**DC General Family Shelter Replacement Plan**

**Introduction**

In his 2013 Family Shelter Restructuring Plan, Mayor Gray laid out his vision to fundamentally change how the District of Columbia meets the needs of families experiencing housing instability. Instead of a one-size fits all “Shelter First” approach, the District is changing how it helps families find lasting housing solutions. Today, increased prevention, community-based shelters, and targeted housing assistance are key strategies the District is using to successfully end homelessness for hundreds of families each year. Closing the large, 288-unit DC General Family Shelter, at the earliest possible time, is a critical step in completing this transformation.

By and large, families experiencing homelessness in the District are not sleeping on the street or in other places not meant for people to live.[[1]](#footnote-1) Rather, families experiencing homelessness often endure months, if not years, of unstable housing arrangements doubled or tripled up with family and friends, with frequent moves between unstable and unpredictable environments. Rather than continuing the District’s historic reliance on “Shelter First”, or “Shelter on Demand”, which fueled an ever-increasing and unsustainable reliance on shelter, this Administration has taken a fundamentally different approach.

Most importantly, families now have access to a variety of resources to avoid shelter altogether. From a re-engineered Virginia Williams Family Resource Center (VWFRC), which serves families seeking homeless services using the framework and resources of the re-designed TANF, to new community-based Homeless Prevention sites, more and more families are getting the support and resources they need to stay in their communities while they work to increase their employment and housing stability.

For families that have no alternatives and must enter shelter, the District is building a consistent and coordinated approach to help families use their time in shelter to prepare for and successfully exit as quickly as possible to permanent housing. Using key strategies, such as implementing a common assessment tool[[2]](#footnote-2) that helps identify the appropriate housing

assistance for each family, and developing a revolving inventory of housing units through the 500 Families Campaign, over 500 families have exited shelter to permanent housing since the end of January 2014, when shelter placements were at their highest.

Families exiting shelter receive supportive services along with financial housing assistance. But families need the meaningful and lasting support systems that only community, friends and family can provide. Research shows that families who have strong connections to their community are more likely to maintain their housing. To help strengthen a family’s community support and reduce the need for a family to return to shelter, the District has partnered with the faith community in an innovative program called One Congregation, One Family. Through this initiative, families have the opportunity to have a mentoring team. These teams can provide a family with practical life skills, caring encouragement, and access to a range of talents and supports that can last a lifetime.

Transforming the District’s approach to helping families experiencing housing instability is well underway. Closing the DC General Family Shelter, which was not designed to be a family shelter and has provided a stop-gap solution at best, is in the best interests of families and the District.

**DC General Family Shelter Replacement Plan**

Currently, the District provides 121 units through community-based shelter programs of between 20 and 45 units at each location, and 288 units at the DC General Family Shelter. The DC General Family Shelter Closure Plan lays out the specific facilities needed in order to close the DC General Family Shelter under two basic options, including legal considerations, facility development strategies and processes, cost estimates, closure schedule options and timeline considerations.

The District is committed to closing the DC General Family Shelter at the earliest possible time. The Plan recommends a one-to-one replacement of the number of units currently provided at the DC General Family Shelter be available in other, more appropriate facilities before closure. This Plan also recommends that at least the main building of the DC General Family Shelter should be closed in its entirety all at once,[[3]](#footnote-3) rather than in a piecemeal fashion, to avoid an unplanned expansion of the overall shelter capacity.

***Development Considerations***

The District of Columbia Department of General Services (DGS) is the agency responsible for the acquisition and development of the facilities that will provide the replacement capacity needed to support the closure of the DC General Family Shelter. DGS has the option of bringing these facilities online through lease, purchase, or construction. Ideally, these facilities should be ready for occupancy before the start of the FY 16 hypothermia season, i.e. before November 1, 2015.

To accomplish this, DGS is pursuing two primary strategies simultaneously, to maximize their ability to identify sites and bring them on-line as quickly as possible:

(1) A Solicitation for Offers (SFO) to private owners and developers, resulting in a leased building; and,

(2) A review of existing DGS inventory for District-owned sites to develop through new construction.

