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City Council approves lease for controversial housing project

North Portland residents split over planned foster family community

BY JIM REDDEN

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The Portland City Council agreed to lease the site of the former John Ball School in North Portland to a nonprofit organization for a foster care community Wednesday morning.

The organization, called Portland Hope Meadows, plans to build a community of homes on the two-acre parcel, at 4221 N. Willis Blvd., where foster children would be placed with adoptive families to gain some stability in their lives.

The lease allows the organization the right to use the property for \$1 a year.

Although construction cannot actually begin until a land use change for the project is approved, the lease would allow the organization to secure grant funds that require a signed lease.

The project is opposed by some neighborhood residents – including the board of the Portsmouth Neighborhood Association – who argue that their part of town already has too many social service programs and low-income housing projects.

Some opponents also feel the council should not approve the project without involving area residents. A number of them testified against the project when the council held a hearing on the lease last week.

A number of other area residents testified in support of the project, however. They felt the project would benefit both the neighborhood and the foster children who would live there.

The council previously invited Portland Hope Meadows to seek the lease after meeting numerous conditions, including raising much of the project's \$12.5 million costs.

A substantial portion of those funds has already been donated from about 400 individual donors, two dozen organizations and foundations, including the Windermere Foundation, Legend Homes, Walsh Construction, Bank of America, Starbucks, Tonkon Torp and developer Homer Williams.

The plan is to build eight fully furnished 2,500-square-foot homes, 32 apartments and a community center. Families would live at the site rent-free in exchange for adopting three to four foster children from the state, and seniors will live rent-free for their time as foster grandparents.

"We're creating a neighborhood that takes care of itself," organization executive director Derenda Schubert told the Portland Tribune last year. "They will be taking care of each other through good times and bad."

According to officials in Saltzman's office, the organization is hoping to soften area opposition by signing a Good Neighbor Agreement and building the community center for all neighbors to use.

Portland Hope Meadows is based on a nonprofit in Rantoul, Ill., called Generations From Hope, which has proven successful since 1993. Besides Portland, 16 other communities, including Medford, are studying the model with hopes of building their own.



COURTESY OF CARLETON HART ARCHITECTURE
Portland Hope Meadows, which will be built on North Willis Boulevard (on the site of the former Ball Elementary School), has met some opposition by neighbors who don't want the facility in the area.