

OPEN LETTER TO ALL ELECTED OFFICIALS REPRESENTING THE CITIZENS OF ITASCA, ILLINOIS

July 29, 2019

To all elected representatives, local officials, and other concerned parties representing the residents and taxpayers of Itasca, Illinois:

It has come to our attention that an organization known as McDermott Center, d/b/a Haymarket Center (and herein referred to as "Haymarket"), has announced its intent to purchase the parcel of land at 860 W Irving Park Road in Itasca, currently a Holiday Inn Hotel and Conference Center, with plans to convert it into a 200-bed inpatient addiction treatment facility.

We too ask that all governing bodies with authority over the matter reject this facility, on the grounds that:

- Itasca is ill-suited to accommodate the treatment center from an emergency services standpoint,
- The location is unacceptably close to public facilities geared towards children, such as our public library and waterpark, and youth-focused businesses,
- The loss of property tax revenue, hotel/entertainment tax revenue, and other collateral sales tax revenues associated with normal hotel and convention operations will have a detrimental effect on Village finances, and,
- The construction of the facility will result in a negative impact on property values for all residents and business owners in proximity to the location.

We, as residents, taxpayers, and concerned business owners want to make clear that we do not oppose the *purpose* of the facility. We recognize the importance of substance abuse treatment services, and understand the current state of the opioid epidemic in Chicago, the suburbs, and nationwide. That said, we believe Itasca is an illogical choice for this type of treatment facility based on the size and population of our community.

Itasca is a community of approximately 8,000 residents. The proposed 200-bed facility would represent, at full capacity, roughly 2.5% of our overall population. The stated purpose of the facility is to treat substance abuse, with a focus on opioid addiction. For reference, the Village of Itasca had a total of three (3) arrests for controlled substances in 2018 and zero (0) in 2017.¹

¹ <https://www.itasca.com/1909/End-of-Year-Crime-Statistics>

While advocates for this facility and its programs will argue that those in the facility are seeking treatment and therefore are not a risk to the community, it is worth noting that not all patients of the facility are there involuntarily, and are permitted to come and go as they wish.² There are a number of youth- and public-focused facilities in the immediate vicinity:

- Itasca Village Hall, 1000ft
- Itasca Public Library, 1600ft
- Itasca Waterpark, 1500ft
- Noles Nation Training Academy, 1900ft
- Spring Brook Nature Center, 2100ft
- Itasca School District Administration, 3100ft
- Usher Park, 3800ft
- Itasca Park District, 4400ft
- Raymond Benson Primary School, 4600ft
- FE Peacock Middle School, 4700ft
- Happy Acres Park, 3600ft
- Elmer H Franzen Intermediate School, 3100ft
- Gym Stars Gymnastics, 830ft
- Music & Arts, 900ft

Additionally, within a 2000ft radius of the proposed location, there are three (3) video gaming/gambling parlors and a full-service liquor store. There are several more bars and gambling establishments within a 1-mile radius as well.

It is our contention that the construction of this facility will lead to an increase in drug-related crimes in the immediate area, thus straining our limited police resources.

We also have concerns about the ability of the Village's current emergency response infrastructure to handle the increase in calls for service that would be associated with the type of facility in question.

According to data released by the City of Chicago, there were 863 emergency responses to Haymarket's existing location at 932 W Washington Street in Chicago (and adjacent connected facilities). With only one available ambulance, neighboring communities with which we have mutual aid agreements will need to cover for our fire department, resulting in longer response times and possible navigation issues with crews being less familiar with the area. Depending on the terms of mutual aid agreements, these responses may also cost taxpayers

² <http://www.hcenter.org/faq/can-you-stay-at-home>

additional money or result in varying fees being charged to residents who need emergency services.

Just last year, Itasca Fire Protection District taxpayers approved a referendum to increase taxes to fund the District's operations. At the time, the increase was described as a way to allow the District to "keep what we have"³, and did not anticipate a need for the type of significant expansion required by this facility.

We believe that the loss of tax revenue (approximately \$250,000 annually)⁴ resulting from the conversion of the facility and transfer to a non-profit organization will negatively impact the finances of the Village of Itasca and other taxing bodies, and will force either a tax increase, or a reduction of services for those already in the community. At the top of our list of tax concerns is the fact that the losses represent a hit of approximately \$50,000 against the budgets of both our High School and Elementary School Districts.

Finally, we contend that the stigma associated with such a facility will result in drastic reductions in property values in the immediate vicinity, which by extension also impacts the finances of the Village and other taxing bodies. Studies show negative impacts of up to 17% on home values in the immediate area of these facilities.⁵

In conclusion, we ask you, our political representatives, local officials, and other decision-makers to take these concerns into consideration, and ultimately, to reject the construction of the Haymarket facility in the Village of Itasca. It is our contention that a failure to stand up for our Village in the face of pressure from outside entities, higher governing bodies, and less-informed members of the public would constitute a dereliction of your duty to represent those who elected you and who fund your public positions through taxes.

Sincerely,

Concerned Citizens of Itasca

³ <https://www.dailyherald.com/news/20181106/voters-appear-to-support-itasca-fire-district-tax-hike>

⁴ Statement from Itasca Mayor Jeff Pruyn, June 21, 2019

⁵ http://www.josre.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/9830-63_92.pdf