

# Healing Place backers skirt hard question of where

## Optimism surrounds push for facility

BY ALICIA B. WILLIAMS  
STAFF WRITER

**RALEIGH** — Organizers trying to bring an innovative homeless program to Wake County have raised \$2.6 million, half the money they need to build the facility.

They even have an artist's sketch of what the building will look like.

What they don't have is a place to put the building.

Organizers say they are optimistic that The Healing Place of Wake County, which will offer alcohol and drug treatment as well as beds for the homeless, will avoid some of the opposition that has met other homeless shelter proposals.

But they concede that they intentionally have been avoiding the issue of where the facility will go.

"Why start things off on the part

that seems to be the most negative for people?" asked Maria Spaulding, Wake's Human Services director, one of a core group of supporters for the project.

"We can gain support for the concept of the program and get people to understand what the program will deliver," Spaulding said. "It's more than a shelter, and it's important for people to realize that. ... That doesn't mean it will be easier to get a site, but I don't believe it will make it harder."

But there are indications that finding a location will be tough. Organizers have said they want the facility to be as close to downtown — where homeless people often congregate — as possible.

City Council member Brad Thompson, whose district includes downtown Raleigh, said downtown neighborhoods are not the only ones that should be considered.

"The issue of location is one that will still be decided," Thompson said. "But I hope that other com-

munities will be as receptive to hosting this type of community as Southeast Raleigh has been to ones that are not nearly as well-supported by funding or innovation of programs."

Junious Sorrell, a member of the Central Citizen's Advisory Council, a community group charged with advising city officials on development proposals and other neighborhood issues, put it in stronger terms.

SEE HOMELESS PAGE 4B

# HOMELESS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1B

"We aren't against something nice, something that the homeless people will feel like they are welcome," Sorrell said, "but we get tired that every time they say something about it, they think about placing it in Southeast Raleigh. I think the other communities of Raleigh should share in the housing of homeless persons."

The core group behind the proposed center — Spaulding; Fred Barber, senior vice president of Capitol Broadcasting; Barbara Goodman, of the Wake County Human Services board, and Dennis Parnell, interim director of The Healing Place of Wake County —

have focused most of their efforts on raising money for the project.

The only steps they have taken toward finding a site have been driving around Raleigh and marking off places on the map that are definitely unavailable because of zoning conflicts, Spaulding said. The group wants to break ground this summer and open by the fall of 2000.

"People tell us that we have to be realistic ... but we don't pay attention to that," Spaulding said. "People could be in the background saying, 'Watch out, watch out,' but we won't be listening, because we're too excited about this."

According to figures provided by Wake County, the area's homeless population is as high as 1,900. But attempts to provide permanent shelter for the indigent have run

into opposition.

Last year, efforts to open a permanent homeless shelter on Morgan Street broke down after opposition from Downtown East neighbors and the Raleigh City Council. Plans by the Raleigh Rescue Mission to open a dormitory for homeless women and children hit a snag when residents protested. Council has yet to resolve whether the Montgomery Green Building on South Wilmington Street will become a permanent homeless shelter or find another site for one.

Healing Place supporters and public officials say the local Healing Place would not be a solution for the area's entire homeless population. It would provide a nonmedical detoxification center and a 12-step recovery program based on Alcoholics Anonymous for 165 men.

"The need for a homeless shelter is tremendous," said County Commissioner Yevonne Brannon. "That is not going to go away. That need is still crucial and the treatment center, even if it serves several homeless people, won't make a small dent. Many of the homeless are not substance abusers. There are many women, men and small children who are just down on their luck. There is this little bit of overlap, but it's not necessarily the same group."

Healing Place organizers have spent the past six months holding lunches to explain the function of the center. The group also connected with architects from Envirotek Inc., who created renderings of the building, complete with an outdoor basketball court.

Their presentations have been successful. This month, WakeMed pledged \$2 million toward the building of The Healing Place. Just this week, the Wake County Alcoholic Beverage Commission pledged \$600,000 toward the new center.

But community leaders in Southeast Raleigh, where a disproportionate amount of the city's transient services are housed, are beginning to wonder what specific sites are being considered.

Mayoral candidate Venita Peyton, who lives in Longview Gardens, said Southeast Raleigh's economic growth depends in part on where the city decides to place centers like The Healing Place.

"What's going to help us to become as progressive as North and West Raleigh, if we continue to be made the home of all of the places that no one else wants?" Peyton asked.

"Let's start being fair about where we locate these facilities. We keep dumping on 27610."

Alicia B. Williams can be reached at 829-4565 or [awilliam@nando.com](mailto:awilliam@nando.com)