



Estelle Supportive Housing **3501 Rainier Avenue South** **July 2015**

DESC's Estelle Supportive Housing will provide affordable, permanent supportive housing for 90 formerly homeless men and women living with serious mental illness or other disabling conditions. The building will be located at 3501 and 3507 Rainier Avenue South.

Location

DESC seeks sites that are appropriate to our program and building needs. This means looking for sites in areas where people live, sites with easy access to transit options and neighborhood amenities, and where the zoning supports the sort of multi-unit properties we create. In our constant effort to create new supportive housing opportunities for our clients, we found a suitable property for development in the Rainier Avenue South neighborhood, entered into a purchase and sale agreement in May 2015, and then we followed all requirements of the City of Seattle, King County and the State's notification process. We anticipate closing on the property December 2015.

Building design

The DESC design team has completed eleven multi-unit projects together. Our architect, **SMR Architects**, has designed several affordable housing buildings throughout the city. Our team is familiar with the Rainier Valley neighborhood, and as with all DESC projects we commit to take into consideration the neighborhood's unique features and aim to design a building that is compatible with the neighborhood.

The building will be six stories, with approximately 90 studio apartments located on floors 2 through 6. The ground floor will include offices for the on-site staff and resident common space, including a kitchen, dining/community room, television lounge and a small computer lab.

The building will include staff parking, as well as parking for agency-owned vehicles. Experience has demonstrated that DESC residents do not own or drive their own cars, and do not require parking for personal vehicles.

Construction

Construction is anticipated to begin in Fall 2016 and be completed in Fall 2017. Like all developments of this size and type, Estelle Supportive Housing must go through the City of Seattle's Design Review process, which allows for public input on the design before it is approved. DESC will post meeting times on its website to inform interested neighbors.

When the project is being constructed, our general contractor will comply with all City regulations regarding traffic, safety, noise, and utility hookups. We require our contractor to develop a neighborhood communications plan to inform neighbors, in advance, of any significant disruption construction might cause. The construction team will provide contact information for someone to call with any questions or concerns during the construction period.

Eligibility & referrals

DESC takes referrals from any community providers coming in contact with the client population, then assesses their eligibility and priority for housing. This occurs in collaboration with the King County Client Care Coordination system, which is an effort sponsored by King County and other major local funders to ensure that chronically homeless people with the greatest needs are matched with the resources created to help them. Referrals to this project might come from any part of King County, including the Rainier Valley neighborhood.

We are exploring the possibility of setting aside a portion of the apartments for individuals with higher medical service needs, in partnership with Harborview Medical Center. These are homeless individuals who no longer need inpatient medical care but need a greater level of ongoing care that cannot be effectively provided if the person is living on the street or in a shelter.

Resident characteristics

On average, DESC residents are in their late 40s to early 50s, and not infrequently in their 70s and 80s. Depending upon the project, one-quarter to one-half of apartments may be inhabited by women; the remaining by men. Residents are a racially diverse mix of people - about half are people of color, and approximately 5% are non-English speakers. About a third are born and raised in Washington State - approximately 8% here in Seattle. The rest come from around the region, the country or from other countries. Most have lived in Seattle for five years or more. The overwhelming majority of the men and women living in DESC's housing are diagnosed with major depression, bipolar disorder or schizophrenia.

People with serious mental illness sometimes exhibit behaviors that are socially unusual, but not threatening. There is no statistical evidence that mentally ill people are more dangerous than the general population.

Just like many neighbors, our residents have their quirks and eccentricities, but they have the same aspirations as most people - they want safety and security for themselves and the people they care about, and they want to be responsible neighbors. Some residents will have substance abuse problems, and some of them may use illegal drugs. We do not condone the use or transaction of drugs in the neighborhood, or drug dealing in our buildings. Substance use problems are treated as we treat all service needs, by trying to forge an alliance with the resident to identify and work toward achievement of goals for healthier living.

DESC's residents are less dependent on basic services in the surrounding neighborhood than low-income residents of non-supportive housing. DESC supportive housing contains a high level of staff and many on-site services, including meals on-site. Staff take residents on trips to the grocery store and other activities regularly, using a vehicle dedicated to resident service.

Criminal histories of residents

A number of people who have been homeless have some history of arrests and convictions. Offenses of status crimes such as public urination, public trespassing or other minor misdemeanors are common. DESC runs a criminal background check on all potential residents prior to offering an apartment, but they are not prohibited from being housed due to a criminal background, including sex offenses. We do screen out those whose criminal histories indicate that they would be a threat to vulnerable people.

