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Abram Street building donated to nonprofit

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ARLINGTON Mission Metroplex, an Arlington-based nonprofit that owns almost 30 properties in the city, has added the home of the Metropolitan Classical Ballet in Arlington to its list of assets.

Tillie Burgin, who heads Mission Metroplex/Mission Arlington, said the organization received the building at 500 W. Abram St. as a donation in August. The ballet will stay in the 8,480-square-foot building rent-free, she said.

"Everything's going to stay the same," she said. "It's just a transfer of ownership."

The former owner of the Abram Street building was Hill Gilstrap Arts Building, a corporation chartered in 2003. Frank Hill, an Arlington attorney and president of the ballet's board of directors, is listed as one of three board members of the corporation.

He characterized the transfer as "a commercial transaction."

Burgin "and her organization are wonderful people and entities, and we are eager to help them in their mission," he said.

County records show that the Hill Gilstrap Arts Building satisfied \$850,000 in loans on the property shortly before turning it over to Mission Metroplex. The city of Arlington, Tarrant County, the Arlington school district and the hospital district will likely lose about \$12,000 total in yearly taxes on the property; Mission Metroplex has exemptions from property taxes because it is a nonprofit.

The transaction hasn't escaped criticism.

Dale Attebery, a longtime community activist who lives in east Arlington, said the city's indigent and homeless populations have increased because of the breadth of free services available through nonprofits based downtown. Mission Arlington's latest acquisition isn't good news for development, he said.

"It's one more property on top of one more property on top of one more property," Attebery said. The more property Mission Arlington/Mission Metroplex acquires, "the more difficult it will be to remove them from the area," he said.

Others said Mission Metroplex's list of downtown properties aren't necessarily cause for concern.

Maggie Campbell, president of the Downtown Arlington Management Corp., said it's not unusual for a healthy downtown to be home to numerous tax-exempt public institutions. She said she wouldn't want any of central Arlington's social services locations to be gone. Instead, city leaders are focusing on improving the ration of businesses to tax-exempt properties by bringing businesses to undeveloped areas of downtown.

Campbell pointed to recently announced plans for a \$30 million expansion project near Johnny High's Country Music Revue as an example of what's needed.

"Between UTA, the city, churches and other nonprofits, we've had more than our fair share of properties go off the tax rolls or were never on the tax rolls to begin with," she said. "What you really need to have is a healthy mix."

'God just provided'

About a dozen Mission Metroplex properties are valued at more than \$100,000 on county tax records, including a 10,852-square-foot church at 1516 W. Pioneer Parkway. The agency's properties include commercial and residential buildings and parking lots. Burgin said Mission Metroplex's buildings are home to numerous congregations, including those that have outgrown their apartment-complex-based settings. Some also house missionaries who work at the nonprofit, she said.

The nonprofit, which lists its main location as 210 W. South St., also operates dental and medical clinics, free school supply distributions, Christmas programs and summer camp.

Burgin said the nonprofit's contributions to the community and the financial impact of those good works more than make up for property tax money lost through its buildings' exempt status.

"God just provided," Burgin said. "We can't predict what God is doing. I just know we're trying to be obedient. When people give us things, we're trying to use them to honor him."

About 5,000 people attend Mission Arlington-sponsored church meetings each Sunday, Burgin said. Mission Metroplex and Mission Arlington are separate nonprofit corporations and file separate tax forms. Burgin said Mission Metroplex is the capital and holding entity of the nonprofit.

If the Metropolitan Classical Ballet ever decides to leave the 500 W. Abram St., the building would likely become a church meeting site, Burgin said.

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Burgin

Map: Mission properties

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