



HOUSING AND HEALTH
TO END HOMELESSNESS

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DESC Burien Supportive Housing FAQs

March 12, 2021

Thank you to all our neighbors and Burien community members who attended DESC Burien's Virtual Public Meeting on the evening of Tuesday, February 23, 2021! We also appreciate those who reached out via the comment form on our website and those who called or emailed to ask questions, give feedback, and express support. We received a lot of questions and were unable to get to every one of them. This document is intended to capture the scope of questions we received and provide responses to concerned members of the community.

On March 10, 2021, DESC presented to the Planning Commission of Burien which unanimously voted to advance DESC's Affordable Housing Demonstration Program application to the Burien City Council. The Burien City Council will hear DESC present about this project on Monday, April 5, 2021 at 7:00 p.m. This document has been updated to reflect questions asked by the members of the Planning Commission.

DESC - The Organization

What is DESC?

For 42 years, DESC has provided a multitude of services that provide health and housing to vulnerable people experiencing homelessness including behavioral health services, crisis intervention, outreach, over 500 shelter beds and survival services, and over 1200 supportive housing units across multiple neighborhoods in Seattle. DESC's supportive housing has been the subject of numerous research evaluations and has won numerous awards.

DESC is a 501c3 nonprofit organization funded by a mixture of public contracts, health insurance (Medicaid), tenant rents and rent subsidies, and private donations.

Site/Location

Why did DESC choose the City of Burien for this project?

DESC is focused on homelessness in King County and provides behavioral health crisis services countywide. We want to establish services where the needs are and have observed the growing level of homelessness outside Seattle for a number of years. In Burien we see a community with unmet needs among the population group DESC serves, and a community with a stated intent to address affordable housing needs. We seek sites that are appropriate to our program and building needs. This means looking for properties in places where people live and where zoning supports the sort of multi-unit properties we create. The site at 801 SW 150th St is suited to our tenants as

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it is near a transit hub and features easy access to groceries and other amenities. DESC entered into a purchase and sale agreement in the summer of 2020 and intends to close on the property in August of 2021.

Furthermore, with the City of Burien's Affordable Housing Demonstration Program (which DESC applied for in Fall of 2020), we know we are joining a community of shared values, one that supports equity and housing.

Construction and Design

What is the proposed design of the DESC Burien supportive housing project?

DESC Burien will feature 95 studio units for single adults with a service space dedicated to tenant supports on the first floor. Amenities include a commercial kitchen, a medical office, a street-facing front desk with 24/7 staffing, offices for case managers, and an alley-facing exterior courtyard that may only be accessed by tenants. We plan to provide three onsite parking spaces for DESC use. Our tenants do not typically own vehicles, thus we do not expect to need more parking for this purpose. This building will include solar panels and electronic utility monitoring systems which allow maintenance staff to intervene in real-time if a leak occurs in the building or water is running excessively. We also have a landscaping plan that will add trees and green space to the areas along SW 150th St and 8th Ave

We intend to fund the building through Low Income Housing Tax Credits, county, and state funding. DESC Burien will begin construction in early 2022 and welcome its first tenants in spring of 2023.

Demographics/Population/Residents

How will DESC Burien recruit and select applicants?

DESC intends to work with local organizations to target and outreach individuals already experiencing homelessness in Burien. These individuals will apply for DESC Burien units through the County's Coordinated Entry for All program. DESC Burien will house single adults experiencing chronic homelessness, which means people homeless for one year or longer and living with a disability. Tenants will have incomes less than 30% of the area median income. At least 25 units will be reserved for veterans experiencing chronic homelessness. Since supportive housing is a specialized resource with built-in robust supports, DESC selects applicants who need this type of housing to be successful.

King County has affirmed that new supportive housing programs should be established to meet the needs of people already in a given community.

Property/Service Management/Operations

What is permanent supportive housing?

Permanent supportive housing is a model that brings support services to tenants help them live successfully in their apartments. Each tenant signs a lease - their housing is permanent, and they may stay as long as they wish, provided they abide by the terms of the lease. Tenants pay 30% of their income as rent. DESC's operating costs are supported by these tenant rents and other

sources likely including a rent subsidy supplied by King County Housing Authority vouchers. DESC Burien tenants will have the typical rights and responsibilities of traditional housing with the added support of onsite case management, onsite property management, and 24/7 staffing.

Onsite case managers assist tenants to connect with behavioral health providers, attend medical appointments, keep units clean and in good condition, obtain metro passes, pay rent on time, and manage their medication. Other provided support includes some meals as well as onsite activities, therapeutic groups, and crisis management services.

What will staffing be like at DESC Burien?

DESC Burien will have an onsite manager, five housing case managers, and ten residential counselors who will staff the front desk and milieu spaces over three shifts. Staff presence is highest during daytime hours, but evening, overnight, and weekend times will have, at minimum, two staff members onsite.

All DESC staff receive training across a variety of topics including effective engagement skills with clients and crisis intervention. This training teaches staff how to identify a person in crisis as well as a range of de-escalation skills, to prevent situations from becoming more acute and avoid the unnecessary reliance on external sources such as police services. One of the most helpful elements of de-escalation is an existing trusting relationship with a tenant. Everything staff do is for the purpose of furthering trusting engagement with clients.