The District’s Solicitation for Offers (SFO) was released on Friday, September 26, 2014. It is a “rolling solicitation”, which allows the District to review sites and proposals as they are received, and negotiate lease terms expeditiously. To further accelerate the process, the District will also encourage developers to initiate design and other development work upon executing a letter of intent. Below is a generic summary schedule for these solicitations:

**Solicitation for Offers (SFO)**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Oct | Nov | Dec | J/15 | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec | J/16 | Feb | Mar |
| Solicitation |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Lease Negot |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| LOI |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Lease Exec. |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Council Pkg |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Design |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Permit |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Construction |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

Completion January – March 2016

Any District-owned sites identified by DGS for renovation or new construction would require funding through the Capital Budget and typically requires a longer timeline due to permitting and approval processes. In addition, there are currently few District-owned sites of sufficient size to accommodate the program needs. Below is a generic summary schedule for District-Owned sites. This schedule is also dependent upon Capital Dollars being allocated to create these facilities.

**District-Owned Sites**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | O | N | D | J/15 | F | M | A | M | J | J | A | S | O | N | D | J/16 | F | M | A | M | J | J | A | S | O |
| Property ID |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| D/B Solicit’n |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Council Pkg |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Design |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Permit |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Construction |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

Completion July – October 2016

The cost, funding, and timeline between identification and occupancy for any particular site will depend, in large part, on which strategy yielded that site. If facilities are offered through the SFO that come ready to occupy or with minimal renovation, the DC General Family Shelter could close as early as the fall of 2015. Buildings that require significant renovation or new construction may not be ready to occupy until the winter of 2016.

**Solicitation for Offers (SFO) – Minimal Renovation**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Oct | Nov | Dec | J/15 | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul |
| Solicitation |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Lease Negot |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| LOI |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Lease Exec. |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Council Pkg |  |  |  | N.A |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Design |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Permit |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Construction |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

Completion Spring/Summer 2015

***Legal Considerations***

Under the District law governing the provision of homeless services, shelter for families must be provided in apartment style units; except where no apartment style units are available, the Mayor is authorized to provide such shelter in non-apartment-style shelter that provides private rooms.[[4]](#footnote-4) In addition, the building must meet the legal program standards for shelter, including access to play space for children and proximity to public transportation and community amenities.

**REPLACEMENT OPTIONS**

**Option 1: Six (6) 40-50 Unit Community-Based Shelter Buildings**

In the District and across the country, best practices show that families can thrive and be more successful when shelter is provided in smaller, community-based, shelter programs. The District is home to a number of excellent community-based family shelter programs, which have proven to be good neighbors, while providing critical emergency support for families.

Option one represents a one-to-one replacement of the DC General Family Shelter capacity by expanding the District’s inventory of smaller, neighborhood-based programs. These facilities would be in various locations throughout the City, to avoid undue burden on any community and to better integrate these uses in neighborhoods. Each location would ideally have no more than 50 families at one location.

Multiple, community-based shelters provide greater choice for families and better access to existing jobs, schools, healthcare, and personal networks. Smaller shelters located within thriving neighborhoods provide a family friendly environment, and safe and secure units.

Programmatically, each building would provide separate rooms for each family, some with individual bathrooms, some with shared bathrooms, communal eating areas or kitchenettes within individual rooms, on-site offices for shelter program operations, case management, community meeting areas, and access to playground and laundry facilities.

The timeline for creating these Community-Based Shelter buildings would be largely based on the SFO schedule above; however, the timeline is also contingent on when responses from the private sector are received, and the schedules that can be negotiated with those private respondents.

**Option 2: A Combination of Small (40-50 unit) and Medium (60-100 unit) Community-Based Shelter Buildings**

The ability of the District to lease or build replacement shelters under this Plan will be shaped by the response to the SFO and the review of available District-owned buildings. Option two represents the possibility that the best options to create replacement shelter units will be through a combination of several smaller shelter facilities of no more than 50 units and medium size buildings of 60-100 families.

Whether a shelter is small or medium size, each building would provide a similar programming model, including separate rooms for each family, some with individual bathrooms, some with shared bathrooms, communal eating areas or kitchenettes within individual rooms, on-site offices for shelter program operations, case management, community meeting areas, and access to playground and laundry facilities.

