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Fiscal Stress

Eastside YMCA Could Be Closing In 2017

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Eastside YMCA officials fear their doors could be closing next year if their funding is cut.

On Tuesday, Max Martin, Eastside YMCA director, Alfonso Pagan, Eastside YMCA board chairman, and John Watkins, Eastside YMCA board member, told The Post-Journal they're concerned their funding will be cut significantly next year.

The Eastside Y, located at 727 E. Second St., in 2015 had a budget of

\$150,000. The budget is mostly funded by three local foundations. Martin said one of those foundations reduced their funding by \$25,000 for 2016 and have warned Eastside YMCA officials their funding could be cut altogether in 2017. Martin didn't want to name the foundation who could be cutting funds to Eastside Y. He only hopes the facility doesn't have the same outcome as the Joint Neighborhood Project, which closed its doors because of a lack of funding after five decades of service in June 2013.

"The Joint Neighborhood Project

was around for 50 years and, out of the blue, they were gone," he said.

Martin said he understands times are tough for all local foundations who are trying to find the best ways to use their funds for worthy community causes. He said if the Eastside YMCA had to close it couldn't come at a worst time as momentum is being built in the Hispanic community. He added the Eastside YMCA is a Hispanic community center that Spanish speaking city residents rely on to help live more successful lives.

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Standing, Graciela Anderson with children from the after-school program at the Eastside YMCA, located at 727 E. Second St. The Eastside YMCA, which along with being an after-school program location, is a community outreach center for the Hispanic community.

P-J photo by Dennis Phillips

YMCA

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"There is a lot of movement happening right now. That is why this is so shocking that we might not be here next year," he said.

Initiatives have started in the last year to assist Spanish speaking city residents living in Jamestown and Chautauqua County. One initiative is the Hispanic Coalition of Chautauqua County. The coalition is looking to bring together employers and job seekers from Hispanic communities. Pagan said the next meeting of the coalition is at 10:30 a.m. Friday, Feb. 19, at the office of Dunkirk Mayor Willie Rosas. Rosas is the first Hispanic person elected as a city mayor in the history of New York. The meeting is open to the public.

Another Hispanic initiative started in 2015 involves the city's Strategic Planning and Partnerships Commission. The volunteer group started a Hispanic action team this year to help break down language and cultural barriers between the city's Spanish and English speaking populations. The action team is led by Martin and Paul

integrate people from different cultures together, city officials have involved the state Council for the Humanities to assist in the immersion initiative. Martin said by working with the state Council for the Humanities, Esmeralda Santiago, Puerto Rican author and actress, may visit the city as part of the immersion program.

The Eastside Y has an after-school program that monthly registers around 48 children, averaging 35 a day. For this school year, the Eastside YMCA is the location for Love Elementary School's After School Amigos Club. The club is unable to meet at Love Elementary school this year while the building undergoes renovations. The After School Amigos Club is a grant-funded family literacy program provided in partnership by the Jamestown Community Learning Council and Jamestown Public Schools District that meets every Tuesday and Thursday. The program targets Hispanic students who might need help with language and literacy, and engages them in activities and learning. It has

through fourth grade. Martin added they also have 20 students from middle school who participate in an after-school program. During the after-school programs, the students receive food, do their homework, participate in activities and have access to computers.

Along with the after-school programs, Martin said the Eastside YMCA is a community center for the Spanish speaking community. He said they host parties, church events and community activities at the facility.

"We're just not an after-school program. We are also a community outreach center," he said.

Pagan said the Eastside YMCA is the only Hispanic outreach center in the county that has an after-school program. He said the entire community needs to know how important the facility, their employees and volunteers are to the Spanish speaking community. He added that around 900 students, or 35 percent, of the children going to Jamestown Public Schools are Hispanic.

"It is a ripple effect," Pagan said