

BREAKING NEWS - MASSLIVE.COM

Springfield seniors protest at City Hall, upset over closing of Mason Square senior center before replacement opens

Updated on October 10, 2017 at 4:49 PM

Posted on October 10, 2017 at 4:45 PM

5

9
shares

By **Patrick Johnson**, pjohnson@repub.com

SPRINGFIELD - A dozen seniors took to the steps of City Hall Tuesday to protest what they called being left in limbo with the closing of the Mason Square Senior Center prior to completion of a new senior center in Blunt Park.

"No one would do this to an elementary school this way," said Lynn Hallowell, one of the seniors to spoke to reporters. "You don't set up a program and have it provide for people in need and then take it out from under them."

At issue is the closing of the Mason Square Senior Center this week. The center, which had operated for years in the Mason Wright Assisted Living apartments on Walnut Street, is closing on Friday.

The Mason Square center was one of four senior centers due to close anyway as services were to be consolidated in the new Raymond Jordan senior center in Blunt Park. The problem is that the \$12.8 million facility has had construction delays.

The building is supposed to be completed by the last week of November or first week of December. Preparing it for occupancy by installing furniture and electronics could push the grand opening back another month until the end of December or even January.

The seniors protested for being left essentially in the lurch by the closing of one facility and delays in the opening of its replacement. Many of its patrons rely on the center for daily lunch and social activities with peers.

"People won't have a place to eat," Hallowell said.

After chanting "save our seniors" on the steps of City Hall for several minutes, they all made their way, some by climbing the steps to the front entrance and other by using

the handicap-accessible entrance on side, to Sarno's office where they delivered a letter explaining the situation.

They are seeking the city to come up with some temporary space in Mason Square for senior center activities until the new facility in Blunt Park is opened.

"Allow us to stay where we are for the next 8 - 12 weeks until the Blunt Park center is open," she said.

Vivian Moulder, president of the Springfield chapter of the Massachusetts Senior Action Council, said the entire thing is being handled badly by the city.

"It's bad. It's really bad," she said. "You just don't do that to people."

The announcement last week that the senior center Mason Wright was closing was abrupt and without notice, she said..

"No one knows where they are going to get their meals. No one knows where they are going to go," she said.

If the city intends to have people who had been serviced by the Mason Square center now serviced by the centers at Pine Point or Greenleaf, then someone needs to consider transportation because many seniors cannot get there without it, she said.

Helen Caulton-Harris, the city director of Health and Human Services, said she was notified last month that the Mason Square Senior Center would have to vacate its space in the Mason Wright Senior Living apartments by Oct. 15.

The original plan has been to open the new center at Blunt Park and then close three existing centers: Mason Square, the Mayflower Senior Center on Sumner Avenue, and Pine Point on Berkshire Avenue.

The Mayflower Center closed on Sept. 30 when its lease expired, and the city did not want to renew it for just a few months, Harris said.

Until the new senior center building is open, services lost at Mason Wright and Mayflower will be offered at Pine Point and at the Greenleaf Community Center in Sixteen Acres, Harris said.

She said she was surprised to hear seniors took to the steps of city hall. She said she had been meeting with seniors, having recently gone to the Mason Square center once every two weeks.

"Everyone is being inconvenienced as far as the new center is being built," she said. " I can understand their frustration. We are doing the best we can to get the senior center open."

Alan T. Popp, president of Mason Wright Senior Living, said the city's intention was to close its center at Mason Wright by Aug. 31. As the delays in construction set in, it notified him they needed the space until around Thanksgiving, he said.

Popp said he informed the city in the beginning of September that an extension was not possible because there had been a change of plans and Mason Wright needed the space. The deadline to vacate was set for Oct. 15.

Popp said he told the city that Mason Wright offered temporary space in another activity room on the property for seniors affected by the closing.

He said Mason Wright would not be able to provide meals to the seniors, but there would be room at the activity center for the city to set up and distribute meals.

He said he never heard back from city officials. "I'm assuming no response means the answer is no," he said. "The offer still stands."

Caulton Harris said the city does not provide meals at any of the senior centers. That is handled by Greater Springfield Senior Services at a cost of \$2.50 per meal.

She said she would contact that agency to see they are interested in participating.

Registration on or use of this site constitutes acceptance of our **User Agreement** and **Privacy Policy**

© 2017 MassLive LLC. All rights reserved (**About Us**).

The material on this site may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, cached or otherwise used, except with the prior written permission of MassLive LLC.

Community Rules apply to all content you upload or otherwise submit to this site.

Ad Choices