



The original Red's Savoy on the eastern edge of downtown St. Paul sits vacant on July 29, 2022. It will soon be remodeled into a daytime shelter for the poor and homeless. (Bryson Rosell / Pioneer Press)

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The vacant commercial building that for decades housed the original Red's Savoy Pizza just outside of downtown St. Paul will be torn down to the studs and remodeled to accommodate a new tenant — a daytime shelter for the poor and homeless.

On Wednesday, eager to get ahead of the winter season, the St. Paul City Council met as the city's Housing and Redevelopment Authority and authorized lending Listening House \$1.4 million to open a new satellite location for its day shelter services at 421 East Seventh St. In the interest of time, the council waived a 45-day public notification period.

"It is close but not directly up against other (social) services," said Molly Jalma, executive director of Listening House, addressing the city council on Wednesday. "In the last year, Listening House had 46,000 visits, and that was done by about 2,700 individuals. That averages each individual coming about 17 times a year. Most of the visits are very brief. People's needs don't last forever. Our regulars tend to be housed. They're very stable people. They're just very poor and isolated."

Jalma said Listening House, located at First Lutheran Church on Maria Avenue, offers visitors a place to nap during the day, read a book, do laundry, pick up their mail and simply find community. Last year, they helped some 50 to 60 visitors apply for state identification.

They recently located a couple who had been driving through the city but were sleeping in their car, parked on the city's East Side, because their car battery had died. They helped them acquire a new battery and get back on the road.

"We probably have mail and documents for over 200 people. Right now, there is nowhere in St. Paul in the evenings or weekends for people experiencing homelessness and deep poverty to just sit down without potential harassment," Jalma said. "We would fill that gap."

A 10-YEAR FORGIVABLE LOAN

The public funding approved by the city council on Wednesday, which will come from tax increment financing derived from private projects in other parts of the city, is structured as a 10-year "forgivable" loan that would not have to be paid back if the project remains in place for the full decade.

The overall project cost — \$2.82 million — is backed in part by a \$600,000 loan from Sunrise Banks, according to a city staff report.

As a nonprofit structure, the 421 East Seventh St. property, which maintains a current taxable market value of \$812,500, will be taken off the tax rolls. Red's Savoy closed at the location was in 2017, [weeks after the death of pizzeria founder Earl "Red" Schoenheider](#), though take-out franchises [have since popped up downtown](#) and elsewhere throughout the metro.

Listening House, which dates back to 1983, operated a day shelter dubbed "Freedom House" for some 18 months in a former fire station on West Seventh Street. The location, [which closed in early May](#), drew hot opposition from nearby business owners, who reported conflicts with homeless visitors getting into fights, loitering, littering and even defecating in the street. Some social service providers accused Listening House of failing to screen visitors for drugs and weapons.

"Yes, there are things that we would have done differently," said Jalma, noting her staff attends police and community meetings and has improved its communication structure.

Council Member Jane Prince [recalled lawsuits filed by Listening House and the First Lutheran Church against city restrictions in 2018](#), shortly after it relocated into the Dayton's Bluff area. The lawsuits resulted in wide-ranging legal settlements that have [allowed Listening House to continue to provide services with limited city oversight](#).

“It was a very rough start for Listening House moving into a residential neighborhood in Swede Hollow,” Prince said. “I don’t want to dwell on a bad thing in the past, but ... waiving the 45-day notice is really hard.”

Responded Jalma: “In order to get open by winter, we have to start now. The main building that’s there right now, we will bring it down to its studs.” Jalma said the building will be largely fenced in, and she has hopes of someday adding a courtyard and a second building structure.

REQUESTS FOR ADDED REQUIREMENTS

Andrea Hinderaker, who manages the Homeless Assistance Response Team for the city’s Department of Safety and Inspections, said the city recently relocated some 59 people living in an encampment at Lower Landing Park on Warner Road. Some of those interviewed at Lower Landing already had housing, but had returned to the encampments simply to find community. She said Listening House’s existing location on Maria Avenue can not handle all the demand alone.

Laura Jacobson, vice president of Heppner’s Auto Body, told the city council on Wednesday that the building was too small, located in a high-traffic area and not connected to social services. She said rising crime in the area had already resulted in stolen vehicles from her lot and a recent assault on an employee.

“I am concerned that the shelter will attract more criminal activity to the area, just as it did when it was located on West Seventh,” said Jacobson, who met with Listening House organizers face-to-face two weeks ago. “I also worry about the safety of Freedom House guests because of the rising crime and high traffic volume of the area. ... We do believe the Listening House has noble intentions, but historically they have not been able to mitigate the negative impacts the shelter creates.”

Among her requests, Jacobson called for the pedestrian entrance to be located on the northeast side of the property, away from the street; a caller complaint line; an outdoor litter pick-up schedule; a full-time public safety officer to monitor the area; and public reimbursements for vandalism, damage and other costs incurred by Freedom House visitors provided businesses can show supporting evidence.