

DEAL SETS CRISIS HOUSE'S EXIT FROM EL CAJON SITE

BY KAREN PEARLMAN

EL CAJON

Crisis House, one of East County's largest nonprofit social services agencies that helps victims of domestic violence and provides homeless services, is on the way out from its longtime home off Fletcher Parkway.

By the end of 2020 the agency will move away from its Magnolia Avenue address of more than a quarter of a century, even getting paid by El Cajon to vacate the premises the city owns, well before Crisis House's lease ends next year.

The El Cajon City Council on Tuesday unanimously voted to give Crisis House until the end of the year to leave the building behind The Home Depot in order to receive a \$700,000 early termination incentive payment from the city.

The money will go into an escrow account. Crisis House will have until August of 2021 to close escrow to retain full access to the funds.

Crisis House has been serving East County for more than 50 years. It has been leasing the building at 1034 N. Magnolia Ave., for \$1 a year for more than a quarter of a century. The end of the lease is not until July 31, 2021, but the city appears to have other plans for the property.

The property, purchased for \$130,000 in 1994, was recently appraised at about \$1 million. It may yet rise in value since a new Hampton Inn recently opened across the street. The hotel and several other businesses, including In-n-Out, are thriving in the spot where the city's old police station stood for decades.

In June, Crisis House was told it would have until the end of September to find a new building to receive the full financial incentive offered by the city to leave before its lease runs out. The City Council had agreed to offer Crisis House different amounts if it vacated the



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property early: \$700,000 to vacate by Sept. 30; \$350,000 before Dec. 31; or \$150,000 by March 31, 2021.

But Tuesday, a long discussion took place among the City Council and city staff, Crisis House CEO Mary Case, the group's board treasurer and commercial banker, Josh Hill, and Case's commercial real estate broker, Robbie Cornell. The discussion ended with a new plan that will allow Crisis House to stay until Dec. 31 to be able to collect the full \$700,000. El Cajon also took off the table any other cash incentives related to future vacating dates.

City Councilman Gary Kendrick suggested to Case, Hill and Cornell that the city hold onto the downpayment for the next Crisis House property in an escrow account, hold Crisis House responsible for closing escrow by August 2021, and if all goes smoothly the money will go to Crisis House for the purchase of its next home.

With COVID-19 wreaking havoc on properties and their values and few buildings available for purchase now that fit its needs, Case said she is hopeful the group will find a place to lease for the time being.

Wherever the group lands, Case said things will likely be very different. While Crisis House will still do outreach work and find permanent housing for those in need, many current offerings at Crisis House will cease.

Case lamented the loss of certain perks that have been available for years for victims of domestic violence and the homeless. Those include a physical building to escape the heat or cold, a dedicated area to pick up emergency food, clothing and shoes, an available telephone for outgoing calls, a place to use electricity to charge cellphones, and a spot for medical mobile services and showers.

Case said she would like to stay in East County and will continue to seek a place in El Cajon or outside the city that can accommodate up to 23 staffers, interns and volunteers.

She said she was grateful for the City Council taking a fresh look at the city's offer. She also said Pastor Harold Brown of East County Transitional Living Center, another group that helps the homeless, has offered assistance with the move, and El Cajon Valley Kiwanis has pledged moving trucks to help Crisis House.

"It's so good to know that we have people who care about us," Case said.

Case said she is making an appeal for reduced-rate office space in the coming months and asks that anyone who can help during the transition go to <http://crishouse.org> or call the group at (619) 444-3132.

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