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87-unit project would provide housing for homeless people

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If it gets financing, the Downtown Emergency Service Center plans to start construction this coming summer on an 87-unit north Seattle apartment complex for formerly homeless people with behavioral health disabilities, its executive director said.

The 10507 Aurora Ave N. project should take 13 months to finish, said Bill Hobson of the Seattle-based organization that serves homeless people.

SMR Architects is designing the complex. Common Ground is providing development consultation.

Walsh Construction did construction cost estimating.

DESC plans to go out to bid for a contractor by May.

The building will have 350- to 425-square-foot efficiencies with kitchen and bath, about 6,000 square feet of commercial space and 21 parking stalls.

It also will have a computer room and a community room for meetings and dining, hydronic heating, low-flow toilets, rainwater collection for irrigation, low VOC and recycled materials, and perhaps a partial green roof and covered seating in a green space.

On-site staff will help residents manage psychiatric and chemical dependencies issues, and the entrance will always be monitored, Hobson said.

The estimated project cost is \$16 million, including land.

“The real wild card in going to be the value of the construction contract,” Hobson said. “If you were asking me what this building would cost three years ago I would have told you \$18 (million) to \$18.5 (million).”

DESC should know by months-end if it will get 45 to 50 percent of the project financing from the city of Seattle, King County and Washington State. If it doesn't, construction will be delayed, Hobson said. Low-income tax credits allocated by the Washington State Housing Finance Commission would make up the remainder of financing.

DESC provides homeless people housing and clinical programs. It works with 7,000-plus people each year, with a staff of 330 and an operational budget of a little more than \$20 million, Hobson said.

In King County on any given day there are about 8,600 homeless people — 2,000 sleeping outside, he said. Vacancy is 1 percent in the 800 housing units for the formerly homeless DESC manages, he said. “We simply don't have enough housing for this population.”

About 300 of those units are in the downtown Seattle core, with most of the rest in other Seattle neighborhoods.

The organization bought the Aurora Avenue North property earlier this year, Hobson said.

It paid Gae Bowman \$1.15 million for the 19,976-square-foot site, according to public records, or nearly \$58 per square foot. King County appraises it at nearly \$1.1 million.

Tom Grennan, Bowman's son, said the Cyndy's House of Pancakes that has operated at the site since 1972 will stay open until construction and hopes to move into the new building if an acceptable rent and parking agreement can be reached.

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