



Wednesday, April 30, 2008

**Roseville**

**Homeless site lacks lodging**

**Group racing to find place for one-stop center**

Jim Lynch / The Detroit News

ROSEVILLE -- Efforts to create a one-stop center for Macomb County's growing homeless population have hit a snag as advocates continue to seek a suitable site for the proposed building.

Officials with the Macomb Homeless Coalition -- the county's decision-making body for homeless issues -- wanted to build the center adjacent to the current Macomb County Rotating Emergency Shelter Team building on Erin Road. But Roseville's zoning board recently denied a series of variances needed to make the new center a reality.

"It's just too small of a site for the kind of project they want to do," said Glenn Sexton, the city's building director. "They were in need of four variances for the project. On a normal project, you'll have one or two. But when you get to three or four variance requests, it's probably not the right site for the project."

Now the coalition is in a race against time to find a replacement site.

"It's not a dead project for us," said Jimetta Lewis, executive director of MCREST. "But this could be a major detriment for Macomb County."

The new facility would be large enough to accommodate a unit for chronically mentally ill clients, a commercial kitchen and office space for several government agencies. Currently, MCREST offers homeless shelter at Macomb County churches that provide space on a rotating basis.

Roughly \$600,000 from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development was already earmarked for the Erin Road site. If coalition members cannot find an alternative site within a month, they will lose the federal funding.

The site originally proposed had one other key advantage going for it -- the Macomb Homeless Coalition already owned it.



Kenneth Ward, 55, talks with administrative assistant Patti Shekoski before he is interviewed Monday for MCREST.

"We can still find a piece of property somewhere, but the project is going to cost more now," Lewis said.

In recent years, the number of those receiving homeless services in Macomb County has crept steadily upward as the region's economy has spiraled downward. The homeless population is estimated every year or two years by point-in-time surveys -- single-day counts of those receiving services.

- In 2004, the county's point-in-time total was 899.
- In 2005, the point-in-time total was 947.
- In 2006, no survey was done.
- In 2007, the point-in-time total was 1,142.

"Our numbers have been growing, but what you don't see in there is that the number of families needing services has grown considerably in the last few years," said Carrie Fortune, Macomb County's Continuum of Care coordinator. "We're getting daily calls about foreclosures and evictions. The number of people we serve who tell us they are getting homeless assistance for the first time is almost 40 percent.

"The face of homelessness in Macomb County is changing."

You can reach Jim Lynch at (586) 468-0520 or [jlynch@detnews.com](mailto:jlynch@detnews.com).

© Copyright 2008 The Detroit News. All rights reserved.