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Article published Jul 13, 2007

United Way day center moves ahead

Agency applies for building permit; some neighbors worried, others aren't

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Despite previous opposition from surrounding neighbors, the United Way of Larimer County is going forward with plans for a 10,000-square-foot, single-story building that will serve as a Housing Service Day Center.

The agency this week applied for a building permit from the city of Fort Collins.

The building, valued at \$1.68 million, will be constructed at the northwest corner of Conifer Street and Blue Spruce Drive. It will be named the Sister Mary Alice Murphy Center for Hope.

While some residents expressed concerns the day center would lead to increased criminal activity, other neighbors said they no longer have a reason to worry.

"Everyone was concerned about the youth center that went in here a while back, and nothing really happened," said John Steiner, who lives on Nokomi Court, just northeast of the day center's location. "I don't see any reason for concern."

Lon Early, who lives in the same neighborhood, said he feels little distress about the center.

"It's not a biggie on my list," he said. "There are worse things that could go in there."

Based on his research, United Way President Gordan Thibedeau said he does not believe crime will be an issue.

"We have had several community meetings with information we have gathered from around the nation about the issue," he said. "We have looked very carefully and it is our assessment that it will not be a problem."

The United Way of Larimer County also has addressed concerns about crowds forming outside the center.

"This is a service center so some of the concerns of having long lines of people outside waiting for a meal or people there with no place to go, well, we don't think that will exist at all," he said.

Once the building permit is granted, Thibedeau anticipates breaking ground in September.

As for the opening, that is still up in the air.

"We would certainly like to have it open by Thanksgiving but perhaps more realistically it would be early next year," Thibedeau said.

The United Way of Larimer County has raised 80 percent of the \$2.4 million cost for the project and will continue fundraising.

Managed by Catholic Charities Northern, an organization that currently operates an overnight shelter, the Housing Services Day Center will provide case management to help homeless and near-homeless people

change their situation.

The center will provide access to resources such as child care, job assistance, housing, financial, transportation, mental health and substance abuse counseling and educational opportunities.
