

Eyeing homelessness, Queen's Motel makeover in Victorville gets green light

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The dilapidated motel will be transformed into an affordable 31-unit apartment complex

VICTORVILLE — The San Bernardino County Housing Authority's \$3 million plan to renovate the dilapidated Queens Motel into a 31-unit affordable housing development, intended to directly pitch to the city's chronically homeless, took a recent step forward.

The City Council on June 5 unanimously approved a site plan to enable the makeover of the historically problem-stricken motel on Stoddard Wells Road, built in 1967.

City officials say they are charting new territory as the first to request from the county to operate a permanent housing facility for the chronically homeless within city limits.

Anticipated to be completed by December, the supportive housing site is viewed as a unique turnaround effort and expected to open only shortly after a similar development in San Bernardino.

Both cities have routinely ranked at the top in the county for homeless population.

Maria Razo, the executive director of the Housing Authority, said the unwelcome distinction was the impetus for the authority choosing to partner with each.

“With a lack of housing that is affordable, not just within the city of Victorville, but within the county,” Razo said, “this revitalization effort will create additional affordable units to help house those in need.”

A one-day count in January showed the countywide homeless population grew 13.5 percent year over year and county officials pinned at least some of the blame on the state’s affordable housing crisis.

The Queen’s Motel transformation plan was first publicly announced in February 2017 during Victorville’s State of the City event and the Housing Authority purchased the property a month later. The project is expected to cost about \$3 million between the purchase and renovations.

To be known as Desert Haven, the complex will consist of 24 one-bedroom and seven studio apartments, featuring many of the same amenities to be found in any other apartment complex: A community room, manager’s office, patio with barbecue and picnic areas, community garden and landscaping.

Upgrades will include wrought iron perimeter fencing; gated entry; new lighting, painting, windows, doors and parking spaces; as well as security cameras and an overhaul of the existing laundry room.

All residents — there will be a one-to-two person limit per unit — will sign a lease agreement, up to five years, and the Housing Authority will provide project-based housing vouchers so rent does not exceed 30 percent of each resident’s adjusted gross income.

Loitering and overnight guests will not be permitted.

Razo emphasized that Desert Haven would not be a homeless shelter or transitional housing development — with no drop-in services — instead operating much like any other apartment complex.

However, buoyed by partnerships that include the county’s Department of Behavioral Health, the Sheriff’s Department’s H.O.P.E. team, United Way and workforce development providers, the facility’s residents will be exposed to on- and off-site services that range from mental health and substance abuse help to vocational counseling, job training and linkage to legal services.

According to a city staff report, potential residents will be identified through the 2-1-1 Coordinated Entry System, a service connecting homeless individuals to resources, yet Razo said the H.O.P.E. team — a law enforcement homeless-advocacy arm — would be instrumental in identifying Victorville-based candidates.

City spokeswoman Sue Jones said temporary fencing has been installed around the facility to secure the site and city officials expect the Housing Authority to submit construction drawings in the coming weeks.

The city is in negotiations to determine what its financial contributions to the endeavor might be, according to Deputy City Manager Sophie Smith.

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