




TO: Councilmember Brooke Pinto

THROUGH: Kevin Donahue, City Administrator 

CC: Wayne Turnage, Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services 

FROM: Rachel Pierre, Interim Director, Department of Human Services

SUBJECT: Bridge Housing at the Aston

DATE: November 30, 2023

Background:

The Aston is an opportunity to respond to a need for non-congregate shelter and strong case manager services to populations who presently live in shelters, PEP-V housing, and encampments. In running this project, DHS will directly apply lessons learned from PEP-V, as well as its work with the Interagency Council on Homelessness (ICH), which publishes the District's Strategic Plans – specifically Homeward DC (2015-2020) and Homeward DC 2.0 (2021- 2025). We will work closely with ICH to think through which populations can be prioritized and what service models offer the greatest efficacy to ensure the goals of the plan and the needs of our population are met.

ANC2A held a Special Meeting on June 21 to discuss the Aston renovation project currently under Council review. The Department of Human Services (DHS) presented an overview of the renovation project, including timelines, population to be served, and eligibility criteria. The Department, with support from Deputy Mayor Turnage as well as the Department of General Services (DGS), answered all community questions at that meeting and in follow-up discussions.

Current Situation:

We appreciate your partnership and the opportunities for input received from the Advisory Neighborhood Commission and the community over the last several weeks. Presently, the disapproval resolution following the District's acquisition of the property from the George Washington University has frozen action on the contract for 45 legislative days, unless or until withdrawal of the disapproval resolution or a vote by the Council on the contract.

To avoid any further delay that could result in the failure to close the acquisition deal, we respectfully request you withdraw your disapproval resolution by noon today.

In support of this request, DHS appreciates the conditions you have laid out in furtherance of what the Advisory Neighborhood Commission and the community have asked for in order to ensure this project is as successful as possible. Those items provide a broad framework that reflects your and our general agreement around some of the most critical issues we discussed. More conversations are needed to enhance the details of this very general and good faith agreement. We remain committed to working with you and the community as this project moves forward to ensure the issues you have highlighted are adequately addressed. These discussions can occur within the context of this broad agreement as we move forward to develop the operational plan for the project. Until such time, your overarching requests along with DHS commitments can be found below.

Comprehensive Service Delivery:

Security: DHS agrees to provide security inside of the Aston 24/7/365. The Aston will be equipped with a magnetometer to assist with the screening process and security will be stationed at each floor. DHS will also require security to monitor the immediate area outside of the building, subject to their limitations under District law.

Capacity: DHS agrees to limit initial access to the Aston at 50 residents. This will allow DHS to establish the necessary personnel and program infrastructure to ensure the successful implementation of transitional housing services. DHS will revisit this decision two months after operations begin in consultation with the Community Advisory Team and provide the community with reports on the operation and outcomes of the program at that time. If the program is successfully implemented, there are no verified safety or operational concerns, and there is support from the Community Advisory Team, DHS will aim to augment the operation by another 25-50 residents after two months, with a maximum capacity of 100 residents.

Support Staff: DHS will employ the necessary case managers and mental health staff to satisfy reasonable resident-to-client ratios. This staff will work 7 days per week and some categories of staff will be in the facility 24 hours per day.

Change in Use: DHS agrees to maintain the Aston’s use for bridge housing for the foreseeable future. DHS agrees to present to the Advisory Neighborhood Commission and the Advisory Team prior to any changes in use, including for other housing purposes by DHS. DHS shall not use the Aston for low-barrier shelter.

Expectations: DHS agrees to develop, in consultation with the Community Advisory Team, rules and expectations for residents of the Aston facility, clear and reasonable consequences for violations (e.g., physical threats of harm to other residents). DHS agrees that, to best support residents who may experience substance use disorders, DHS should endeavor to offer substance use disorder treatment and shall enforce a policy that prohibit alcohol and illegal drug use on site.

Agency Response: DHS shall provide clarity on which agency is responsible for each service provided at the Aston (e.g., DHS, DOH, DMHHS).

Community Engagement:

Drawing upon lessons learned from the District’s very successful Short-Term Family Housing

program, DHS will work with a Community Advisory Team to discuss progress and ensure success of the project.

Nature of Work of the Community Advisory Team:

1. Provide feedback on concerns related to residents' quality of life during any building repurposing/construction and during the first two years of operations;
2. Coordinate opportunities for community feedback and input on all issues and concerns related to the development of Bridge Housing and share information with DHS; and
3. Develop Good Neighbor Agreements.

In coordination with the Advisory Team, DHS will:

1. Provide feedback on concerns related to quality-of-life concerns and present any building repurposing/construction during the first two years;
2. Report on the impact of the property on the surrounding neighborhood, using data on metrics provided by other District agencies; and
3. Receive and coordinate opportunities for community feedback and input on concerns related to the development of this project.

Membership Composition and Roles: The Advisory Team will be co-chaired by the ANC Chair (or designee) and a representative from Mayor Bowser's administration.

- *Community, ANC, and Council Representatives (10)*
 - ANC – 4 participants: ANC Chair, ANC for the SMD, and 2 community members selected by the ANC. Suggestions for community members include immediate neighbors, faith community representatives, and members of the business community, nearby condo association president, or other community stakeholders.
 - Civic or Neighborhood Association – 2 participants: the president of each of the two local associations, or a designee for each.
 - Ward Councilmember – 3 participants: Ward Councilmember or designee and two community representatives selected by the Ward Councilmember.
- *Homeless Services Stakeholders (3)*
 - One homeless services provider who serves the neighborhood surrounding the Aston under the District's outreach provider contract.
 - One homeless services consumer selected by the above homeless services provider.
 - One representative from the service provider operating services at the Aston.
- *DC Executive Government Representatives (3)*
 - Bowser Administration Co-Chair
 - DGS Project Manager
 - DHS representative

Communication and Information Sharing:

Once opened, DHS will update its website to include the Aston's service provider and the program manager information. The coordinator will be responsible for creating a shared folder to provide updates, meeting notes, and other community updates that impact the project. As noted above, in running this project, DHS will directly apply lessons learned from PEP-V, as

well as its work with the Interagency Council on Homelessness (ICH), which publishes the District’s Strategic Plans – specifically Homeward DC (2015-2020) and Homeward DC 2.0 (2021-2025). We will work closely with ICH to think through which populations can be prioritized and what service models offer the greatest efficacy to ensure the goals of the plan and the needs of our population are met.