

Daily Herald Article

Opposition growing to Haymarket's plans for rehab facility in Itasca

By Robert Sanchez

Posted 9/9/2019

More than 1,200 "No Haymarket" signs have appeared in yards around Itasca in response to Haymarket Center's proposal to open a drug and alcohol treatment center at what is now a hotel.

The signs, both literally and figuratively, are not good for supporters of a proposed 200-bed drug and alcohol treatment facility in what is now an Itasca hotel.

Haymarket Center's plan to buy and refurbish a Holiday Inn along Irving Park Road is under fire from many of the town's more than 8,600 residents. And opposition is mounting as the village prepares for a Sept. 18 public hearing to consider the Chicago-based nonprofit's proposal.

A group calling itself "Concerned Citizens of Itasca" is rallying efforts to block Haymarket and has distributed more than 1,200 "No Haymarket" yard signs -- roughly one for every three residences in the village.

There's also a Facebook group called "No Itasca Haymarket" with roughly 1,370 members.

And the name of one county board member who represents Itasca has been removed from a list of Haymarket DuPage supporters.

"I didn't have a problem with it if Itasca didn't have a problem with it," said Don Puchalski, an Addison Republican. "It's clear that Itasca is not supporting this at all."

Several residents spoke with the Daily Herald about their opposition. They cited four key reasons: Itasca is too small to support such a facility; the project would cost the village tax revenue; the location isn't appropriate; and Haymarket hasn't been transparent.

Too big for Itasca

Haymarket would provide a full continuum of substance abuse and mental health treatment, as well as primary care, for hundreds of patients from DuPage and other collar counties.

"Haymarket in 2017 and 2018 served 2,000 DuPage and collar-county residents," said Karen Kissel, Haymarket's senior executive vice president. "We're responding to a need."

Nicole Diestel, an administrator of the "No Itasca Haymarket" Facebook group, agrees a treatment center is needed in DuPage, especially to combat the opioid crisis. But she says Haymarket's plan for Itasca doesn't make sense.

James Diestel, a member of Concerned Citizens of Itasca, says the proposed behavioral health clinic and recovery campus is too big for the small town and will put a strain on police and fire services.

"I think they were so centered on the Holiday Inn as a perfect turnkey location," he said, "they didn't consider what it would do and how we could not properly address the concerns in that location."

Opponents want Haymarket to seek a site in the center of the county and in a larger town that can better absorb the inherent costs.

Itasca's police department has 11 patrol officers and two detectives. The fire protection district has one ambulance and needed voters to approve a property tax hike last fall to help balance its budget.

There were 863 emergency calls requiring a response from Haymarket's Chicago location in a single year, according to residents who gathered the information through a FOIA request.

Kissel said Haymarket is collecting five years of 911 data for the Chicago site, which is twice the size of what's proposed for Itasca.

Haymarket officials say they would contract a private ambulance service to handle calls in Itasca. "We felt that was one way we could provide support that wouldn't be a drain on Itasca resources," Kissel said.

Still, opponents say, Itasca crews would be called to respond to some emergencies.

"If you fall in the parking lot of a hospital, they call 911," said Dustin Sneath, an administrator of the Facebook group. "So to tell us that you are not going to call 911 -- you're just going to treat all these things internally -- seems a little bit far-fetched."

Lost revenue

The hotel currently generates roughly \$250,000 in annual tax revenue, including \$150,000 in property taxes. Residents say that loss would be a direct blow to village.

Kissel said Haymarket understands and would work with Itasca to pursue grants. In addition, the Itasca facility is expected to have 163 employees who will buy gas and food in town.

The hotel was on the market for two years before Haymarket considered buying it. If Haymarket walks away, the hotel owner still wants to sell it.

But Nicole Diestel said that doesn't mean another hospitality company won't buy it.

"If a new ownership comes through and wants to continue as a hotel, we believe it will be successful," she said.

Other concerns

When Haymarket announced its plans in June, officials said the hotel on the west side of I-290 is closer to the police station than to houses.

But Nicole Diestel says the site also is close to children-based businesses along with schools, the water park, the library and park district.

"This is in the center of our community," she said.

Residents also say Haymarket officials haven't been transparent.

"If they had come in and given us all the information up front and just pretty much been open about all this stuff, I think people would have a slightly different opinion." Sneath said.

Kissel said Haymarket has tried to be transparent by releasing information to the public and starting a website at haymarketdupage.org. Haymarket officials also spoke with people in the community, including first responders, village officials and religious leaders.

Opponents have their own website at noitascahaymarket.com. They say they will make their objections clear during the public hearing, which has been moved to Peacock Junior High School, 301 E. North St., to make room for the expected crowd.

"The message we're sending is everybody deserves to have their voice heard -- for or against," Nicole Diestel said.