

Richmond accepts donated building, will borrow \$2.3 million to expand Family Justice Center

By Robert Rogers Contra Costa Times
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RICHMOND -- The county provided the building, now it's on Richmond to rebuild it and make sure the people come.

The City Council on Tuesday voted to accept a gifted 7,200-square-foot building and borrow more than \$2.3 million to restore it for use as a new West Contra Costa Family Justice Center.

The building is located at 256 24th St. Richmond police Chief Chris Magnus said his department will work with the Contra Costa County District Attorney's Office and several nonprofit domestic violence groups to run a multidisciplinary facility to assist local victims of domestic violence and sex crimes.

"It's a one-stop shop, a co-location for a range of services," Magnus said. "We have a chance to really be on the cutting edge here in Richmond."

The family justice center will provide a single location where victims of domestic violence can be assisted by advocates, develop safety plans, meet with police and prosecutors, receive medical assistance, obtain information on shelter and get help with transportation, according to a city staff report.

"The West Contra Costa Family Justice Center promises to be one of the most significant projects created for victims of abuse in this region in the past 20 years," the report stated.

This building was formerly used by Contra Costa County as an outpatient mental health services clinic but has been unoccupied and in disrepair for years. County supervisors agreed earlier Tuesday to transfer the building to the city's ownership, Supervisor John Gioia said.



The Richmond council unanimously approved a \$2.34 million, 10-year bond with a 3.17 percent interest rate to finance the restoration of the facility. No construction date is set.

Councilman Nat Bates said he had some concerns about the costs, noting that the city's finances are tight and questioning why it would cost more than \$2 million to rehabilitate a building that size.

Magnus said the city's investment would draw funding from corporations, businesses, nonprofit groups and foundations devoted to reducing domestic violence and sexual exploitation.

"Once we get this up and running, it will attract funding," Magnus said. He added that the investment would have a stimulative effect in the neighborhood, which suffers from lingering blight.

City Manager Bill Lindsay said, "The city is putting itself on the hook for the debt service. But the best case scenario ... this will be financed in part with outside resources. Worst case scenario is it will come out of the Police Department budget."

More than 10 residents spoke Tuesday in favor of borrowing the money and opening the center.

The city is just 10 percent of the county's population but accounts for about 20 percent of all domestic violence crimes, Magnus said. He said the city recorded 16 domestic violence-related homicides in 2009-10, by far the highest of any city in the county.

Currently, most of the resources available to domestic violence victims in Richmond are

located in Martinez, about 20 miles away, Magnus said, dissuading economically challenged victims from seeking help.

"It's costly and inefficient to have all these different services spread out all over the place," Magnus said.

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