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Community member to hold meeting about El Centro's plans for Argentine property

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Charging that the Kansas City, Kan.-based non-profit social service agency El Centro, Inc., is withholding information about a pending sale of property, a local resident has called for a town hall meeting to discuss the matter.

Victor Hernandez, a member of the Argentine neighborhood of KCK, believes the agency is planning to sell its land north of Metropolitan Avenue between 22nd and 24th Streets to a company that might develop a junkyard on the site.

"We know they have entered into negotiations with these types of companies," Hernandez told the Kansan Tuesday. "But we don't know the status of those negotiations, and that's what we're trying to find out.

Hernandez said he's called the meeting to bring together members of the community and leaders of El Centro to share information.

"We just want to know what's going on," he said.

Officials at El Centro, including president and chief executive officer Mary Lou Jaramillo and board president Kaler Bole, were not immediately available for comment on Hernandez's claims.

The meeting is set for 6 p.m. Friday, Oct. 26, at the Argentine Community Center, 2810 Metropolitan Ave.

At the center of the issue is a 22-acre parcel of land that was the former home of Structural Steel. After the company went bankrupt, the site was decontaminated from high concentrations of lead, but no one has sought to redevelop the site in the dozen years since.

Although El Centro is based in Wyandotte County, it also serves Johnson County, Kan., on an annual budget of \$2.4 million. The organization's Web site says 45 people work at the agency's five locations, and it is funded through a combination of local, state and federal grants and contracts, local and national foundations, corporate sponsors, the United Way and various fees and charitable donations.