

Residents vehemently oppose rezoning

BY CHANEL DAVIS
THE CHRONICLE

Roughly 50 people came out on Tuesday night, April 28, to voice their opinion on the rezoning of 939 Cleveland Ave. to a shelter for The Salvation Army.

The community responded with an overwhelming no to the request. The forum, held by Council Member Derwin Montgomery at the Rupert Bell Recreation Center, was held so that residents in the East Winston community could discuss the proposal with each other, members from The Salvation Army and members from Housing Authority of Winston-Salem.

The Housing Authority of Winston-Salem's Board of Commissioners has signed a petition of protest against the rezoning of the property at 939 Cleveland Ave. at a special meeting that was called on April 21. A petition of protest triggers a super majority of the City Council in order for the rezoning to pass, meaning it would require six members to pass instead of five, meaning the mayor

would have to vote. The petition could prevent The Salvation Army from purchasing the day-care building from Greater Cleveland Christian Church and turning it into an estimated 90-bed facility to house homeless individuals directly across from the Oaks at Tenth property.

Both Major James Allison, from The Salvation Army, and Larry Woods, CEO of HAWS, attended Tuesday night's meeting and spoke to attendees about their wishes and answered questions. "We believe that the family shelter coming to the Cleveland Avenue area is not a deterrent at all to the economic or any other progress in this area," Allison said. "We are happy to be in this neighborhood, we want to be in this neighborhood and we need to be in this neighborhood. It is a place in the community that needs us."

Woods said council must stick to the plan. "We believe that if this community put together this plan, it should be adhered to by all city government and agencies. Any changes of that plan should be

brought back to the community, for the community's sake," he said.

Resident Donja Gillis doesn't live in the area but said that she believes the organization's presence would benefit the area.

"I've been serviced by The Salvation Army, and I'm pretty sure that a lot of you guys against the rezoning, your families or you have received services from The Salvation Army," Gillis said. "Most of the time The Salvation Army is servicing people from this community. It's hard to sit and hear this area say 'we don't want a shelter that is only to help people.'"

James Russo disagrees and said that the community should fight for the original plan. "We have a plan now. Winston-Salem finally has a plan that will develop East Winston. We've had to fight for a grocery store and drug store. We can get an ABC store but we've had to fight for anything else that's been positive in the community," he said. "Don't let this take away all of the hard work and efforts to improve the economic development of East Winston." Resident Jimmy Norwood said that he chose to live in East Winston and was glad to see the turnout tonight.

"It's not a bad thing, but it's not the thing for our neighborhood," he said. "No matter what, perception is what drives the reality. It may not be a bad thing but per-

ception is what people see."

Abram Coker said he's lived in the area all his life and has seen businesses come and go over what he deems stupidity and negativity.

"What I'm seeing is that something that may be good and help the community, people are using the excuse 'Not in my community'," Coker said. "Lack of knowledge is one of the problems. When someone comes to do something good you don't want it. Instead of making excuses you need to work it and see what you get out of it."

Antonio Pagan is the pastor of Iglesia Christiana Arca de Refugio (Arc of Refuge) and is fairly new to the area. His church bought the property in November 2014. The shelter would be right next to his building.

"It would be unfair for me to have an opinion because I'm new to the area, however we have to hear the community and do what they asked to be done," he said.

The City Council meeting will be held on Monday, May 4 at 7 p.m. at the City Hall building in Room 230. For those who cannot make the council meeting, it can be viewed live online by accessing the government

website: <http://www.cityofws.org/home-center/public-meetings>.

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"We believe that the shelter is not compatible with the long-term redevelopment of that area at this time," he said. "We believe the Masterplan process is in the early stages and that a shelter coming in at this time could have a chilling effect on bringing in investors, including new homeowners."

Woods said that this has not been an easy decision to come to but he said that he doesn't want it to seem like the housing authority is blocking the agency.

"This is about the dreams and aspirations that this community has put forth, which we believe should be honored and maintained by both the county and the city. Changes to that plan should be a community decision with community input," said Woods. "Having a group come in and make a request is not compatible with the plan. We just don't think it's a good thing."

In November 2013, HAWS announced the opening of The Oaks at Tenth, housing exclusively for working public housing clients. The program is a part of the Housing Authority's "Step Up" program that promotes self-sufficiency. Prior to admission and to continue occupancy, head of households will need to maintain a work schedule of at least 30 hours per week, except for those who are elderly or disabled. Tenants who are unable to maintain the work requirement over a period of time would still have the option of residing in more traditional affordable housing locations.

The complex is made up of one-, two- or three-bedroom apartments with single and multi-level floor plan options. The complex has 50 units with energy efficient appliances.

The location is considered the first phase of the Cleveland Avenue Initiative Masterplan. That plan was established to revitalize the surrounding 130-acre community as a mixed-use neighborhood. Per U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) guidelines, the plans are developed by local leaders, residents, stakeholders and private developers from the community.

Housing employees Kevin Cheshire, vice president and general counsel, and Troy Dehaven, director of real estate development, have been working with a community planning group to create that plan.

The agency received a \$500,000 grant from HUD as a recipient of the 2013 Choice Neighborhoods Planning Grant to support the development of a comprehensive neighborhood Transformation Plan for Cleveland Avenue Homes, a traditional public housing community.

The program supports

locally driven strategies to address struggling neighborhoods with distressed public or HUD-assisted housing through a comprehensive approach to neighborhood transformation.

Cheshire said The Salvation Army approached the agency with its intent.

"We discussed it internally in committee and with the full board, and determined that the use was contrary to what we've submitted and had endorsed by the planning board and City Council regarding the Masterplan. We told The Salvation Army that while we supported its mission, we would not be able to endorse the plan for a rezoning to use as a homeless shelter," he said.

The rezoning has passed the planning board with a 7-2 vote.

A block away, construction vehicles are making way for another complex - Camden Station. Both projects are sandwiched between Cleveland Avenue Homes and Sunrise Towers, an aging high-rise for senior citizens and those with disabilities.

Combined, The Oaks at Tenth and Camden Station cost about \$9 million - money that was mostly secured by the agency through bank loans.

Camden Station is a proposed 30-unit apartment community that will consist of 14 one-bedroom, 14 two-bedroom and 2 three-bedroom units, with private entrances.

Camden Station will be

the second new apartment community by the Housing Authority in the Cleveland Avenue Initiative Masterplan area that is a part of the "Step Up" program.

Woods said that the revamping in the area has spurred other property owners into action.

One of those would be George Carr, the owner of Summit Square, who has written a letter to City Council opposing the rezoning.

"He has been motivated to redevelop and reinvest into his property with \$1.5 million in renovations," Woods said. "We are finding some single-family homes who are starting to invest into their homes."

"It is starting to do what we thought it would do,

which is stimulate investment in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods." The Salvation Army, which has provided shelter for 108 years in the city, is the only provider of emergency housing for homeless families that usually consist of single-mothers and their children. Last month, the shelter provided over 900 nights of lodging to children under age 18, according to data from The Salvation Army.

Families that live in the shelter are offered three meals each day and essential services, such as transportation assistance, clothing and tutoring and homework help for children. Residents of the shelter are required to be in the building by 8:30 p.m. every day unless they are working,

attending church or community meetings.

The agency would have to install showers in the rooms and a sprinkler system at 939 Cleveland Ave. before moving in, if approved. "At this point, we don't have another option," Allison said. "We found this and literally fell in love with it, putting our heart and soul into getting it. If this doesn't end in our favor, we will not be angry at anyone at all. We will regroup and begin looking for somewhere to relocate our shelter."

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