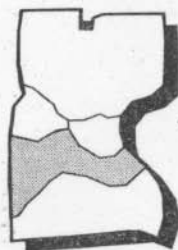


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Health council's plan to open youth center wins agency backing

By HELEN UBINAS
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Frog Hollow and South Green neighborhoods.

"There really isn't a center like this in the South End of town," said Merrill Singer, deputy director of the council. "This is a place where kids can get training for future jobs or jobs they can take while going to college."

At a Hartford Redevelopment Agency meeting Thursday, members approved the redevelopment of the building at 36 John St., which will house the youth center. A resolution to approve the council's tentative status as developer allows it to begin developing the center.

"This is a good plan," said Collin Bennett, chairman of the redevelopment agency. "It helps people in that area to help themselves."

The primary focus of the center would be to train youths in vocational areas. It would run programs to teach youths about computers, graphics, arts and crafts, and cooking. Other features would include a gymnasium, a day-care program, classrooms and a darkroom.

Representatives of the health council said \$300,000 in state mon-

ey has already been approved to help develop the center, which they estimate will open by late next year.

The center is the second part of the Hartford Redevelopment Agency's Main-John-Hudson Street Project, which includes the coming opening of the Ramon Quiros Park on Hudson Street and business and housing redevelopment of the whole area.

Many of the programs now being operated from the Hispanic Health Council, at 175 Main St., will be housed at the new two-story location.

At a redevelopment agency meeting Thursday, one member, Arthur Feltman, praised the youth center, but said he was concerned about making sure that those who would use the center — up to 1,600 youths — would not pose conflicts with businesses and residents in the neighborhood, specifically the popular restaurant Max on Main.

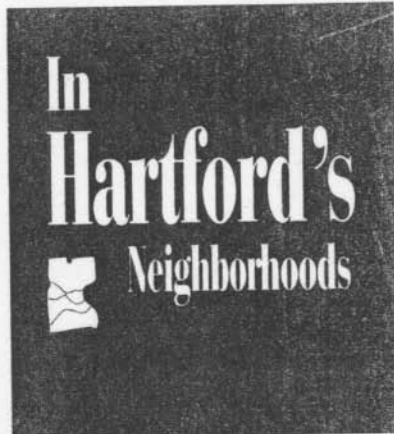
Feltman, a member of the Hartford Redevelopment Agency for 2½ years, resigned at the meeting, saying he wanted to avoid expected conflicts with his work as a lawyer.

Feltman said there could be a need for additional security in the neighborhood outside the center. One worry, he said, is possible thefts of or damage to cars of restaurant patrons.

But the owner of the restaurant didn't seem to share his concerns.

Rich Rosenthal, owner of Max on Main, said if the center will benefit youths, he doesn't foresee any problems.

"There's already tons of kids around here," said Tony Cosgrove,



beverage manager for the restaurant. "I see no reason for people to get upset. Hartford needs more programs like this."

The redevelopment agency voted Thursday to ask the Hispanic Health Council to submit a plan for security, including an after-hours staffing plan.

Kendahl Craig, development officer for the council, said Friday the council has anticipated security concerns and will do everything possible to ensure that people in the community feel safe.

"The kids are really excited about having a place with all the resources they need," she said. "I don't want those kinds of fears, whether valid or not, to paralyze us from moving forward."

For more information on the Jovenes Youth Center, please call Kendahl Craig at 527-0856.

Courant Staff Writer Mike Swift contributed to this story.