

ANGER: Critics say no to halfway house plan

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VOA, a national faith-based not-for-profit, is trying to move into the neighborhood.

Volunteers of America's application came two months after its similar request to put the facility on South Lake Avenue was denied by the city amid an outcry by residents in Pine Hills — a more affluent neighborhood.

"What kind of message does that send to the South End?" said Carolyn McLaughlin, head of the Common Council's Democratic majority and leader of the charge against the Volunteers of America's application.

"There's no way I'm going stand for them rejecting it in one

neighborhood and accepting it in my neighborhood. That's not going to fly," McLaughlin fumed. "It's not good enough for them, but it's good enough for us? I'll lay down in the middle of the street to oppose this."

But the debate about what's best for the neighborhood has been muddied by charges of political double-dealing.

McLaughlin sits on the board of directors of Horizon Center, the current contract holder.

The political leader, who represents the 2nd Ward, angrily dismissed the allegations of conflict of interest, instead accusing

"If someone's dealing drugs down on the corner, they're not going to deal drugs in front of a federal institution," Yager said, adding that it would not accept convicted arsonists or sex criminals.

After rejecting VOA on South Lake Avenue, the city suggested the organization look in neighborhoods like Arbor Hill and the South End, Yager said, adding that the Fourth Avenue site was the most suitable it found.

City Planning Director Mike Yevoli said his office advised the group to seek a spot with more appropriate zoning but did not single out specific neighborhoods.

While the zoning in the South End allows for more intensive uses than on South Lake, Volunteers of America would still need at least a special-use permit, Yevoli said, noting that the group did not have to pick a spot in the city.

Yager urged the Board of Zoning Appeals to reserve judgment until the federal government makes its decision in the next couple of months.

"We're just asking for the city to give us a fair hearing on this," he said, adding that McLaughlin's

work to foment neighborhood opposition was "a total conflict of interest."

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