

Daily Herald Article

Why some residents oppose putting treatment center in Itasca hotel

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Haymarket Center's plan to convert an Itasca hotel into a drug and alcohol treatment center to serve hundreds of patients from DuPage and other collar counties continues to raise concerns among residents questioning the proposed location and the openness of Haymarket officials.

A recent informational meeting about the project did nothing to quell those fears.

"We are not opposed to a treatment center and believe DuPage County has a role to play in solving the (opioid) crisis, but we feel Itasca simply cannot properly support a facility of this size and scope," a group of residents said in a statement released Monday.

In addition, the residents said they don't believe Haymarket officials were "transparent" during the forum hosted by state Rep. Diane Pappas.

They said the answers provided by Haymarket officials "were vague and in some instances incorrect."

More than 350 people attended the meeting about the project proposed by the Chicago-based nonprofit that provides treatment for substance use disorders and mental health conditions.

Haymarket wants to buy the hotel along Irving Park Road and convert it into a roughly 200-bed facility.

The proposed Haymarket DuPage would provide a full continuum of substance abuse and mental health treatment, as well as primary care, for those 18 and older.

Supporters say the facility would, among other things, help address the suburban opioid crisis.

Haymarket needs Itasca officials to approve the project for it to become a reality. The process to seek that approval is scheduled to begin Sept. 18 when the plan commission considers the proposal.

Thursday's meeting was simply an opportunity for residents to ask questions.

The panel included Mayor Jeff Pruyn, Village Administrator Carie Anne Ergo, and three county board members -- Ashley Selmon, a Democrat from Addison; Sam Tornatore, a Republican from Roselle; and Don Puchalski, an Addison Republican.

But Haymarket President and CEO Dan Lustig got the lion's share of the questions during the 90-minute session. He was asked about a range of topics, including program success rates, the proposed facility's security measures and how many 911 calls are expected.

"I was grateful for the opportunity to address the community directly, answer dozens of residents' questions and offer specific, accurate details about our project," Lustig said in a statement Monday.

When asked about why Itasca was chosen, Lustig said on Thursday that Haymarket spent two years looking for suitable locations.

"When it came to Itasca, there was a lot of incentives in refurbishing an old hotel or a hotel that was leaving," Lustig said.

He said the design of the building's interior would allow Haymarket to meet state requirements for programming.

But opponents said the project would hurt Itasca's economy. The hotel currently generates around \$250,000 in annual tax revenue that would be lost.

Village officials also are trying to determine how the proposal would affect police, fire and emergency medical services.

While they agree DuPage needs treatment options, the residents said they would prefer the facility be more centrally located in the county.

"When direct questions were asked regarding the impact on Itasca, they were all pushed back toward the needs of DuPage," the residents' statement reads.

"They (Haymarket) found a facility that fit their needs in Itasca, but we believe overlooked the impact of putting it in such a small town with limited resources."

Meanwhile, Pruyn and Ergo visited Haymarket's Chicago location on Friday.

Pruyn said the visit didn't answer all his questions, but Haymarket officials said the meeting and tour were "productive and informative."

"We look forward to continuing our dialogue," Lustig said.