

Noyes artists push for city staff at center

By Bill
Smith



Lisa Degliantoni and Maggie Weiss.

Evanston arts groups are pushing for the city to provide a full-time staff person at the Noyes Cultural Arts Center.

At the Human Services Committee meeting Monday night leaders of the Noyes Tenants' Association and the Evanston Arts Council argued that a city staffer needs to be on site to provide security for art exhibits and directions to center visitors.

Maggie Weiss of the tenants' group said having art on display in the building's corridors is part of what's needed to make it a lively space -- but that artists risk having their works damaged or stolen if there's not security.

The city recently moved staffers who had been at Noyes to the Civic Center as part of an effort to create more space at Noyes that could be rented to artists.

Alderman Coleen Burrus, 9th Ward, said she thought the added expense for a staffer was unnecessary -- especially when the city also takes on financial responsibility for damage to the exhibits.



Alderman Coleen Burrus.

"So you want the city, in addition to taking on liability, to hire someone to be a receptionist and a sheriff for the art work?" Burrus asked.

Lisa Degliantoni, co-chair of the arts council, said the tenants are already paying rent for their space and should be able to count on adequate security in return.

Alderman Mark Tendam, 6th Ward, said the city should treat Noyes like its other recreation centers where it has staff on duty.

"Arts are recreation and give lives purpose," Tendam said. "Not everyone plays team sports. This is truly recreation for a lot of people in the community."

But Burrus countered that at its other recreation centers the city is running programs, whereas at Noyes it's primarily just renting out space to others.

Alderman Judy Fiske, 1st Ward, said she'd always felt the need to have someone at Noyes. "It's a very difficult building to find your way around in," she said. "The artists are paying rent to be there, and we're asking them to put their livelihood at risk."

But Alderman Delores Holmes, 5th Ward, said any solution "is going to have to be sustainable."

"It gets back to the dollars and cents of it," Holmes said. "The rents have to be sustainable."

City Manager Wally Bobkiewicz said adding additional operating expenses would take money away from funding for needed capital improvements at the building.

"We've tried to get away from staff members who just sit," Bobkiewicz added, and he said volunteers might be the solution. "We've had a lot of success with volunteers here at the Civic Center."

The staffing issue was part of a broader report on guidelines for administering the Noyes Center.

The committee voted 5-1 to receive the report, but postponed any further action until the city manager could develop a plan for putting its recommendations into operation -- essentially leaving the staffing issue unresolved.

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