Quality of Living/Effects on the Neighborhood/Neighborhood Responsibility

Will neighbors see an increase in drug activity in the community?

Some DESC clients struggle with substance use issues. We work with people connect to supports or treatment at their own pace. We don't tolerate drug dealing in our properties and we have a code of conduct for our tenants that prohibits drug-related and other problematic behaviors in the surrounding community. The DESC Burien building will have sharps disposal bins in multiple common areas such as the client restrooms, laundry rooms, and trash rooms. Housing case managers will work closely with tenants to ensure they have the resources needed to dispose of any sharps safely and appropriately.

Will DESC Burien's presence in the neighborhood increase emergency response calls?

DESC's tenants live with complex conditions that sometimes result in personal crises, especially medical emergencies. We attempt to minimize these events by being attentive that what is going on with our tenants and bringing services to them. Given the disability profiles of our tenants, it's true that 911 calls are more likely in our building than an average apartment building. Examples of what might happen include a DESC tenant calling 911 to report an issue that either isn't real or isn't an emergency. Partnerships with police and fire allow us to ensure we keep these calls down. Studies on DESC and other supportive housing programs have shown that crisis events and 911 calls decrease once people go into supportive housing compared to when those people were on the streets, so the overall burden on crisis response systems in Burien will go down.

What is DESC Burien's plan for tenants behaving inappropriately in the neighborhood, including interfering with or loitering around local businesses?

When tenants move in, they sign an addendum to the lease called the Good Neighbor policy. This policy prohibits problematic behaviors such as loitering around local businesses. Should a business suspect that an individual exhibiting concerning behavior lives at the DESC Burien building, they may call the front desk at any time day or night for a response. DESC's stance is to check on the situation as quickly as possible, and to reinforce expectations if the person is a DESC tenant. In the event the person does not reside in the DESC Burien building, we would do our best to help resolve the matter.

What is DESC's process for integrating neighborhood feedback into their plans?

DESC welcomes feedback from neighbors and wants to understand any questions and concerns, including what additional needs the neighborhood has. Recommendations about building design features may be possible to consider, and ideas about the most productive communication channels for DESC's staff once the building is operational are most welcome. If there is a neighborhood need that might be addressed in DESC's building, we would like to hear it and see if we can help. An example that comes to mind is neighborhood meeting spaces for community groups, which may be something DESC's building design could accommodate.

Will property crimes increase as a result of your tenants or visitors of your tenants?

We have no experience showing that DESC's tenants or their visitors engage in crimes that affect the neighbors of our buildings, including businesses, residents, and children. As noted above, we have systems in place to address any inappropriate behaviors by DESC tenants in the neighborhood. Research has shown repeatedly that when people experiencing homelessness gain the stability of a home, incidents of arrests and incarceration decline significantly and steadily. For any tenants going through periods of struggle, DESC staff are in a position to much more closely monitor behaviors and intervene as needed than if the same person were living homeless in the area.

How will DESC help integrate tenants into the surrounding neighborhood?

DESC's tenants will all be permanent residents of the community. Many of them will eagerly avail themselves of the range of groups and activities in the neighborhood, while others will more likely keep to themselves. DESC is excited to help facilitate connection between tenants of our building and other neighbors by establishing low-key social events for people to meet one another, via neighborhood cleanup projects, and other similar activities.

Can we expect more people experiencing homelessness to be living in cars or motorhomes near the building?

The DESC building will not have services for people other than those who live in the building, so there would be no advantage to parking a vehicle near the building.

Questions Received From the Burien City Council

During the public meeting, DESC said they would prioritize Burien residents that need the assistance. Is this written somewhere? Is there a contract that states this?

King County officials have stated publicly that they intend for new supportive housing projects to serve the needs of the local area. We will work with our King County contacts to confirm whether this is documented somewhere in their policies.

Would the residents pay rent, or is it 100% covered by subsidies? If covered by subsidies, would that not qualify for the project as “affordable housing” but public housing?

Tenants will pay rent based on their individual income. DESC will utilize additional resources to cover the full array of operating costs not covered by the low rents paid by the tenants. A likely revenue source would be rent subsidies attached to the apartments. A number of affordable housing projects are subsidized in this way. The term “public housing” refers to another kind of subsidized housing project that is operated by a public housing authority such as KCHA.

What is DESC’s process of connecting residents for long-term housing for its residents?

Permanent supportive housing is considered long-term housing. Not everyone stays forever, but the typical tenant stays for many years until another type of environment is needed such as assisted living or skilled nursing. Some people move out to other housing along the way because they desire something else and are able to be successful there. In such cases, DESC staff assist tenants with making these other arrangements.

What was the timing of DESC’s planning and decision-making regarding properties in Burien?

