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By Karin Elton , Marshall Independent

Adult Basic Education loses lease



Photo by Deb Gau The Southwest ABE's current offices are a busy place. On Wednesday afternoon, students were taking part in English language, GED and other education and job training programs.

MARSHALL — It's clear that space is tight for agencies at the Lyon County Government Center, even with an ongoing building expansion project. In the past couple of months, a request for more office space from Southwest Health and Human Services has been the subject of both discussion by county commissioners and a recent building tour.

Then, at Tuesday's county board meeting, things got to the point where commissioners were deciding whether to help make room for other services, by letting go of a long-time tenant at the government center.

Commissioners voted to terminate Southwest Adult Basic Education's lease for office space on the third floor of the government center.

It was a disappointing decision, Pat Thomas, director of Southwest ABE in the Marshall region, said Wednesday. It was also one that would hurt the area residents Southwest ABE serves.

"We're doing a disservice to the customer," she said.

Southwest ABE, which offers a range of adult education programs including

English as a Second Language, GED programs, and career training programs, has been a tenant at the government center since 2000, said Bruce Lamprecht, director of business services at Marshall Public Schools. The school district is one of several area partners that works with Southwest ABE.

Last August, county commissioners had voted to approve a one-year lease for Southwest ABE's current offices. The term of the lease expires June 30. Lamprecht, who was at Tuesday's meeting representing Southwest ABE, said it was his impression that the county would then consider offering the agency a four-year lease.

However, the discussion Tuesday centered on whether the Southwest ABE offices should be considered as additional space for SWHHS. Lyon County Administrator Loren Stomberg said a space study conducted three years ago didn't anticipate SWHHS needing more room.

The Southwest ABE offices weren't part of the space request from SWHHS that commissioners discussed in February. But if there was limited space at the government center, commissioners said, they may need to prioritize which agencies stayed on-site.

"As much as I hate to lose a tenant, I think we need to keep the tenants that are closest to us," said Commissioner Rick Anderson. He said SWHHS had a close relationship to the county, with a joint powers agreement.

Commissioners voted to terminate Southwest ABE's lease on June 30, but allow it to continue to stay in its offices until Sept. 1, to allow time for the agency to find a new location and move.

On Wednesday, Thomas said Southwest ABE will start looking at its options for potential new offices. But, she said, it will be disappointing to lose the high level of service possible at the government center.

Thomas said the government center is a prime location for Southwest ABE. Being across the hall from the Marshall office of the Minnesota Workforce Center makes it easier for people to get help with both job searches and education, and for partner agencies to work together.

Without that connection, she said, *"The services we've provided to individuals in the past are going to be diminished."*

Those services have an impact on area residents, Thomas said. She shared some 2016-2017 statistics for Southwest ABE in the Marshall region. A total of more than 400 students took part in programs ranging from ESL and citizenship classes, to computer skills programs, and Certified Nursing Assistant training.

This school year 51 ESL students went on to get jobs. A total of 33 adult students took part in CNA training offered through Southwest ABE and Marshall Public Schools, and 19 CNA students went on to obtain employment.

A total of 16 people obtained a high school diploma or GED with the help of Southwest ABE programs this school year, and 10 ESL students went on to enter college.

"Those numbers would not be where they are at, if it were not for the partnerships we have had" at the government center, Thomas said.