

# Maggie's House request in limbo

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Despite a visible need for an improved entrance to Maggie's House and the availability of free labor to repair the area, the San Benito school district has not granted the nonprofit organization permission to fix the entrance.

"We have people from all over, Harlingen, San Benito, Brownsville, that represent Maggie's House to help children day in and day out and they have to drive through sink holes to serve our children," said Maggie's House board member and San Benito resident Dorothy Garza.

School board trustee Oscar Medrano also witnessed the trouble facing drivers entering the child abuse prevention facility. "I passed the other day through that parking lot. It was horrible," he remarked.

Maggie's House has been located on San Benito CISD property since 2001 and any improvements require the district's permission.

The Executive Director of the Cameron County Children's Advocacy Centers, Brenda A. Garza, approached the district's finance committee to request permission to pave the parking lot in March. She said poor drainage and large vehicles causing holes have made the entrance a hazard, where some cars have gotten stuck, especially after rain.

She presented the committee a copy of a letter from the City of San Benito offering free labor to make

the repairs, contingent on being provided materials and getting permission from the district to work on the area. Garza told the board members she would work on getting in-kind donations for the materials and the entire repair would cost the district nothing.

During the presentation, the conversation turned into questions about the original agreement between SBCISD and Maggie's House.

"The board was told it was just a temporary location... because this is school property" one trustee was heard saying at the March 11 meeting, which was tape recorded.

The recent bond election, which had not passed at the time of the meeting, was mentioned. Committee members voiced concern the property where Maggie's House is located might be needed for a new campus.

Garza told the committee she was aware they might be asked to leave in a few months or two years, but said she believed paving the parking lot now would improve the property and possibly benefit the district later.

She compared repairing the area to the act of a "good renter."

"Are you renting?" replied a committee member and once again the conversation turned to the agreement between the district and the nonprofit organization.

Neither Garza, who became the director in November, nor SBCISD trustees seem definite on the original agreement.

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According to a Maggie's House past board president, the two entities had a "memorandum of understanding." Garza was searching for the document.

"I think we let them use the school property for their purpose," said SBCISD board president Oscar De La Fuente Jr. "We don't receive any rent from them. We pretty much let them use the property, because it's a good location and we're not using it. I don't think there's any agreement signed or anything of that nature."

At the end of Garza's presentation to the finance committee, the trustees told the executive director the item would be placed on the next regular school board agenda.

The item did not appear on the agenda or the following meeting agenda for the board or the finance committee.

"The response she got later was 'No, the board did not approve you all going on with the in-kind work,'" said Dorothy Garza. "I'm flabbergasted as a community member."

"The reason for that being questioned is... there's some talks that perhaps we might end up building there the new elementary school and that was some of the committee concerns that there were," said Medrano, who is part of the three-member finance

committee.

The school board president said, "There might be some question concerning that, but it's kind of a little bit far off in the future to tell."

However, De La Fuente did mention the possibility that the property Maggie's House is using could eventually be used for a new campus or could be sold for funds to purchase property elsewhere for another campus.

If that occurs, "they're going to have to take that up with the new owners," he remarked.

Dorothy Garza said, "The board members are very saddened that all of a sudden we're getting request for: What are our intentions? When do we plan to move out?" She said Maggie's House received a letter from the school district earlier in the school year asking about the organization's future plans for purchasing its own building elsewhere.

"As a board we understand the need the district may have for that property, but as we know today there are no specific plans for the property," she added.

Medrano said even if future plans require Maggie's House to move, he hopes the district could find a place for it somewhere else in San Benito. "It shows that our school district generally cares for our community," he explained, adding his own support to the work done.

While the child abuse prevention facility will may have to face the possibility of relocation in the future, its immediate concern about the driving entrance has not improved since March.

"If we could do something to improve the parking area, I'm all for it," said Medrano, who said he would be contacting the Maggie's House Executive Director. But the trustee added, "I'm just the one person. There are other people on the board."

Medrano, Bob Tumberlinson and Joe G. Gonzalez make up the finance committee. Neither Tumberlinson or Gonzalez could be reached for comment.