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ChildSafe Donates 21 Acres to City, Details Plans for Eastside Facility

by Iris Dimmick September 21, 2017



This rendering shows the front entry of the ChildSafe Salado Creek campus. Credit: Courtesy / Overland Partners

ChildSafe is moving its children's advocacy center from the far Westside of San Antonio to a new \$28.5 million facility on the Eastside near Salado Creek. The nonprofit serving abused and neglected children purchased 36 acres of land for its expansion project and donated 21 acres to the City of San Antonio to build a greenway trail on the creek. City Council formally accepted the donation Thursday.

The trail will connect the creek to ChildSafe's own green space plans, which will include rooftop gardens, courtyards, healing gardens, and activity areas for clients, staff, and partners. The property also is adjacent to Martin Luther King Park.

“It’s not a fenced-in campus,” ChildSafe CEO Kim Abernethy told the *Rivard Report* Thursday. “We want to let the community know that, yes, we’re doing some serious work there – but we have a beautiful space that we want to share.”

The new building will be five times larger than ChildSafe’s current facility and more centrally located, she said, allowing its growing staff to provide counseling and other services to more abused children and families.

“Unfortunately the need [for abuse services] is growing,” Abernethy said, “but we can grow with it.”

The ChildSafe Salado Creek campus project will officially break ground with an on-site ceremony Saturday, Oct. 14, at 10 a.m.

Its current facility, which ChildSafe plans to sell and use the proceeds for the new, is 13,000 sq. ft. and the organization has needed to rent other space to accommodate its growing staff and clientele. Once the new facility is complete in early 2019, ChildSafe’s 102 staff members will co-locate with staff from Child Protective Services (CPS) and juvenile probation department as well as law enforcement officers and Bexar County district attorneys.



ChildSafe donated 21 of its 36 acres on Salado Creek to enhance the greenway trail system. In this image, the nonprofit’s land is the wooded area below Interstate 10 and above the Wheatley Heights Sports Complex. Credit: Satellite Image / Apple Maps



The new ChildSafe facility will feature an interior courtyard.



The lobby inside the ChildSafe Salado Creek campus features modern design and play areas.



An open, naturally-lit waiting room will out over a garden at the new ChildSafe facility.



This rendering shows a child examining a creek in the future ChildSafe facility.

This rendering shows the entrance to the ChildSafe healing pavilion. Credit: Courtesy / Overland Partners

Now, when children and families come to ChildSafe most of the services they need will be “all in one place so children don’t have to travel around to different agencies,” said ChildSafe board Chair Ray Battaglia.

The building also is closer to downtown and vulnerable communities, Battaglia said, so it will be much easier to reach.

Related: [Harvey Najim Donates \\$5 Million For Eastside ChildSafe Facility](#)

“Imagine you’re taking an abused child in for a forensic interview and you don’t have a car – you’re on a bus. It would take, I would imagine, hours to get [to our current facility],” he said. “And that’s a huge disservice to the people that are most important here, the abused kids and families.”

The City has contributed more than \$2.5 million so far towards the facility through the fiscal year 2015 budget, [tax reinvestment zone](#), and its inner city investment [fee waiver program](#). ChildSafe has raised \$17 million towards the \$33.5 million project total that includes a \$5 million facility operations and maintenance fund. Local philanthropist Harvey Najim donated \$5 million of his personal money to the campaign [last year](#).

“This has been important to [Najim] for years now. He’s been very much in tune with us,” Battaglia said. Najim could not attend Thursday’s Council meeting.

The building and landscaping will use several sustainability features, including water catchment tanks, permeable parking lots, solar panels, solar water heating, and green roofs.

The wooded 21 acres lie in the floodplain, so the land is not ideal for development, Abernethy said, “but it’s good for parks ... and we don’t do park space, [the City’s Parks and Recreation Department] does.”

Voter-approved tax funds designated for greenway development will be used to build the trail along the creek, Parks and Recreation Director Xavier D. Urrutia said. Maintenance will be paid for through the annual budget process.

“Having that trail connection not only benefits the community, but it benefits the these kids [at ChildSafe], too,” Urrutia said.



Related: [ChildSafe, Cardboard Kids Put a Face on Child Abuse](#)

These types of land donations along creeks are becoming increasingly popular, he said, as property owners “realize we can deliver and we’re sensitive to the environment.”

City Council praised ChildSafe, which is the only children’s advocacy center in Bexar County.

Councilman Cruz Shaw (D2) told his colleagues that the work ChildSafe does in the community is “unmatched” and welcomed the facility to his district.

“It’s sad that we have to have this discussion and these organizations,” Shaw said, but until we solve sexual, physical, and emotional abuse, “I’m glad we do.”

TAGGED: [ChildSafe](#) [city council](#) [District 2](#) [Iris Dimmick](#) [Salado Creek](#) [William Cruz Shaw](#)

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