Homeless people living with major mental disorders generally have lived chaotic lives since leaving their homes of origin. Living on the streets without a predictable place to live often leads many to petty crime to simply survive. While it's hard to precisely pin down the frequency of occurrence, national estimates are that approximately 25% of the homeless have felony histories. What we do know, is that the incidence of felonious behavior dramatically falls off once the person has been stably housed. The number of felony convictions among DESC residents since our housing began is less than 1%.

Concerns about sex offenders are sometimes raised, but we seldom see them among the disabled population we serve (less than 1%). Similarly, proximity to schools and day cares is not a concern because our residents are not raising young children and they do not pose any risks to other children. We have not encountered any instances of our residents posing any threats to children in the vicinity of our buildings.

More often, homeless people disabled by mental illness and/or chemical dependency are the victims of violent street predators and other criminals, who consider them to be easy targets. Providing stable housing for people with adequate staff support greatly decreases the opportunities for mentally ill people to be preyed upon.

DESC's Housing First approach

DESC has a long record of serving many of the County's most vulnerable residents with both housing and supportive services. DESC's supportive housing program is predicated on the evidence-based practice of **Housing First**. The Housing First approach is based on a simple premise that people are more likely to be successful in treatment when they have a stable home.

Clients are more easily engaged in robust clinical services and experience greater success once the chaos of living on the streets has been eliminated from their lives. Eliminating this debilitating chaos is achieved when a chronically homeless adult is provided a safe and permanent apartment of their own. Housing is seen as a tool, rather than a reward, for recovery.

Housing and Services model

Key to success of DESC's housing programs is having 24-hour on-site-staff. The "support" in DESC buildings can be compared to accommodations we are more accustomed to seeing everyday, such as wheelchair ramps for people who can't walk up stairs. For people with long histories of homelessness and serious mental illness, community spaces, 24-hour staffing and other services are similar to ramps or braille signs.

Staffing

The project will be staffed 24/7 by a group of trained staff under the supervision of the full-time on-site Project Manager. The residents will all receive case management services on-site from DESC.

There will be at least two staff on-site at any given time 24/7. During the daytime hours, staffing will be more robust. Services will be delivered on-site in resident apartments, in case manager offices on-site, or in group activities, such as community meals and discussion groups, in the community rooms. As appropriate, some services will be delivered off-site.

Management Plan

The full Management Plan for Estelle Supportive Housing will be finalized three months prior to opening and will include sections on the following three areas of priority: (1) program description and eligibility for the housing; (2) management and maintenance of the physical plant; and (3) client responsibilities, rules and regulations to continue residency at Estelle Supportive Housing. The topics to be addressed in the Management Plan include the following: description of facility, description of target population, management philosophy and description of staff roles and responsibilities; rent structure; description of long-term maintenance plan; building security and emergency plans; tenant screening and selection process; grievance procedure; house rules; evictions; on-going community education and involvement; and on-site services.

Length of Tenancy

All apartments in the building are permanent housing, and the length of residency is not limited. In general, people are more secure knowing they will not be forced to leave after specific period of time. The wrap-around services offered in the building help residents stabilize and keep their housing for a longer period of time than in a conventional apartment building where no specialized support is offered.

The vast majority of residents will stay in the housing for multiple years. Like any rental housing, residents have leases. Residents are required to pay thirty percent (30%) of their income as rent. Most residents receive income through federal disability benefits. The bulk of funding for the program's operations and services comes from different government contracts, although the amount from resident rents is an important piece.

Safety in and around the building

We mitigate the risks of illegal or unsafe activity around our buildings by employing a number of safety and security procedures. The building will be equipped with a security system and cameras throughout the interior and exterior of the building. Front desk staff monitor security cameras spread throughout the interior and exterior of the building. Staff walk the perimeter of the building several times throughout the day and night to check that doors are secure and perform basic building security and are, available to neighbors as needed.

As stated earlier, we do not condone the use or transaction of drugs in the neighborhood, or drug dealing in our buildings. We work with our residents to understand that engaging in drug activity in neighborhood is not allowed. Many of the people we serve use or have used services in areas of downtown Seattle that have the highest concentration of drug activity in the city, so we look forward to being able to provide them with a place to live in an area that has less of this problem activity.

