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Halfway house move approved

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Despite wide community opposition and contentious debate, a city halfway house will be able to relocate after council endorsed the rezoning of a southeast industrial lot.

In a 13-2 vote, council approved the application of John Howard Society to relocate Bedford House to 4444 Builders Rd. S.E. in Machester industrial area, near the 39 Ave. LRT station.

Gordon Sand, executive director of John Howard, said he wasn't sure how council was going to vote, but it's a relief to move on to the next step which is a development permit.

"If we didn't have another space we would be out of business," said Sand.

The Bedford House is on a borrowed time with its current location in Victoria Park because it will be expropriated for the Calgary Stampede expansion project.

The society earlier set its eyes on relocating in Sunalta but that didn't work out.

Sand said if everything goes smoothly with the development permit application a new Bedford House will open in 2012 with 32 beds.

Residents of Britannia, Elboya, Elbow Park and Park Hills/Stanley Park opposed the rezoning although the closest residential area is nearly one kilometre west of the proposed site.

Glen Scott, a lawyer representing the community associations against the development, said a council amendment that the society and area residents sign a good neighbour agreement isn't enough to satisfy concerns.

"The consultative process that was supposed to happen as part of arriving at this decision didn't occur," said Scott.

"That created concerns in the community about trusting John Howard Society and it's difficult to dispel when you don't have the right process."

He said the amendment is non-binding and there's no incentive that residents can negotiate anything with John Howard.

Sand said everywhere there's a halfway house in Calgary John Howard has always cultivated and maintained good relationship with its neighbours.

He said the residents and the society have to work past their differences and talk about how they're going to work together.

In the next six months, the society will work on the development permit which includes amenities, parking, lighting, sidewalks and other pieces attached to the project.

Ald. Brian Pincott didn't support the project because his constituents have safety concerns and Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart voted no because there was not enough consultation with residents.

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