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TIME FOR CHANGE FOUNDATION



PHOTO BY JIM STEINBERG

Protesters accuse San Bernardino city officials of "dirty politics" over funding for an affordable housing project.

GROUP'S SUPPORTERS PROTEST AT CITY HALL

By Ryan Hagen

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SAN BERNARDINO » A crowd of more than 30 protesters didn't pull any punches Monday as they accused city officials of "dirty politics" in tabling funding for an affordable housing project that finished first in an objective bidding process.

Kim Carter, executive director of Time for Change Foundation, said she was tired of "back-door deals" at City Hall.

"We need honesty, we need integrity, we need transparency," Carter said, holding a sign underlining the first letter of each of those nouns. "San Bernardino needs an H-I-T."

The crowd called back — "H-I-T, H-I-T," responding to calls for chants as it did several times during the hourlong news conference on the steps of City Hall.

They were responding to Carter's call for a protest after last Monday's decision not to award federal HOME funds to Time for Change — at least for now — after the nonprofit's proposal to expand an affordable housing project called Phoenix Square.

Carter and others criticized the city for, they said, not giving a reason for their decision or voting in the open.

"At least vote publicly, because we need an open, honest government," Nicole Wolfe, spokeswoman for Time for change, called into the microphone.

In fact, the decision was on the agenda Oct. 6 and voted on publicly — 4 in favor of tabling, 2 against — and Councilman Fred Shorett said at the meeting that he was calling to table because the city needed to better understand how the project fit with other federally funded projects and a wider vision for the city.

Informed of that rationale after the event, protester Eugene Scott, 52, said a bigger picture does sound important.

"It makes sense," Scott said. "But it also doesn't. We need more opportunities for the homeless, not less. I haven't had a job in five years."

Carter estimates her project would create 50 jobs, with 90 percent of the funding going to individuals or businesses in the city. Compare that, she said, to San Bernardino International Airport or the sbX bus line, which she criticized as being underused.

"Does San Bernardino have something against money staying in the local community?" she asked.

The money in question is almost \$700,000 of HOME funds from the U.S. Housing and Urban Development Department.

The city received four bids for a share of the \$2 million in those funds it has available, and a six-person committee gave it the highest average score.

The decision to table negotiations is not final, reiterated a statement a city employee handed out Monday that matches one made last week.

"It is unfortunate that the potential awardee has come forward casting unfounded aspersions on the City of San Bernardino concerning a process that has been transparent, met open procurement requirements and has not yet reached conclusion," says the statement, attributed to City Manager Allen Parker.

The protesters asked for the decision to award the funding to be back on the City Council's agenda Oct. 20, with a vote and an explanation.

Editor's note: Kim Carter is a reader member of The Sun's editorial board.

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