



Jewish girls school has to wait another week for dorm decision

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CORAL SPRINGS — Men and women in conservative Jewish Orthodox garb packed city hall waiting four hours for a resolution they never got.

Commissioners listened to back-to-back presentations from the city staff and the petitioner, Alliance for Education, to decide whether to allow a Jewish Orthodox school for girls to turn a residential building into a girls dormitory.

The Rohr Bais Chaya Academy, in Tamarac, wants to renovate a four-apartment duplex on residential Northwest 35th Street in Coral Springs to turn it into a dorm for 40 girls.

But the city says the property is not zoned for a dormitory and doesn't warrant a special exception.

The commission expected to make a decision about the dormitory Tuesday evening but as the clock approached midnight, the commission tabled the discussion and postponed the public hearing for a week.

The 80 people signed up to speak about the dorm will get the chance to do so at the Oct. 11 meeting.

Sandy Wasserman and Jean-Ellen King of Lauderhill said they'd love to have the girls as neighbors.

"It's like nuns trying to settle somewhere, they have the same type of character," King said.

The dorm concerns started when Fire Marshal Larry Archacki was called to inspect the apartment after a small popcorn fire in June. Archacki found exposed wires, torn down walls, extra ovens and other unsafe conditions in the duplex.

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He immediately issued a "cease and desist" order shutting down the dorm. That's when the city discovered that the academy had illegally operated the duplex as a dorm since 2007.

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"It was substandard construction," said Archacki. "It was something we had to take care of immediately."

Rabbi Moshe Rabin, who runs the academy, said the girls are temporarily living with families in the community.

Distraught over the situation, Rabin offered to resign because of the bad conditions in the dorm while under his direction. He suggested another rabbi take over so that the school could continue.

"People come to this school because this type of education is not available to them anywhere else," he said.

Rabin said that religious rules dictate that the girls must be able to walk to the synagogue, which is one mile away in Coral Springs. A dorm in Tamarac near the school would be too far away, he said.

But neighbors of the property don't want the city commission to grant the academy a special exception.

They say it's a nuisance to the community to have 40 girls, including young adult house mothers, running around the yard, climbing trees, dumping garbage in the yard, and talking loudly on cellphones.

They also complained about the large, 40-foot school bus that has to make a five-point turn to pick up the girls down the small residential street.

"It's not an issue with the girls or their character," said Douglas Jovanovic, who owns property behind the apartment. "It's just a matter of too many people — it's not zoned for this."

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