

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 6
850 Delaware Ave, SW

Department of General Services

Testimony of
Greer Gillis
Director

Before the
Board of Zoning Adjustment

Wednesday, March 1, 2017
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 Board 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 850 Delaware Avenue, SW as an Emergency Shelter in the RF-1 District for more than 15 persons. Section U – 203.1(h) identifies conditions for approving an Emergency Shelter use. The BZA may approve more than 15 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 6.

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 - 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. Using these criteria, DHS then prepared written evaluations of site qualifications for each potential site submitted.

In Ward 6 we received three proposals with only one site--700 Delaware Ave, SW—to be of adequate size and within close proximity to public transportation and having the capacity to satisfy the program requirements. Upon award the Architects attended bi-weekly design meetings with both DGS / DHS representatives to develop test-fits layouts and concept drawings. As the designs progressed we held community meetings to gather input regarding the current design direction.

Proposals Received				
Company	Address	Ward	Received	Reason for Selection/Rejection
Blue Skye Development	700 Delaware Ave, SW	6	8/30/2015	Developer did not secure site control
Marshall Moya Design	L Street + New Jersey Ave, NW	6	9/7/2015	Site not large enough
Potomac Holdings/Varsity Investment Group	700 Delaware Ave, SW	6	10/7/2015	Good location, size, access, community amenities

The D.C. Council determined that District owned properties would serve the City’s interest better than leased sites. The Homeless Shelter Replacement Act of 2016 designated 850 Delaware Ave, SW; a District owned- site as the Ward 6 shelter location. At the time of our initial property search this location was and is currently occupied. This site includes an existing Clinic, The Council’s legislation last June 13 (Bill 21-0620) designated new District-owned sites for the emergency shelters for Wards 3, 5 and 6, which required efforts to solicit, evaluate and award new teams of Architects. In October 2016, Studio 27 Architects was awarded a contract for Architectural and Engineering Services leading the efforts for the Ward 6 site. With an inspired team of innovative architects and designers we have developed sound design solutions that satisfy the program goals and objectives.

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 team to conduct a number of design charettes to ensure the proper 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 6 community. This allowed us to gather immediate

feedback and to incorporate suggestions made by the community and the Advisory Team. The District has and will continue to meet with members of the Community through the design and construction process and provide monthly updates. To date we have held over a dozen meetings with Ward 6 and Southwest neighborhood stakeholders, including public meetings, meetings with the ANC, Council Members, community Leaders and advocacy groups. We have also conducted “Community Walks” to understand the needs of the neighborhood as a whole. Continuous dialogue between the District and the ANC is ongoing resulted in a unanimous vote in support of the Ward 6 short term family housing site.

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 District’s 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. The Department of Human Services’ service provider may also provide additional maintenance and security through their contract.

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, construct, deliver and manage the emergency shelter in Ward 6. Each day that passes equates to families unfairly being subjected to the 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 6 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).

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.