

Shelter for homeless, addicted could open in fall 2000

Healing Place backers must raise \$1 million

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RALEIGH — Supporters of The Healing Place, a planned shelter where homeless men can go to sober up, say they have only a couple of hurdles to clear before beginning construction in October.

One is rezoning land on Dorothea Dix Hospital's campus to accommodate the shel-

ter. The other is finding money to build it. Although those sound like major obstacles, organizers say The Healing Place should open its doors in the fall of 2000.

Rezoning the 4.5-acre plot shouldn't be a big problem, according to Raleigh City Council member Benson Kirkman, who represents the neighborhoods surrounding the Dix campus. Neighbors aren't worried about hosting a homeless shelter, he said, so there shouldn't be much opposition at the rezoning hearing Sept. 13. The property is currently set aside for offices and institutions, and the program's backers have filed to add

emergency shelters.

"People in the area aren't just willing to have the center, they're volunteering to help out," Kirkman said.

J.W. Reasons is one of those people. He is 78 years old, and has lived across from the hospital on Lake Wheeler Road for 46 years.

"This program is one of the best things I've heard of lately," he said. "I've never heard tell of anything like it. With most of these shelters, a man goes in there on alcohol and dope, stays during the night, then he's back out during the day. Just giving him a place to sleep is not really helping him, I say."

That's the idea behind The Healing Place: to treat homeless men's addictions fully rather than offer them temporary shelter. The men will attend 12-step programs, classes, job training and follow-up counseling, and will stay at the shelter until they have a job and a place to live. Most stays are expected to last three to six months.

Reasons said he doesn't expect an influx of vagrants once the center is up and running. On the contrary, he expects relief. "Now, homeless folks are walking by my house out

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front, sleeping in the woods behind. With this place set up, we can give these people a place to go, and help them out. Bring them back to human beings, if you will. I'll go in and teach them Sunday school, if they'll let me."

Despite Reasons' optimism, leaders at other local shelters say a flood of drifters is something to look out for.

"I think it's a great idea, but if there was one drawback, it's this: If you build it, they will come," said Sam Foster, executive director of the Raleigh Rescue Mission. "Some people may see that as not-so-good."

On the other hand, he said, the good far outweighs the bad. For example, The Healing Place will be a "wet shelter," which means it will accept wanderers who are drunk or high, instead of turning them away to hospitals or jail.

"Except in life-threatening weather, we can't accept those people," Foster said. "Now, we'll be able to refer them to The Healing Place."

Ann Burke, executive director of Urban Ministries, said she also eagerly awaits The Healing Place.

"I've very excited," she said. She said Urban Ministries turns away drunk and high men for two main reasons: "There's a lot of potential for problems. They're more likely to start trouble," she said. "Also, for the ones trying to stay clean and sober, it's not fair to expose them to these guys who come in inebriated."



full-size basketball court.

The center will cost \$4.5 million to build. So far, backers have raised \$3.5 million. The biggest donations were \$2 million from WakeMed and \$600,000 from the Wake County Alcoholic Beverage Commission.

"To be honest, we don't know where the other million is going to come from," said Barbara Goodmon of the Wake County human services board. "But with the community response we've gotten, I think we'll be able to raise the money. Some people may object, but I think they'll be few and far between."

She continued: "We will get this done. It's just too important."

Operating costs are expected to be about \$1 million a year, once the program is in full swing. Fred Barber, one of the program's core backers, said the cost of leasing the

And therein, she said, lies the strength of The Healing Place: It's huge — big enough to separate the guys trying to kick the habit and those who still have liquor on their breath.

The Healing Place will have room for 165 men (another shelter for women is being planned). Blueprints for the building show two wings: one marked "Recovery Program" and one for "Sobering Up/Social Detox."

The longer the men stay sober, and stick to their regimen of campus chores and classes, the more privileges they'll have and the better their living conditions will become. For example, the "Sobering Up" wing will have 70 beds — some bunked — in two big rooms. On the "Recovery" side, there will be smaller, more private rooms with four beds in the "Stage One" area. In "Stage Two," there will be two beds per room. There also will be a lounge and more shower space.

The two wings will flank an administrative building, forming a horseshoe-shaped complex. Between the wings, there will be a covered walkway, gardens and a

state-owned land will be nominal. "It's a 25-year lease for a dollar," he said. "I'm not sure if that's a one-time dollar, or a dollar a year. Either way, it's not much."

At the end of the lease, Barber said, The Healing Place will have an option to extend the lease 10 years.

Kirkman said the advent of The Healing Place will not stall plans by the city of Raleigh and Wake County to build a shelter for shorter stays. The city and the county have agreed to house the shelter in the Montgomery Green Building at 1420 S. Wilmington St.

Mildred Flynn is chairwoman of the Caraleigh Neighborhood Watch, which covers the community squeezed between the Montgomery Green Building and Dorothea Dix. She has lived in the neighborhood 40 years, and said she hopes The Healing Place is a raging success — so the city and county's shelter can be closed down.

"It's horrible, over on Wilmington," she said. "People just wander in and out. I think this Healing Place is going to be fabulous."

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