

U pulls out of North Side center

The decision leaves supporters disappointed and the school looking for space for family programs.

By [STEVE BRANDT](#), Star Tribune

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The University of Minnesota has decided to pull out as a main tenant of a planned \$60 million social services building on the North Side of Minneapolis, citing worsening finances.

The university's decision last week means that innovative programs aimed at keeping families together and improving parenting skills won't be offered at the planned building near Plymouth and Penn Avenues. That's where the county's NorthPoint health and social service center is based.

"I'm just very, very disappointed. I was very, very enthusiastic about it," Council Member Don Samuels said Wednesday. He and other North Side political leaders expended political capital for the university's plans in the face of some critics who accused the school of experimenting on black families.

Robert Jones, a senior university vice president, blamed a worsening financial picture for the university and the nation, and higher lease costs than the university could afford.

He said the university remains committed to renovating the nearby Plymouth-Penn shopping center as a base for a smorgasbord of university outreach programs ranging from pre-kindergarten preparation to master gardening. He said that the school will look elsewhere in the community for space for its research-based family programs headed by Dante Cicchetti.

But Samuels said his understanding is those programs will be based at the university, with satellite space on the North Side, not based in the community.

Jones said that the construction cost of about \$380 per square foot for the county's new building raised red flags for the university about its potential lease costs. "That caused us great concern," he said.

Gary Cunningham, NorthPoint's former top executive, said the county is short-sighted if it's letting lease rates get in the way of a university program that promises big savings in

the county's \$31 million annual cost for removing children from troubled homes and placing them in alternative settings.

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