



EAST PALO ALTO

City will consider funding for law clinic

New clinic has replaced longtime community mainstay

by Don Kazak

A new nonprofit legal service comprised of community volunteers may receive city aid to help East Palo Alto's poor, if the City Council decides there's enough money to go around.

And it could become one of two legal-aid services for the community.

Community Legal Services opened its doors in September on Bay Road, replacing the former East Palo Alto Community Law Project.

The new group has asked for up to \$50,000 from the city and is existing now mainly on foundation grants.

The clinic had served 312 people through mid-December, said Esther Lee, co-executive director, handling cases on immigration law and housing advice and services. Volunteer lawyers help with individual cases, Lee said, and the group is about to start a juvenile justice clinic.

"Everyone praised the center for the work its been doing," Councilman Duane Bay said. "They haven't missed a beat" since the East Palo Alto Community Law Project closed its doors at the end of September after serving the community since 1984.

"Nobody said no," Bay said. "Everybody said, 'We'd like to help.'"

But there may be some competition for funding.

"We do have a number of nonprofits who also need help," Mayor Pat Foster said. "We need to develop a criteria of who we will fund."

In the meantime, Stanford Law School is continuing its efforts to open its own legal services clinic in East Palo Alto. The two groups will

coordinate their efforts "so that minimal overlap" will occur, said Cecil Reeves, chairman of the board of directors of Community Legal Services, in a letter to the city.

The council asked for a report from its staff by March 1 about the city's policy of nonprofit groups.

Foster said that the city has a responsibility to make sure services are provided to residents, but doesn't have the ability to fund all the nonprofits which need help. "We need to find where to draw the line," she said.

Community Legal Services asked the city for \$50,000, including \$25,000 from the city's Rent Stabilization Board, since the clinic provides housing advice to residents.

Bay said the rent board has its own budget "but it derives its power from the voters" — so it needs to be clarified whether rent-board funds could be used to help fund the new legal clinic.

Meanwhile, the group is continuing to look for other sources of funding, Lee said.

Even with two law clinics providing services, together they may not equal the former Community Law Project in volume of up to 1,500 cases a year.

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