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PATRICK HENNESSEY

Commitment & Compromise

Where do Faith Center's priorities lie?

The Faith Center is committed to maintaining a good relationship to the neighborhood," said Faith Center (FC) Four Square Church Executive Pastor Jim Thomas to the city, at a pre-development conference April 6. But compromise does not appear likely as the church goes head-to-head with protesting neighbors.

Currently, houses on 15th Avenue look out at one another. Children bike back and forth. "Neighbors on both sides of the street keep an eye for each other," says one neighborhood organizer, Garth Cheff.

Behind the houses on the north side of 15th Avenue, the Four Square campus includes numerous structures and more than 500 parking spaces. An extra 100 spaces used by FC are located across 13th Avenue, and additional parking will soon be available on a sharing basis with the new Caesar Chavez school being built nearby. Plans for removal of the 10 houses call for two-thirds of the entire cleared space, according to Overman, to be used for more parking lots.

Faith Center's planned expansion includes removing 10 houses from 15th Avenue on the south side of FC property, in a neighborhood organized against the changes FC development would mean to their lives.

At the pre-development conference, the city told the church that "residential neighborhoods did not have parking lots," and therefore the conditional use permit (CUP) should "consider landscaping an important factor in meeting the CUP criterion for compatibility with the neighborhood." Furthermore, according to a land use analyst in the city Planning Department, the church, existing in a residential neighborhood, must show "the compatibility of its plan with the neighborhood."

The church has a congregation of about 3,000, according to one Four Square employee. During the two Sunday services, she says, about 1,000 attend the first service at 9 am, and 2,000 attend the second service at 11:30 am.

During the earlier Sunday, May 30 service, the parking lot was not full. Before the second service, however, cars were lining up.

"We're as much of a part of the neighborhood as they are," says one young churchgoer. "Have you seen our children's building? We need a new facility. You can't use the bottom floor because it floods. They wouldn't ask us if they wanted to develop their property. I think it's good we're even talking to them."

Faith Center's planned expansion includes removing 10 houses from 15th Avenue on the south side of FC property, in a neighborhood organized against the changes FC development would mean to their lives.

The church plans on moving, rather than bulldozing, nine of 10 houses it has acquired over the years; only one would be razed.

In a meeting with concerned neighbors on May 25, Four Square head Pastor Steve Overman agreed to look into alternative options for expansion. In a conversation with *Eugene Weekly* shortly after the meeting, Overman admitted, "About slowing down and looking into creative options; I'm going to check into that, but I believe we've got takers for every house. I think the soonest that any will be moved will be August, maybe July."

But unhappy neighbors in the area say the church could repair its failing facility instead of taking out the houses, wait and expand in the direction of the Armory, or work with the new Caesar Chavez school in sharing their parking and their brand new gym. FC could also add more Sunday services or urge members to bicycle to church to avoid the need for more parking.