DESC initially became interested in Burien when learning in late 2019 about the Affordable Housing Demonstration Program legislation. We became aware that St. Vincent de Paul was potentially interested in redeveloping their property in Burien, so in early 2020 we began talking with them about how a partnership could work. Toward the middle of the year we realized that we weren’t going to be able to successfully redevelop the St. Vincent site for the needs of both organizations. At that time, we engaged a real estate broker and began looking for other properties in Burien so we could use the Affordable Housing Demonstration Program.

Are other properties in Burien being considered or were other properties under considered?

We selected the site on 150th because of several characteristics including great access to transit, which our tenants need. Although we wish this site had more of a residential context, we did note that some condo buildings were being constructed or had permits pending and we envisioned a more residential downtown urban setting in the future. Many other sites that we evaluated had a more residential context, such as near schools, homes and small businesses, but had very poor access to transit. In the end, we selected this property as the one with the best combination of characteristics for our needs.

Questions Received From the Planning Commission

Are the services offered mandatory?

DESC uses a voluntary model of services. Evidence shows that coercing participation in services is not as effective as devising services and engagement strategies that are attractive to tenants. This results in a very high service participation rates.

Does DESC have plans to provide a food bank?

DESC continues to use our resources to build on what we do best: providing health and housing to King County’s most vulnerable residents experiencing homelessness. While we do a lot of work helping our tenants acquire food for themselves, we do not have plans at this time to expand our services to provide a food bank for the broader community. DESC would be happy to explore ways we could partner with organizations beginning this endeavor.

You have indicated your commitment to housing people experiencing homelessness in Burien. What local organizations have you reached out to that may help you achieve this?

DESC has reached out to various behavioral healthcare and social services organizations doing work in Burien including Navos, Sound Health, Catholic Community Services, the LEAD program, REACH, and Mary's Place. We have strong relationships with many of these organizations. We have been in communication with Chief Boe and expect that his team will be helpful in identifying individuals we may outreach for housing. As we get closer to opening in 2023, we will continue to make connections with local agencies that can help us fill our building with those who are unhoused in Burien.

What does DESC do to dispel myths about homelessness and educate communities about the work you do?

DESC sent invitations to its February Virtual Public Meeting to addresses within 1000 feet of the DESC Burien site. We invited many local organizations and stakeholders to attend as well. Approximately 140 people attended the meeting. We continue to provide updates through our website and respond to people who submit questions or concerns. The materials we have shared with neighbors are translated into Spanish and can be found on the website. We also have several meetings and tours scheduled with members of the business community in Burien.

How is this project different from an Enhanced Services Facility (ESF)?

DESC Burien Supportive Housing is very different. It is voluntary and it is rental housing with services that act as disability accommodations. Enhanced Service Facilities deploy a more institutional service model with personal care assistance and nursing services onsite. People who live at ESFs are often mandated to live there by the court system. DESC has no custodial control over individuals in its housing. All DESC Burien tenants will have the rights and responsibilities of a typical Washington State tenant.

Will DESC Burien Supportive Housing source labor from the local area for construction?

DESC would be pleased to source labor from the Burien area. Sometimes our public funding contracts have compliance requirements for subcontractors that can make the process more arduous, however, DESC intends to strategize with our general contractor between now and when bids go out to develop area contacts and find ways to make those reporting requirements more accessible to local businesses.

Will DESC track data on how successful it is in housing individuals from Burien?

Yes. DESC has a robust data system that tracks people we serve. We will ensure we track updated information about where people were experiencing homelessness in order to quantify our local positive impact as we open DESC Burien.

Will DESC prioritize people of color?

BIPOC (Black, indigenous, and people of color) are overrepresented in the population of people experiencing homelessness. As a result, we expect that DESC Burien will house high numbers of BIPOC individuals. While many of our prioritization requirements (such as our set-aside veteran units) come from public funding sources, DESC may consider folding other prioritizations into its recruitment.

If DESC has applicants with 30-50% AMI (area median income), do they get put on a waiting list?

Due to the scarcity of affordable housing and the extremely low income population we serve, it is not difficult to fill the units we rent. Furthermore, our funding sources constrain us to rent to individuals with 30% or lower AMI. The people DESC Burien is intended to serve - individuals experiencing long-term homelessness who also have disabilities - often make 0-15% of the median income.

Will DESC be building sidewalks?

Yes! DESC Burien will be significantly improving the site as well as adding sidewalks along both sides of the corner lot.

Is it hard to fill veteran units due to the 30% AMI restriction?

Unfortunately, there is no shortage of veterans under 30% experiencing long term homelessness. We do not have difficulty filling units.

What's the average time tenants stay with DESC?

For the vast majority of people, their DESC apartment is a permanent home until they pass away or need a higher level of care. The high cost of market rate housing and income levels of our tenant population make it unlikely they will move into an independent market rate housing situation.

Have you worked with King County Metro around the renovations for the H Line that will occur in front of DESC Burien along 150th Street?

The DESC Burien design team has reached out to King County Metro and obtained plans for their work along 150th. Our goal is to work with their schedule as closely as possible so we can avoid a situation where DESC has to remove brand-new work done by King County and vice versa. We are excited that the H Line will be so convenient and walkable for our tenants!