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Fort Lauderdale could fund most of \$15M YMCA center

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Fort Lauderdale officials will consider a deal to fund most of a new \$15 million YMCA Community Center that would include retail space and co-working/incubator space for local businesses.

The project could create 106 jobs in a neighborhood with some of the biggest economic and health disparities in Broward County. It would be operated by the nonprofit YMCA of South Florida, a \$52 million organization with over 1,600 year-round employees.

The four-story community center would total 65,000 square feet.

"The new building on Sistrunk Boulevard is really going to be a community center that has a YMCA in it," said Tongelia Milton, spokeswoman for the YMCA of South Florida. "It's about integrating into the community and providing things that they want to see and things they want to do and making sure we are providing for our overall health and wellness."



The YMCA of South Florida wants to build a 65,000-square-foot community center at 1409 N.W. 6th Street (Sistrunk Blvd.) in Fort Lauderdale.

The City Commission and the Community Redevelopment Agency will both consider proposal for the YMCA deal on Aug 22.

The city could lease the 1.26-acre site of the Mizell Center at 1409 N.W. 6th Street (Sistrunk Blvd.) to the YMCA for \$1 a year for 50 years. That lease would be contingent on the YMCA demolishing the existing building, construction a community center, obtaining a \$10 million construction loan, raising \$5 million in cash donations within 16 months, and receiving development approvals in one year. The final budget for construction must be no more than \$15 million.

Milton said the YMCA will launch a fundraising campaign for the additional costs of the Fort Lauderdale community center, and there will be naming opportunities.

The CRA will consider providing a \$10 million forgivable construction loan for the project. The YMCA must obtain a \$10 million construction loan from an institutional lender, and then the CRA would repay the loan over eight years in equal installments of \$1.25 million. As long as the YMCA complies with the development agreement's terms on building the facility, creating local jobs and being financially solvent, the CRA loan would be forgiven.

The proposed agreement says the CRA could only be used for hard construction costs, not soft costs such as operating expenses. It also says that once the new facility is completed, the YMCA must vacate its existing community center at 408 N.W. 14th Terrace and either sell or exchange that 1.6 acre site to a third party for the development of affordable or workforce housing.

The proposed lease doesn't specify a number of jobs that must be created by the YMCA, but it mandates that at least half of its employees in the Fort Lauderdale facility must be full-time employees who reside in the CRA area. The same requirement holds for tenants in the facility. The proposed lease also says that at least 30 percent of the contractors during construction should be minority-owned firms.

The document estimates that the YMCA facility will support 106 jobs, including 54 working directly for the YMCA and its pre-school, and create 300 jobs during construction.

The 65,000-square-foot community center was designed by local architecture firm Synalovski Romanik Saye. Its uses would include a wellness center, a pool, a gym, 7,400 square feet of ground-floor retail, 10,155 square feet leased to Broward College, a 2,075-square-foot co-working/business incubator space, community conference space, a 3,600-square-foot black box theater, a pre-school and after-school care center run by the YMCA and a rooftop patio.

"If the CRA approves the new project, Broward College will begin working with the YMCA to offer the Sistrunk community career and technical education which will lead to high-wage, in-demand jobs aimed at elevating the residents of this historical area," said Broward College South Campus President Rolando Garcia.

The retail and co-working space will be geared towards local small businesses, Milton said.

"There are a lot of businesses looking for space and space isn't always cheap when you are in South Florida," Milton said. "So providing space where they can set up until they really get on their feet is a great resource for them."

Milton said the YMCA's swimming education and wellness programs are vital to the community. Miami-Dade and Broward counties have the highest rate of childhood drowning in the nation, she said. The ZIP code the center will reside in has the highest health disparity rate in Broward, she added.

The city documents estimate a construction start date of October 2018 and completion in September 2020.

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