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# Fort Lauderdale votes in favor of leasing Mizell Center to YMCA

Organization would move into new building in 3 years

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**FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla.** - The Fort Lauderdale City Commission voted Tuesday night to approve the leasing of the Mizell Center building to the YMCA [<https://www.local10.com/topic/YMCA?entityid=123135&lang=en>].

A redevelopment fight has been shaping up surrounding the center along Sistrunk Boulevard [[https://www.local10.com/topic/Sistrunk boulevard?entityid=3455047595&lang=en](https://www.local10.com/topic/Sistrunk%20boulevard?entityid=3455047595&lang=en)] in Fort Lauderdale, and many African-American community leaders are opposed to the city's plan to lease the building to the YMCA.

About \$10 million of the \$16 million needed to build the center would come from Community Redevelopment Agency funds, which is public money earmarked for economic development.

The opposition believes that if the city doles it out to the wrong hands, it will only open the door to developers and wipe away a historic black community.

The Mizell Center is named after Broward County's first black surgeon, Dr. Von D. Mizell.

He opened an all-black hospital in the 1930s, which later became a community center that has sat vacant for the past decade in the deprived neighborhood.

"My goal is to bring the history to life in the community because right now how's that history really continuing?" Sheryl Woods, of YMCA of South Florida, said. "It's not."

The head of the YMCA of South Florida wants to pump \$16 million into the site to build a state-of-the-art facility.

"It will include retail space to drive economic development to the community, it will have a preschool in honor of Ms. Irma's preschool for many, many years," Woods said. "We want to keep that history."

The YMCA would also have a swimming pool, basketball court and all the things a typical YMCA would bring.

But that's just the problem for some people who call the area home.

"That's a foreign organization that started in Switzerland, and it has nothing to do with our culture and what we want in our community," William Gary, who is against the plan, said.

"This is a black historic community, and we would like to keep it this way," Hope Gary said. "We want to see it economically brought back to the way that it used to be a long time ago."

The YMCA, which has maintained a facility two blocks from Sistrunk Boulevard for the past 75 years, acknowledges that the revitalization plan is a sensitive issue.

"We have tremendous respect for these families in this community," Woods said.

"It is not against the Y. It is against the outside entity," Hope Gary said.

"This is the first fight against the gentrification that's trying to take place on Sistrunk and the community coming back," William Gary said.

The organization would move into the new building in three years.

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