DESC's visitation policy, building rules and good neighbor commitment are appended to each of the residents' leases that are strictly enforced by staff. This project will only serve people currently living in the building and will have controlled access to limit visitors and hold visitors accountable for their behavior. The visitor policy will limit the number of people visiting and frequency of visitors a resident may have. It also requires all visitors to leave their I.D. at the front desk while in the building, and be escorted by the resident they are visiting at all times. Overnight visits are limited. Staff are empowered

to prohibit non-residents from entering the building, and would do so in the event the prospective visitor has caused problems in the building or the neighborhood. In general, we find that residents of our buildings outside the downtown core receive fewer visitors than residents of our buildings downtown. Staff may also restrict the visitors of specific residents to ensure their safety and the safety of others in the building.

Quality of life & impact on the neighborhood

DESC is committed to being good neighbors to all who live and work in the area. It is important to us that staff and residents contribute to the health and stability of the neighborhood and that we are available to neighbors as needed, to answer questions or hear concerns.

Our experience has shown that after long periods of living on the street, residents in our buildings want to be good neighbors because they value their housing. We talk with building residents about this expectation at length, both when they move in and throughout their tenancy, and we write it into their lease agreements.

Engagement with neighbors

Our goal is to be transparent in describing our resident population and the model we employ to help them. Our clients have had very difficult lives and we have a strong objective of having a safe and pleasant community for them to live. Neighbors want this as well, of course, and so we are earnest in establishing a relationship with the neighborhood aimed at supporting this mutual objective. Our intent is to continue working with neighbors over the long haul, and we are interested in discussing our program and how best to integrate with the neighborhood.

We find that after opening, neighbors appreciate DESC's attentive approach to both how we operate our programs, and how we respond to neighborhood concerns. Neighbors are encouraged to call at any time to request a staff person respond to an issue involving a building resident's behavior in the neighborhood. Staff are prepared to respond immediately whenever possible to help; if the person in question is not a resident of the project, our staff will still try to help them get whatever resources they may need.

Lease agreements with all residents include prohibitions against certain behaviors in the neighborhood including panhandling, drinking, loitering, littering, or other uncivil behaviors.

In the vicinity of each of DESC's apartment buildings, neighborhoods have become more stable and property values have increased. The following are some examples:

Pioneer Square neighborhood

In December 2005, DESC completed the \$27 million Morrison Rehabilitation that has both reclaimed the former nobility of the building and added to the vibrancy of a historic district. What was once a negative presence on the block is now a credit to the street. Not surprisingly, development responded all around, including the opening of Tashiro-Kaplan artist lofts in 2004 and the Quintessa Apartments in 2008.

Cascade neighborhood: In 1996, DESC's Kerner-Scott House was a pioneering development in a neighborhood in transition. Originally built in a neighborhood of unimproved parking lots

and warehouses, the project was greeted warmly by the neighborhood. It now blends nicely in to the diverse fabric of high-end condominiums, market rate apartments, small business and retail shops.

Hillman City neighborhood: DESC opened Rainier House, a 50-unit permanent supportive housing building located in the Hillman City neighborhood in 2009. It is located on a lot on Rainier Avenue that was overgrown with blackberries bushes, and held a large billboard sign. Following a \$15 million investment in new construction, neighbors often refer to the building as "the nicest on the block." The Rainier Chamber of Commerce, which at first hearing of the prospect of a DESC development raised serious concern, has been the commercial resident in the building since it opened, and speaks highly of DESC both as a landlord and a housing operator.

North Delridge neighborhood: In late 2013, DESC opened Cottage Grove Commons, a 66-unit permanent supportive housing building located in the North Delridge neighborhood in West Seattle. Cottage Grove Commons complements the new development of shops and condominiums immediately adjacent to it.

Measuring Success

Success in all our housing projects is measured in terms of the residential longevity of our residents. That longevity is related to the clinical and social stabilization of residents and is the principle reason we staff our buildings so generously. "Success" in Estelle Supportive Housing will be defined in the same manner.

One of the core competencies of the organization lies in the breadth and depth of talent of its highly experienced and competent staff that works daily with one of the most challenging populations in our community. DESC is nationally recognized as expert in providing intensive services to chronically homeless people with mental health and substance abuse problems who are facing multiple obstacles and challenges in their lives. Please see our [Awards](#) page for information on recent recognition of our programs.

DESC programs are extensively evaluated, and many involve academic research resulting in peer-reviewed scientific journal articles and other published reports. DESC's 1811 Eastlake project for chronic alcoholic adults was the subject of an evaluation funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation which found that the facility saved the taxpayers \$4 million per year compared to the cost of jail, treatment and detox programs (results published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in 2009). For more information about this and other evaluations, please see our [Research](#) page.

We welcome any questions you may have about this program. Please contact Greg Jensen, DESC's Administrative Director, at 206-515-1542. gjensen@desc.org