



NEWS RELEASE

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SVDP seeks new site for Youth House for homeless teen boys

Decision follows last week's 'listening sessions' with Bethel-area neighbors

The St. Vincent de Paul Society of Lane County announced Wednesday that it has withdrawn its proposal to build a new SVDP Youth House for homeless teen boys on Bethel School District property near the intersection of Legacy and Avalon streets in the Meadow View neighborhood of Eugene.

Executive Director Terry McDonald said the agency has begun a search for a new location for the facility, which will be similar to the Eugene-based nonprofit's recently opened Youth House for homeless, unaccompanied teen girls in south Eugene. McDonald said the new site will be located in the Eugene, Springfield or Bethel school districts.

The announcement followed months of controversy over the agency's request to secure a long-term lease for the .66-acre site to locate the Youth House for boys, which will provide homeless teens with up to two years of free housing, intensive casework and community support. Last week St. Vincent de Paul and the school district held 24 hours of facilitated small-group "listening sessions" attended by more than 100 neighbors, and representatives from the Bethel School District, St. Vincent de Paul, the city of Eugene, and the Active Bethel Citizens neighborhood association.

"After considering the comments from the neighbors during the listening sessions, St. Vincent de Paul staff -- and I personally -- feel that St. Vincent did not follow its normal neighborhood notification process to involve the community in the siting of a St. Vincent Youth House facility, which put the school board and neighbors in a difficult position," McDonald said in a letter delivered Wednesday to the Bethel School Board.

"We want to thank the school board and staff for their incredible devotion to the needs of all students enrolled in the district," McDonald added. "I think we all are concerned with the wellbeing of homeless students. Finding a creative way to address their needs in a compassionate manner is a value the district, constituents and St. Vincent share. My hope is that the district will work with its community to find a creative way to address the needs of this population."

The number of homeless, unaccompanied youth attending high school in the Bethel, Eugene and Springfield school districts has increased significantly in recent years. Officials estimate that more than 400 youth enrolled in the three local districts' high schools are homeless and not living with their families; Bethel school officials estimate that nearly 10 percent of all students enrolled in its schools were homeless at some point in the last school year.