., because the number of residents expected to attend is "larger than what we can accommodate here at village hall."

In fact, Ergo said, more than one meeting may be needed.

"We are anticipating there will be multiple meetings to accommodate the amount of people who have called in to indicate they will be coming to speak," she said.

Meanwhile, a number of "No Haymarket" signs started appearing last week in yards around the village.

Mayor Jeff Pruyn said most of the residents he's hearing from are "concerned" about the impact Haymarket's plan would have on the village.

"Can a town of 8,700 people -- with limited resources -- service a 200-bed facility?" Pruyn asked. Last month, Pruyn sent a list of questions to Haymarket. While the village did get a response, Ergo said many of the questions weren't answered.

As part of its plan, Haymarket would spend roughly \$1.5 million to remodel the interior of the building at 860 W. Irving Park Road.

The facility would provide a full continuum of substance abuse and mental health treatment, as well as primary care, for those 18 and older. It would offer inpatient and outpatient care and have beds for treatment and recovery.

"Unfortunately, there has been a lot of false and misleading information about this project," Lustig said. He said the plan commission meeting will be an opportunity "to dispel rumors that paint an unflattering and false representation of this project."