The timeline for creating these Community-Based Shelter buildings would be largely based on the SFO schedule above; however, the timeline is also contingent on when responses from the private sector are received, and the schedules that can be negotiated with those private respondents.

**Cost Considerations for Leased Buildings**

Leased buildings generally offer the District the greatest flexibility, as the renovations are funded through the agency’s operations budget and are amortized over a designated lease period. Furthermore, soliciting and negotiating turnkey leased sites from the private sector can happen relatively quickly. Property owners have an incentive to expedite design, approval and construction; because the District does not start paying rent until the facility is ready for occupancy.

Facility costs may include: the amortized rent, renovation costs, security systems, utilities, and maintenance. Program costs include: administrative staff, program and case management staff, food, security, and other incidental costs. The below chart outlines the per-building costs, which are subject to variations based on SFO responses and subsequent negotiations.

|  |
| --- |
| **DC General Replacement Budget- Leased Sites (40-50 units)** |
| **Type of Annual Cost (Per Building)** | **Description** | **One-Time Costs**  | **Annual Operating Costs (per 40 unit building)** | **Annual Operating Costs (per 50 unit building)** |
| **Facility Costs** (40 -50 units) | Total per unit cost is $2,000/month, which includes: Rent, Renovation, Furniture, Security System, Utilities, Cable/Phone Installation, Maintenance | N/A |  $ 960,000 | $ 1,200,000 |
| **Program and Operations**  | Administrative and program staff, food, security | N/A |  2,966,000 |  2,966,000  |
| **Total Cost Per Building** | N/A | **$ 3,926,000** | **$ 4,166,000**  |
| **Total Cost for 6 Buildings** | N/A | **$23,556,000** | **$24,996,000** |

**Cost Considerations for New Construction of District-Owned Sites**

To build or renovate a District-owned site, the District would provide funding through the Capital Budget. Typically, capital projects require a longer timeline due to permitting and approval processes. In addition, there are currently few District-owned sites of sufficient size to accommodate the program needs.

In addition to the one-time renovation or construction costs, there would be annual facility costs such as property management fees, utility costs, and maintenance. Program costs would be the same as for a leased building, and would include administrative staff, program and case management staff, food, security, and other incidental costs. The below chart outlines the per-building costs, which are subject to variations based on actual site development considerations.

|  |
| --- |
| **DC General Replacement Budget- District-Owned Sites (40-50 units)** |
| **Type of Annual Cost (Per Building)** | **Description** | **One-Time Costs** **(Per Building)** | **Annual Operating Costs****(Per 40-50 unit Building)** |
| **Facility Costs** (40 -50 units) | Property Management, Utilities and Maintenance | N/A | $ 80,000 |
| **Program and Operations**  | Administrative and program staff, food, security | N/A | $ 2,966,000 |
| **Construction** | Construction, including demolition and build out |  $ 8,000,000 | N/A |
| **Total One-Time Costs Per Building** | **$ 8,000,000** | \_\_\_ |
| **Total Annual Operating Costs Per Building** | \_\_\_ | **$3,046,000** |
| **Total One-Time Costs For 6 Buildings** | **$ 48,000,000** | \_\_\_ |
| **Total Annual Operating Costs For 6 Buildings** | \_\_\_ | **$18,276,000** |

1. The HUD mandated “Point-in-Time Count” conducted annually in each January since 2003 has never counted a family living outside or in inhabitable situations, including during the recent bitter winter of FY14. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Through a partnership between the Community of Hope (COH),Transitional Housing Corporation (THC),

the DC Department of Human Services (DHS) and The Community Partnership for the Prevention of

Homelessness (TCP) with funding from the Freddie Mac Foundation, the District piloted and then expanded system-wide the use of the evidence-informed assessment tool, the Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (SPDAT), which helps families determine the appropriate housing assistance needed to exit shelter. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The DC General Shelter is comprised of three buildings -the main building, former cafeteria, and Building 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. D.C. Official Code § 4-753.01(d). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)