

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Department of General Services



A Plan to Close DC General: Short-Term Family Housing in All 8 Wards

Ward 3
3320 Idaho Ave. NW

Department of General Services

Testimony of
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Director

Before the
Board of Zoning Adjustment

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DC Office of Zoning
441 4th Street, NW – Suite 200S
Washington, D.C. 20001

Welcome

Good morning Chairperson Hill, and members and staff of the Boarding of Zoning Adjustment. I am Greer Gillis, Director of the Department of General Services (DGS). Thank you for the opportunity to testify today about our efforts to support Mayor Bowser's goal to close the family shelter at DC General by 2018.

Property Search and Solicitation for Offers

We are here today before the BZA seeking zoning relief for approval of 3320 Idaho Ave as an Emergency Shelter for more than 25 persons. Section U – 420.1(f) identifies conditions for approving an Emergency Shelter use. The BZA may approve more than 25 persons if there is no other reasonable alternative to meet the program needs of that area of the District.

As the Director of DGS I can state that no other reasonable alternative is practical to meet the needs of the District.

The Department of General Services started a property search by looking at District-owned properties in the city's inventory nearly two years ago. We looked for properties to purchase or lease only after we had exhausted our inventory. We worked in partnership with the Department of Human Services (DHS) to develop relevant criteria, and released a Solicitation for Offers (SFO) based on those metrics in late 2014 to get viable proposals from the community. In the summer of 2015, we hired a broker to help us identify sites in Wards where we had not yet identified feasible sites, such as Ward 3.

We executed the SFO process as an open solicitation, so sites were evaluated when they were brought forward. All responses to the solicitations were directed to DGS. Upon receipt of the developer's submission of proposals, potential sites were forwarded to DHS for evaluation. In order to close DC General, it is necessary to secure a total of 280 total units. The District sought roughly 12,000 to 30,000 square feet per site, preferably close to public transportation and other services and amenities, and sites that are economically feasible and able to be developed within a 24-30 month timeline.

In Ward 3 we received six proposals with one site; 2619 Wisconsin Ave, NW identified to be of adequate size and within close proximity to public transportation and having the capacity to satisfy the program requirements.

However, the D.C. Council voted to locate these shelters on District-owned properties. The D.C. Council conducted their own search of DC-owned properties, and the Homeless Shelter Replacement Act of 2016 designated 3320 Idaho Avenue, NW; a District owned- site as the Ward 3 shelter location. In October 2016, Ayers- Saint Gross was awarded a contract for Architectural and Engineering Services leading the efforts for the Ward 3 site..

Development Process

Over the next several months, both DGS and DHS held weekly design meetings with the architects in order to move the concept design phase forward. We required the new team to conduct a number of design charrettes to ensure the proper project design for the existing structure and the surrounding community. We notified the team of our expectation to design distinguished facilities in which families experiencing homeless will feel safe and maintain a sense of pride. As the team reached significant milestones we integrated them within the Advisory Team and Design Overview meetings with the Ward 3 residence. This allowed us to gather immediate feedback and to incorporate suggestions made by the community. The District has and will continue to meet with members of the Community through the design and construction process that will provide monthly updates. To date we have held over a dozen meetings which include the ANC, Council Members, District Leaders as well as several stakeholders and advocacy groups. Shortly after the start of 2017 we held a special meeting to present the proposed design to the newly elected ANC members. Continuous dialogue between the District and the ANC allowed for us to propose various parking solutions that would meet the needs of the emergency shelter site, the adjacent police station as well as the immediate community. While the end vote of the ANC was a split vote, all Commissioners supported the Emergency Shelter use, and necessary special exception relief, at this location.

DGS remains steadfast in its commitment to engage the community and stakeholders in the multi-phased elements of this Project. Based on community comments, we request flexibility to work with the community to refine exterior designs and non-programmatic elements. . Such features include but are not limited to landscaping and exteriors, and other elements that will be immediately impactful to the neighborhood.

Our design teams have engaged the Districts Fire and Emergency Medical Services well as the Metropolitan Police Department as consultants during concept development to assure safety and security is adequately incorporated in the early stages of the design process. Based on

conversation with DFEMS and MPD, we are confident that co-locating the emergency shelter and the 2D MPD facility will be secure and sustainable for both uses.

Construction Timeline

As the City Administrator indicated, “DC General is not a place for families. Continuing to house families at this facility does not reflect the values that we share for how to serve and support our most vulnerable residents, especially families with children.” As the implementing agency, DGS leads the effort to design, entitle, construction, deliver and manage the emergency shelter facilities. Each day that passes equates to families unfairly being subjected to DC General Shelter system.

Council’s legislation last June required DGS to have teams develop preliminary designs, cost estimates and delivery schedules efficiently. Though every effort has been made to maintain the initial 2018 delivery, after careful evaluation the team has committed to delivering the Ward 3 site in the summer of 2019. The following is the timeline of the anticipated delivery schedule:

Design Start	DCRA Submission	Construction Start	Construction Delivery
October 2016	June 2017	November 2017	Summer 2019

Any alternative that delays entitlement, construction and opening the new emergency shelters extends our use of DC General (an old, poorly adapted hospital building – beyond its useful life). We understand that the Opposition Party and some members of the ANC believe a shorter, fewer unit shelter is feasible. As the Director of DGS, in reliance upon our team of experienced professionals, the City’s goals and objective cannot be achieved by a facility of fewer units (which would require that the need be met, by more facilities), and a shorter facility would create a practical difficulty for accomplishing this great public need for the City.

Conclusion

On behalf of the Mayor and the accomplished team who work for the Department of General Services, thank you for the opportunity to testify. We are ready, willing and eager to close DC General and deliver smaller, dignified and safe community-based shelters for the city’s most vulnerable population. We appreciate your time and consideration. I am now available to answer any questions at the end of our presentation.