

RIVER STREET RESIDENCES

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What is the River Street Residences project?

- A. The River Street Residences is an initiative of the City and County of Honolulu to produce 100 permanent rental units in the Downtown Honolulu and Chinatown area to be developed and operated by a private nonprofit organization selected by the City and County of Honolulu through a Request for Proposals (RFP) process. This public-private partnership was conceived in response to concerns expressed at the Chinatown Summit, convened by the Mayor in 2006, about the increasing level of homelessness and its impact on the quality of life for the people in the community and effect on commercial businesses.

The River Street Residences is designed to address the need for safe, decent, and affordable housing for people who have been chronically homeless using a "Housing First" approach. According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, this approach is "The most successful model for housing people who experience chronic homelessness . . . "

The property is located at 1311 River Street, zoned BMX-4 and is comprised of a land area of 26,925 square feet. The River Street Residences will provide a mix of residential units to accommodate individuals, couples, and possibly small families including persons with special needs and disabilities. Residents will also be provided with a program of onsite supportive services.

In addition to developing permanent housing, there will be 24 hour a day staffing, a program of supportive services and employment services. The successful bidder will also be responsible for providing access to restrooms that can be made available to the public on a 24 hour basis.

Q. What is the Federal Definition of "Chronic Homelessness?"

- A. HUD adopted the Federal definition which defines a chronically homeless person as "either (1) an unaccompanied homeless individual with a disabling condition who has been continuously homeless for a year or more, OR (2) an unaccompanied individual with a disabling condition who has had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years." This definition is adopted by HUD from a federal standard that was arrived upon through collective decision making by a team of federal agencies including HUD, the U.S. Department of Labor, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness.

In its definition of a chronically homeless person, HUD defines the term "homeless" as "a person sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation (e.g. living on the

streets, for example) OR living in a homeless emergency shelter.” A disabling condition is defined as “a diagnosable substance abuse disorder, a serious mental illness, developmental disability, or chronic physical illness or disability, including the co-occurrence of two or more of these conditions.” In addition, “a disabling condition limits an individual’s ability to work or perform one or more activities of daily living.”

Q. Why was this particular site selected and why can’t this project be relocated to another area?

- A. The site was originally purchased by the City using federal Community Development Block Grant funds for the purpose of developing affordable housing. To relocate this project somewhere else within the urban core would be expensive and would delay the project indefinitely. A “land swap” is not practical due to the amount of time and legal issues it would entail.

The site’s proximity to Downtown Honolulu and Chinatown is close enough to where people are residing (sidewalks, doorways, etc.), to be an attractive option. A common misperception is that service providers attract more homelessness to an area. The reality is that many of the service providers in the Downtown Honolulu and Chinatown area are there because the people who need the services are there. Even if the service providers moved out of the area, it is unlikely that those who are homeless would follow them.

Q. What is the “housing first” model and what are the benefits?

- A. Housing First is an approach to ending homelessness that centers on providing people experiencing homelessness with housing quickly and then providing services as needed. The supportive services address addiction, mental health issues, provision of case management, and offer stability for individuals who have been homeless. These services increase the ability of homeless individuals to maintain permanent housing and achieve self-sufficiency.

The “housing first” model has been shown to:

- Reduce “street” homelessness;
- Reduce arrests of people who are homeless for status crimes (loitering, public urination, or public intoxication);
- Reduce emergency room visits and costs; and
- Reduce incarceration days and costs.

Q. Is the River Street Residences a homeless shelter?

- A. No. The River Street Residences will provide permanent affordable rental units.

Q. Will the project attract more homeless people to the downtown/Chinatown area?

- A. The project was proposed in response to community concerns voiced at the 2006 Chinatown Summit about the problems that have arisen as a result of the number of homeless people already in the area. Projects such as these do not tend to “draw” more people to the general area (streets). However, it is true that the project is allowed to accept referrals to this program from providers servicing people who are homeless from other geographic regions.

Q. Will the project attract more criminal elements into the community?

- A. Many of the criminal elements described by community members already exist in the area. These include use and sale of drugs, theft, and acts of violence. A City prosecuting attorney has repeatedly stated that 75% of the crime committed in Chinatown is carried out by people who live outside of the district.

The people to be served by the River Street Residences are generally not the ones involved in the crimes listed above. Furthermore, having a new building and a 24 hour presence in the neighborhood will be more likely to increase the safety and security in a currently dangerous part of town riddled with active drug dealing.

Q. Will this residence be in conflict with the Weed and Seed Program?

- A. The River Street Residences can work with the Weed and Seed program to address quality of life issues in the Downtown Honolulu and Chinatown area and will also serve to seed the area with a new supportive housing program that addresses chronic homelessness. The successful bidder will need to take into consideration the tools used by the Weed and Seed Program, such as geographic restrictions, and incorporate these into the program’s policies and procedures.

