

Sun City Independent
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Front Page Story

Sun City School: Some worry County: Charters allowed by right if meet criteria

By Rusty Bradshaw
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Sun City residents are concerned about another school located within the community.

New Joy Ministries of Youngtown relocated to the 35,000-square-foot building on the southeast corner of 107th and Peoria avenues. The facility includes the church, pastored by Jack Duran of Youngtown, and a charter school with grades K-8. Both entities have been operating from the location for nearly a month.

Sun City Home Owners Association officials received several calls from residents expressing concern that a school was located within the community, according to Pete Granucci, SCHOA board president.

"They are afraid it will affect our age overlay," he said.

However, county planning officials claim that will not happen.

"The Sun City overlay only applies to the residential zoning districts in Sun City. It does not apply to the commercial zoning districts," stated Darren Gerard, Maricopa County planning and development department deputy director.

He added there is no prohibition against a school located within Sun City if it meets the use regulations of the zoning district within which it is proposed.

Mr. Duran, who is Youngtown vice mayor, said he checked with Sun City officials and was told there were no restrictions against a school, but went to the county planning department to make sure.

"I wanted to make sure before I signed a lease," he said.

Mr. Gerard said a plan of development would be required to locate a new use within a developed commercial site. He added the age overlay applied to residential areas of the community but did not apply to commercially zoned areas.

Bill Szentmiklosi, SCHOA compliance manager, researched the matter with the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors office. In a newsletter to Sun City residents, he stated Charles Hart, county principal planner, said charter schools are allowed by right if they satisfy certain criteria. Among them, the proposed lot must be five acres or larger, have 100-foot setbacks from the property line, be screened by a six-foot fence and have frontage on a paved roadway. School sites must also have an on-site student drop off and pick up location and that item, along with all other parking, must have a 50-foot setback from all property lines.

Mr. Szentmiklosi stated in the newsletter New Joy Ministries does not meet all of these requirements at the 107th and Peoria avenues location.

"SCHOA is trying to obtain more specific information and will release a more detailed public statement by the beginning of next week," he stated in the newsletter distributed July 7 by e-mail.

He suggested residents with concerns should address them to Max Wilson, District 4 county supervisor; Charles Hart, county principal planner; and Mr. Duran.

New Joy Ministries is not the first school to operate in Sun City. In 2008 Temple Beth Shalom, 12202 N. 101st Ave., started classes in September with religious and Hebrew studies. The classes, offered two days a week, were a response to requests and a need to adjust to changing times, according to Rabbi Shelly Moss.

While he said the school may not affect the age overlay, Mr. Granucci said there are concerns about increased traffic.

"It may come to nothing, but people are concerned," he said.

Mr. Duran said he did not want to make waves with Sun City and hoped he could collaborate with the community and its residents. He made the move because the 107th and Peoria avenues site provided more space to allow him to locate the church, the school and a storage area for the Valley View Community Food Bank.

"I helped Jesse (Ramirez) start that food bank, and a lot of Sun City people are served there," Mr. Duran said. "I don't want to create problems in Sun City."

The school has about 120 students enrolled in K-8 grades. Classes begin at 8 a.m. and dismiss at 3 p.m. New Joy officials operate one bus to transport students, according to Mr. Duran. The facility also includes a section for pre-school children, he added.

Mr. Duran said school activities will be contained within the building.

"They (Sun City residents) won't even know we are there," he said.

Mr. Duran also said no students enrolled in the New Joy Ministries school live in Sun City.

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