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# Springfield Mayor Sarno apologizes to Mason Square seniors; agrees to temporary center space

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SPRINGFIELD - Sometimes you can fight City Hall.

A group of seniors who gathered on the steps of City Hall this week to protest the closing of the Mason Square Senior Center months in advance of the grand opening of new center in Blunt Park learned Thursday their cries had not fallen on deaf ears.

Mayor Domenic Sarno issued a statement in which he said he apologized for any confusion, and announced a temporary space for the senior center has been found and it will operate until the new Raymond Jordan Senior Center goes online.

Pam Edwards, operations director for the Mass Seniors Action Council, the group behind Tuesday's demonstration, said members were very pleased to learn of Sarno's announcement.

"The mayor has given us a lifeline. That is what we were asking for," she said. "We're looking at this as a stay of execution."

Seniors who used the Mason Square center, located for years in the Mason Wright Senior Living apartments, were left in the lurch this week when it was announced the center would close at the end of this week.

It was due to close this year along with two other senior centers once the city opened its \$12 million Raymond Jordan Senior Center in Blunt Park.

That project was supposed to have been completed in September but delays in construction mean it is now likely to be ready to open by December or maybe after the first of the year.

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The owners of Mason Wright notified the city last month that they need the space that had been used for the senior center, and it would have to vacate by Oct. 15.

The seniors taking part in the City Hall protest said they would be without valuable services provided by the center, including daily meals, activities and social interaction.

Sarno in his statement said city agencies, working with Mason Wright officials, and Meals on Wheels and Greater Springfield Senior Services Inc., have found a temporary solution to the problem.

A new space has been made available at Mason Wright for activities and daily lunches until the new center opens, he said. "I appreciate our seniors' continued patience and understanding," he said.

He cited the work of Health and Human Services Commissioner Helen Caulton-Harris, Elder Affairs Director Sandy Federico, and Mason Wright director Alan Popp in working toward a solution.


"For well over 40 years, our seniors have asked for a state of the art senior center. My administration has been able to deliver on this request," Sarno said. "We all look forward to the opening and enjoying the Raymond A. Jordan Senior Center in the very near future."

Edwards said seniors are looking forward to the new center, but there is still some anxiety in regard to transportation, as well as with the consolidation of different centers under on roof.

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"But we are happy the mayor continues to work with us," she said.

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