



North 96th Supportive Housing
937 No. 96th Street, Seattle 98103
August 2016

DESC's North 96th Supportive Housing will provide affordable, permanent supportive housing for approximately 100 formerly homeless men and women living with disabilities such as serious mental illness or other conditions. The building will be located in the Aurora-Licton Springs neighborhood at 937 North 96th Street.

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 this suitable property for development in the Aurora-Licton Springs area and entered into an agreement to purchase the property in July 2016.

Building design

The DESC design team has completed twelve multi-unit projects together. Our architect, **SMR Architects**, has designed many affordable housing buildings throughout the city. Our team is familiar with the Aurora Avenue neighborhood, having one other DESC supportive housing, Aurora House, located farther north at 10507 Aurora Avenue North. As with all DESC projects we 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 100 studio apartments. The ground floor will include offices for the on-site staff and tenant common space, including a kitchen, dining/community room, television lounge and a small computer lab.

The building will include limited parking for agency-owned vehicles. DESC tenants do not own or drive their own cars, and do not require parking for personal vehicles.

Construction

Construction is anticipated to begin in Fall 2017 and be completed in Fall 2018. Like all developments of this size and type, North 96th 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. The City sends out notices of these meetings to nearby property owners.

Of course, when the project is being constructed, our general contractor will comply with all City regulations regarding traffic, safety, noise, and utility hookups. Additionally, 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

Homeless people in King County have access to housing opportunities through a system called [Coordinated Entry for All \(CEA\)](#). This system 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.

Tenant characteristics

On average, DESC tenants are in their early 50s, and not infrequently in their 60s and 70s. One-quarter to one-half of apartments may be inhabited by women; the remaining by men. Tenants 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, and most have lived in Seattle for five years or more.

People with serious mental illness sometimes exhibit behaviors that are socially unusual, but not threatening. Just like many neighbors, our tenants 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 tenants will have substance use problems, and some of them may use illicit 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 tenant to identify and work toward achievement of goals for healthier living.

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

Criminal histories of tenants

A number of people who have been homeless have some history of arrests and convictions, typically for offenses such as public urination, public trespassing or other minor misdemeanors

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 homeless adults have felony histories. What we do know, is that the incidence of felonious behavior and all other law violations dramatically falls off once the person has been stably housed.

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 tenants are not raising young children and they do not pose any risks to other children. We have not encountered any instances of our tenants posing any threats to children in the vicinity of our buildings.

More often, homeless people disabled by mental illness and/or substance use disorders 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 tenants 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 tenants 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 tenant 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 detailed Management Plan for North 96th 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 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 tenants 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 tenants will stay in the housing for multiple years. Like any rental housing, tenants have leases. tenants are required to pay thirty percent (30%) of their income as rent. Most tenants 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 tenant 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 tenants to understand that engaging in drug activity in the neighborhood is not allowed.

DESC's visitation policy, building rules and good neighbor commitment are appended to each of the tenants' 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.

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 tenants 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, tenants in our buildings want to be good neighbors because they value their housing. We talk with building tenants 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 tenant 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 tenant's behavior in the neighborhood. Staff are prepared to respond whenever possible to help; if the person in question is not a tenant of the project, our staff will still try to help them get whatever resources they may need.

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

Measuring Success

Success in all our housing projects is measured in terms of the residential longevity of our tenants. That longevity is related to the clinical and social stabilization of tenants and is the principle reason we staff our buildings so generously. "Success" in North 96th 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. DESC is nationally recognized as expert in providing intensive services to chronically homeless people with mental health and substance use 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