No charter school at 51st and Keeler

Proposal withdrawn; Tabares prevails

By Joan Hadac

A plan to establish a charter school at the south end of Archer Heights has been withdrawn, in the face of opposition from 23rd Ward Ald. Silvana Tabares.

A representative of Youth Connection Charter School has told the Greater Southwest News-Herald that YCCS has withdrawn its proposal to set up shop in space they would have rented from New Life Community Church Midway.

Founded in 1997 and headquartered on the South Side at 35th and State, YCCS is a charter school operator that seeks to "advocate, develop and provide world-class education to high school dropouts in collaboration with the alternative high school community," according to a statement on its website.

In an April 15 letter to Chicago Public Schools Chief of Public Policy Francis "Frank" Bilecki, Tabares made her opposition clear.

"Our priority should be working to ensure that our existing neighborhood schools have the resources they need to provide our children with the best education possible," she wrote. "Adding this charter [school] does not move us closer to this goal, and will only further jeopardize the resources so desperately needed by our existing schools."

Charter schools are public schools owned and operated by a private organization. Critics of charter schools claim that such schools siphon students and tax dollars away from government-operated public schools—and that they leave behind students with special needs and others.

Charter school advocates say that they give more education choices to parents and that they provide opportunities to children—particularly children living at or near poverty—that they otherwise would not have.

Copies of Tabares' letter also went to Chicago Teachers Union President Jesse Sharkey, New Life Associate Pastor Mike Bery, 14th Ward Ald. Edward M. Burke and 12th Ward Ald. George Cardenas.

New Life is right across the street from the 14th Ward. Burke has long been a supporter of charter schools and has welcomed them to his ward—especially the Acero charter school network and the Noble Network, which built the brand new Mansueto High School near 47th and Richmond two years ago. Before it was in its new home, Mansueto was temporarily located at New Life's campus.

New Life is two blocks west of Curie High School.

Tabares' position was supported by Archer Heights Civic Association President Thomas S. Baliga, who said that situating a new school at 51st an Keeler would exacerbate existing traffic tie-ups in the immediate area.