Q. How many rental units will be constructed?

- A. The City is requesting for 100 studio and one-bedroom units to be constructed that can accommodate individuals, couples, and small families. The actual unit count will be determined after the developer is selected. In addition, the project will include space for the delivery of services to residents, facilities to accommodate resident activities, and staff offices.

Q. Where will the funding come from?

- A. The Department of Community Services requested a total of \$10.6 million from the Affordable Housing Fund over a 4 year period in its capital improvement budget.

Q. Will this project only serve people who are homeless?

- A. The City's Affordable Housing Fund must be used to provide housing for persons earning less than 50% of the median household income and a mixed-income project must be comprised principally of housing for low and moderate income persons. The developer will be required to serve people who are homeless with the use of the Affordable Housing Fund. However, this does not preclude a developer using their own financing, to develop housing for people who are not homeless and could allow for a commercial component on the premises as well.

Q. When is the project anticipated to begin?

- A. The process begins with the publication of a Request for Proposals. It is anticipated that it will take a **minimum** of 6 months from publication to selection of an organization and then another 3 to 6 months before a contract can be executed. NO FUNDS will be awarded or expended until the lease of the property is approved by the City Council and a contract is signed.

Q. Who will develop and manage the project?

- A. The River Street Residences will be developed, owned, and managed by a nonprofit agency selected by the City through a Request for Proposals process. The selected nonprofit agency will be responsible for securing the financing necessary to develop the project, overseeing the design and construction of the project, and managing the operations of the project including the program of supportive services. The City and County of Honolulu will assist the selected nonprofit agency by leasing the project site for \$1 per year and provide a grant of \$10.6 million from the City's Affordable Housing Fund to support the planning, design, and construction of the proposed project with the approval of the Honolulu City Council.

Q. How will the community be able to provide input and recommendations for this proposed project?

- A. The community will be able to provide testimony on the proposed appropriation from the Affordable Housing Fund for the River Street Residences when the City Council holds its public hearings for each year's Capital Improvement Project budget. The Department of Community Services is also required to hold a public hearing on the proposed lease of the project site after the Request for Proposals process is complete. Final approval of the lease is subject to the approval of the City Council, and the community will be able to provide testimony to the City Council when it considers approving the lease of the property. The nonprofit agency that will develop and manage the project will be required to make periodic presentations to the Neighborhood Board. The presentations will include discussion on the plans and design of the project, the management plan, and the

program of supportive services. The public will also be able to provide comments on the proposed project during the environmental review process.

Q. What is the developer selection and approval process?

A. The process is outlined below:

1. Developer Selection Phase

- a. The Department of Community Services (DCS) issues a Request for Proposals for the development of the River Street Residences
- b. Proposals are received and reviewed by the City.
- c. The City will hold discussions and negotiations with qualified Developers who submitted proposals.
- d. A preliminary selection of a Developer is made by the City.
- e. DCS files a report with the City Clerk on the outcome of the Request for Proposal, the discussions with qualified Developers, and the selection of the Developer.

2. Community Review Phase

- a. The selected Developer will be required to make presentations to community organizations including, but not limited to, the Downtown Neighborhood Board No. 13, community and business associations and other interested groups as necessary.
- b. Community comments and suggestions shall be considered, and follow-up meetings and presentation shall be conducted as necessary.
- c. DCS will hold a public hearing on the proposed lease of the project site at nominal lease rent (\$1.00 per year) pursuant to Section 28.3.4(h)(1), Revised Ordinances of Honolulu.

3. Approvals

- a. Developer and City finalize lease and development agreement which incorporate any modifications to the Developer's Proposal to address community concerns.
- b. DCS submits a Resolution approving the execution of a lease and development agreement with the Developer to the Honolulu City Council for review and approval.

- c. The Resolution approving the execution of the lease and development agreement is assigned to a City Council Committee. The Committee places the Resolution on its meeting agenda. The public may provide written and oral testimony on the proposed Resolution at the Committee meeting. The Committee may amend and modify the lease and development agreement.
- d. The City Council Committee may report the Resolution out for approval by the Full City Council or hold the Resolution in Committee for further discussion.
- e. If the Resolution is reported out of Committee, it will be scheduled to be adopted by the Honolulu City Council at a City Council meeting. The public may provide written and oral testimony to the full City Council at the City Council meeting. The City Council may amend or modify the lease or development agreement prior to adopting the Resolution.
- f. Upon City Council approval of the Resolution authorizing the execution of the lease and development agreement, the City and Developer will execute these documents and the project will move forward into implementation.

***** If the documents are not executed by June 30, 2010, \$4.6 million appropriated from the Affordable Housing Fund will lapse.***

For more information, please go to: <http://www.honolulu.gov/dcs/homeless.htm>

Email questions or comments to: riverstreet@honolulu.gov