

Teens step up call for youth center

Just-purchased Escuela church property is perfect site, they say

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At a meeting Saturday, local youth and community members said their three-year campaign for a new teen center in Mountain View should be close to an end now that the city has bought a church on Escuela Avenue — the perfect location for their long-sought teen center.

The young people, part of Youth Motivated for Action and Involvement (YMAI) which is associated with Peninsula Interfaith Action, say the city's current teen center does not serve the needs of most youth in Mountain View because it is open only two nights a week.

The city late last month spent \$3.5 million to purchase the Rock Church of Mountain View, located at 263 Escuela Ave. right across the street from the Senior Center and the current teen center. Peninsula Interfaith Action, an advocacy group, said this building should be converted into a new teen center.

"Finally the City Council has purchased some property," said Tameeka Bennett of Peninsula Interfaith Action. "We want the building to be a new teen center."

However, Bennett said, the city is thinking of using the new church site as a second parking lot for the Senior Center. Local youth, she said, are "outraged," and to draw attention to the issue and campaign for a new center, the YMAI held a press conference on Saturday.

"Gang violence is spiking now," said Eddie Olmos, a Mountain View resident involved with YMAI who just graduated from Bellarmine College Preparatory in San Jose. A better teen center would help keep local teenagers out of trouble, he said.

The council has not made any decisions on how to use the new property, and will probably begin discussing the issue this fall after members return from summer recess, said Mayor Margaret Abe-Koga. She added that she supported the purchase of the property and that her "priority" is using it has a teen center.

However, she said, the city is still leasing the church to its congregation until June 2011, which means teen activities there would have to happen "during non-church hours."

The church is currently acting as a second parking lot for the Senior Center, and Abe-Koga said the seniors may also want to use the church for activities. Another possibility is housing the Mountain View Police Activities League, which pairs cops and at-risk youth together to play sports, at the church.

Olmos said the teen center is necessary given the needs of Mountain View's youth. Teens in YMAI questioned hundreds of young people several years ago about what they wanted out of their city, and most responded that they wanted more activities and programs.

"Every kid we asked said there was not enough to do," Olmos said. "We have a library, but nothing else."

After conducting their survey, the teens started campaigning for a new center, and even got some City Council members on board. They took a tour of other local teen centers with council member Tom Means earlier this year. The teen center in Santa Clara had video games and a skate park, Olmos said.

"Why don't we have what other cities and classes have?" Olmos said.

The City Council in February rejected a proposal to use the Senior Center for teen programs and activities in the evening. Instead, council members approved a \$50,000 four-month pilot program for a set of youth classes and events that will be held at local high schools and other locations.

But Olmos and his peers say more is needed. Members of Peninsula Interfaith Action are holding a meeting on Thursday, July 30 in the basement of Saint Josephs Church at 582 Hope Street to further discuss the need for a teen center. For more information, visit www.myspace.com/ymai.

