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Ideas aired about housing for vets and homeless, disabled individuals

Rehoboth McKinley Christian Health Care Services held a community meeting at the Substance Abuse Treatment Center, 650 Vanden Bosch Pkwy in Gallup, Dec. 10 to discuss a new housing project.

According to information provided at the meeting, the Gallup community assembled a grassroots team to develop a 30- to 40-unit Permanent Supportive Housing Project.

The project is spearheaded by RMCHCS, with aid from the City of Gallup and individuals like Rep. Wonda Johnson, D-Church Rock, and Councilwoman Linda Garcia, as well as entities such as The Western Health Foundation, Blue Cross Blue Shield, Veterans Helping Veterans and the New Mexico Coalition to End Homelessness.

The project aims to provide housing and supportive services to vulnerable, low-income veterans and disabled, homeless individuals in Gallup.

Zoe LeBeau, of LeBeau Development LLC, said she hopes the project moves forward.

“It’s been great, absolutely amazing [to work with Gallup],” LeBeau told the *Sun* Dec. 10. “The faith community is supportive, as well as the state and city.”

LeBeau said she's worked with Gallup on numerous projects over the past two years, building on her supportive housing work of some 25 years.

She said the project is anticipated to cost between $8-$10 million, and will be funded through an allocation of tax credits from the New Mexico Mortgage Finance Authority, as well as gap funding from Federal Home Loan Bank and a land donation from the City of Gallup.

Additionally, the project will need between $400,000-$500,000 to cover costs of infrastructure development.

When capital outlay funds are in place, the gap funds would ensure the project is funded and started within two years.

LeBeau said the outline proposed at the meeting consists of six outreach sessions in the Gallup community, and entails looking for two land lots for potential sites to build individual units — small apartments that measure 500-600 square feet.

Residents would be able move in after they file the proper paperwork and undergo an intensive admission process.

LeBeau said the goal of the project is to provide affordable housing and supportive onsite services to qualified individuals.

The proposed center would accommodate various people, providing each their own space and the time to address individual challenges. The staff would be flexible and open-minded.

LeBeau said the proposed housing center would charge 30 percent of an individual's income for their stay at the center.

Dist. 1 Councilor Linda Garcia was present at the meeting to give her full support to the project. She said the city council supports the its moving forward.

“When you see progress, you get enthusiastic,” she said.

Garcia spoke to the crowd about a trip she and other members of the city and state took to Duluth, Minn. to evaluate similar housing solutions. She described a series of supportive housing projects in that region, with modern amenities and a supportive community.

“The dedication from people [impressed me],” Garcia said. “What made [that project] a success was that people cared. They all just take care of each other.”

At the meeting, D. Wonda Johnson, Dist. 5 legislator for N.M., said issues like homelessness, alcoholism, community and demographics have no boundaries. She said the problems in Gallup are also problems in Duluth.

“The homes provided a place for healing,” Johnson said. “They embraced Native American spirituality. I could smell the sage burning inside the homes. It was very powerful for me.”

Richard Kontz, executive director for the Gallup Housing Authority, was also present at the meeting. He said it is the housing authority’s goal to educate people about the project.

Kontz said it’s crucial to educate people on how they should behave when they live in the housing center. He said various issues may cause residents to lose their housing, from lying about income to making trouble in the community.

“You have to be truthful with people,” Kontz said. “You tell them this is how Gallup is.”

In the face of potential challenges to the endeavor, the sentiment in the room was that the project will require cooperation with and support from the Gallup community.

“[This requires] dedication. It will take all of us to get it done,” Garcia said.

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