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SMTD buys Planned Parenthood property for bus transfer center; clinic will remain open for now

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Planned Parenthood of Illinois has sold its Springfield outpatient clinic building and surrounding land to the Springfield Mass Transit District for the district's future bus transfer center along the 10th Street rail corridor.

But when and where Planned Parenthood might move to a new site in the capital city remained unclear Wednesday.

The not-for-profit organization received \$470,000 in federal grant funding from SMTD for its property at 1000 E. Washington St., where Planned Parenthood has operated a clinic since the early 1980s. The sale took place in August.

Planned Parenthood is paying \$1 per month as part of its month-to-month lease with SMTD, said Frank Squires, the transit agency's managing director. Julie Lynn, a Chicago-based spokeswoman for Planned Parenthood, said the lease allows the organization to stay for at least a year.

"Our doors are still open," Lynn said. "We have a lease, and we're fulfilling that lease."

Lynn added, "I'm not entirely sure how long we plan to be there." But she said current plans call for the organization to continue to provide basic health care and reproductive services, including nonsurgical abortions known as "medication abortions," in Springfield.

Tim Moore, president of Springfield Right to Life, said he learned of the sale recently and pledged to work to prevent Planned Parenthood from opening a facility elsewhere in the Springfield area.

Moore said abortion opponents will call upon local zoning officials and municipal officials to turn down any such requests from Planned Parenthood. He said his group also will inform any neighborhoods about Planned Parenthood's plans whenever they become public.

Moore, 53, a Springfield resident and a Republican who served 12 years on the Sangamon County Board, said Right to Life members are "elated" that Planned Parenthood eventually will leave its current location.

"We hope they will close their doors permanently," he said.

Planned Parenthood, which operates clinics elsewhere in Illinois and nationwide, has come under fire in recent months after the release of controversial videos depicting Planned Parenthood officials — not in Illinois — who discussed procedures for obtaining and selling organs from aborted fetuses for medical research.

Moore said Planned Parenthood's patients could get low-cost services similar to those the organization provides from other medical clinics and agencies in the Springfield area.

The Planned Parenthood property is one of several pieces of land SMTD has purchased in the neighborhood in recent months, Squires said. The district isn't done acquiring the necessary land and so far has spent less than \$1 million on purchases, with all the money coming from federal grants, he said.

The tax-supported district wants to relocate its current bus transfer center from a congested Capitol Avenue intersection to the 10th Street corridor between Adams and Washington streets.

The district had hoped that this project, estimated in 2013 to cost \$23.4 million, would dovetail with the city's plans to move Third Street railroad traffic to the 10th Street rail corridor.

That 10-year, \$315 million project hit a major snag last week, when local officials learned that a \$16 million federal grant considered critical to the next phase of the project failed to make the cut in a round of funding for transportation improvement projects nationwide.

Even if the rail consolidation project fails to progress, SMTD will move forward with the proposed enclosed bus transfer center, Squires said.

Construction of the new center could be several years away, he said, though the district would like to proceed as soon as possible if it can secure the necessary funding.

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