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## Native Directions responds to concerns; Rescue facility would serve young mothers facing homelessness

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A sign put up on Deer Valley Road near Deer Valley Court in Rescue reads, "get informed! get vocal!" in advertising RescueDeerValley.com, a website created by Rescue area residents opposing Native Directions' proposed facilities. Mountain Democrat photo by Eric Jaramishian

El Dorado County residents and county leaders have publicly expressed concerns opposing a proposed "substance use disorder treatment center" planned for the Rescue area.

In conjunction with housing nonprofit HomeCA, Manteca-based tribal nonprofit Native Directions is looking to construct a facility on Deer Valley Court geared toward serving tribal pregnant women; Native Directions representatives say it would be the first of its kind in California.

The facility is meant to fill a "significant gap" in services for tribal communities. It would house 16 women and includes additional accommodations for residents' children.

However, despite it being referenced as "New Tribal Youth Perinatal Residential SUD" in a Behavioral Health Continuum Infrastructure Program funding application filed Sept. 29, 2022, there is more to the facility than a "substance use disorder treatment center" function, according to Beth Miller, who provides outreach services for both HomeCA and Native Directions.

In an email to the Mountain Democrat, Miller explained the nonmedical, residential facility would act as California's "first residential initiative dedicated to young pregnant tribal mothers who are facing homelessness or the risk thereof.

"The goal is to create a residential facility that feels like a home that offers person-centered, culturally-sensitive care," Miller added.

Services would include counseling and therapy through horticulture, music and arts, all tailored to supporting and healing young mothers, "some of whom are recovering from substance use disorders or escaping abusive situations," according to Miller.

Miller said the facility would be in compliance with California's Assembly Bill 172, which funds treatment centers through the Community Care Expansion Program.

The county's concern is that the project overrides local land zoning and "allows nonconforming uses to automatically be considered conforming, which bypasses enforcement of regulations that would normally provide for quality of life, compatibility and public health and safety," meaning the state has more authority over the project than the county.

Addressing concerns the community has expressed, including lack of nearby medical services, fire safety and traffic impact concerns on the one-lane roads in the area, Native Directions and HomeCA officials said the facility is designed to have low impact on local traffic.

"Both residents and staff will live on the premises, minimizing comings and goings," Miller stated. "Moreover, the unique needs of our residents mean that frequent off-site travel is not anticipated."

When asked about the choice of location, 3335 Deer Valley Court, Miller said it was a "deliberate and thoughtful decision made in consultation with the Native communities we aim to serve."

"They expressed a preference for a setting that is rural and private, aligning with their desire for a tranquil and healing environment," Miller said. "Upon presenting the properties in Rescue, they were met with overwhelming approval for their serene and sacred nature."

The facility would serve vulnerable tribal women statewide and not only San Joaquin County residents, according to Miller.

Rescue Fire Department Fire Chief Bryan Ransdell during a Jan. 30 Board of Supervisors' meeting expressed his concerns about increasing the level of services that would be needed should a facility be constructed, as well as increased traffic impacts.

"I have a three-person company, if I'm lucky," Ransdell said. "If we have to do a rescue in a fire, you are talking about a major resource drawdown. We are not Sacramento. We don't have 200 engines coming, so that is a major impact and undertaking to make sure the folks get out of there."

Both Native Directions and HomeCA ensure full compliance with all local fire safety regulations and have evacuation and emergency response plans. Miller noted the location provides an additional route to access medical facilities, including the Shingle Springs Wellness Center, which is run by the Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians.

"While the facility is not a medical center, it's vital to highlight that it is designed as a residential facility, focusing on providing a nurturing and supportive environment," Miller said. "For emergencies requiring hospital services, plans are in place to ensure rapid and efficient access to nearby medical facilities."

"This initiative underscores our commitment to creating residential, not medical, facilities catering exclusively to the needs of tribal women," Miller continued.

The Mountain Democrat previously reported the facility would break ground in March. However, Miller explained the groundbreaking timeline is not set in stone due to further necessary preparatory steps.

"We aim for progress but must ensure all protocols are meticulously followed, making any specific start date, such as March, tentative at this stage," she said.

The El Dorado County Board of Supervisors sent a letter to state Sen. Marie Alvarado-Gil, requesting her to get in contact with state leaders on its behalf to express concerns about the facility and make sure community impacts are understood.

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