

Assault Services seeks more space, privacy

Neighbors debate how the change would affect traffic and parking nearby

By Felicity Ayles
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Some Eugene residents are worried that if Sexual Assault Support Services moves to a residential neighborhood, its clients will take up too many parking spaces.

At a public hearing at City Hall on Sept. 23, SASS members and Eugene residents debated the organization's plans to move.

Through a conditional use permit, SASS members are requesting to operate their organization at 591 West 19th Avenue.

SASS, a Eugene organization that aids survivors of sexual abuse or assault through support groups and crisis lines, wants to move to a larger residence at the corner of 19th Avenue and Jefferson Street, in the heart of a residential neighborhood. The organization has meetings Thursday nights, as well

as Monday night drop-in groups. Nearby residents are concerned about heavy parking and traffic. About 15 people usually attend the meetings each week, SASS executive director Phyllis Barkhurst said.

Clients need a safe place and a sense of confidentiality, which SASS can provide better through a residence than an office, Barkhurst said. The organization is currently located in a smaller building on Lincoln Street.

One requirement of the conditional use permit is that the organization provides off-street parking to its clients and employees, and it must construct a parking lot on the property.

After filing the original application, SASS amended the application, asking to have the parking lot requirement waived.

"We feel that the parking lot is basically unnecessary," Barkhurst said.

A staff report compiled by the City of Eugene states that because other available parking is nearby,

the construction of a parking lot is "an unnecessary physical hardship."

SASS does not support the construction of a parking lot because it will be obvious that the house is no longer a residence, Barkhurst said.

The organization has put a lot of time and energy into finding other parking near the proposed residence, Barkhurst said. Members have found available parking in a nearby Park and Ride at 18th Avenue and Lincoln Street near the house.

SASS has reserved four parking spaces at the Park and Ride, and with the two spaces already on the property and surrounding street parking, the clients and staff have ample places to park, Barkhurst said.

Throughout the hearing, citizens of Eugene and the neighborhood in question were able to voice their opinions about the organization's planned move.

Dorothy Dunn, who lives near the proposed site, was one of sev-

eral neighbors opposed to the change in her neighborhood. She has written two letters to the Eugene Planning Division expressing her opinion.

"This is a residential area, and I do not understand why commercial enterprises have to creep into residential areas," Dunn wrote.

But many people supported the organization at the hearing, particularly those who had friends or family who were survivors of sexual abuse.

"I think the neighborhood would profit by having such people nearby," said Cynthia Kokis, a supporter of SASS and the permit request.

The City of Eugene will make a decision on SASS's request within 15 days of the hearing.

Felicity Ayles covers city development, the West University neighborhood and this fall's ballot measures for the Emerald. She can be reached via e-mail at fizzer@gladstone.uoregon.edu.

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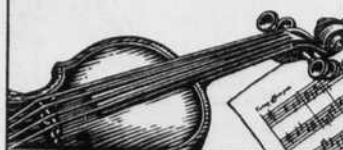
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