



The Huntsville Times

Housing Authority shows plans for Lowe Mill area - Page 2

'Mixed-income product' with 72 units depends on winning federal grant

The Huntsville Housing Authority next hopes to tear down one of the city's smaller runs of public housing, razing the 72 units of Brookside Apartments to make way for cottages, duplexes and town houses beside Lowe Mill.

"What we really want to have is a mixed-income product, so you won't have the poorest of the poor in one area," said Michael Lundy, executive director of the authority, while sharing the early designs with business leaders Tuesday.

That means while the authority would replace the 72 apartments with 72 new units, many, if not most, would no longer serve as public housing. The project continues the authority's efforts to demolish old public housing downtown and scatter residents throughout the city.

However, the latest plan hinges on a federal grant. And the authority, which voted only last week to pursue the grant, has to apply by Nov. 17. To that end, the authority has pulled together a large team of national experts and private developers.

Pressed for time, the team held a daylong series of meetings Tuesday at Lowe Mill. Architects shared preliminary designs, while Lundy took a few questions from city officials, downtown business owners and Brookside residents.

During one meeting, members of the Big Spring Partners downtown revitalization committee watched a short slide show by the architect, looked over preliminary floor plans and street-level drawings taped to a brick wall in Lowe Mill.

"I see this as an opportunity to grow an artist colony," said Michelle McMullen, president of the West Huntsville Civic Association and Historic Lowe Mill Village. She said some artists who work at Lowe Mill may qualify for public housing, while others may choose to live in the new development nearby.

Rob Norcross, an architect with LRK in Memphis, said the new development likely would consist of 10 percent one bedroom cottages, 45 percent two-bedroom units, and 45 percent three-bedroom town houses.

Norcross is part of the project team. Big Spring Partners is the local development arm. Aslan, a development firm based in Louisville, Ky., is leading the application process.

"If you don't get the grant, what's plan B?" asked Kelly Schrimsher of the city Planning Commission.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development will award \$113 million under the HOPE VI revitalization program this year. Greg Evans of Aslan said that about 150 cities are competing for that money, and only a half-dozen will win.

"This a very, very competitive process," he said, but added that the authority, with minimal effort, could resubmit the application next fall.

In the meantime, if Huntsville isn't selected, Evans suggested that the authority would search for other public money. After the meeting, Evans told The Times that the initial design phase and grant application could cost up to \$200,000.

At a later meeting Tuesday, about 15 residents of Brookside saw the same presentation and asked several questions about floor plans, patios, old-growth trees and the distance between units.

At one point, Lundy stood up and shifted the conversation to relocation. "Not everybody necessarily will be coming back," he said.

He said the authority would help relocate families, possibly guiding older residents toward a new senior center, while helping younger residents toward self-sufficiency. Vouchers could be used to offset private rents throughout the city.

Lundy then said the authority's goal is to create more mixed-income housing to deconcentrate low-income families.

"But that's what public housing is for," said one Brookside resident. "You're going to put me out of my house for someone who has a job."

"You're not going to be without housing," Lundy said. "If you pay \$100 a month (rent), you're going to keep paying \$100 a month. But you may not live next to someone who pays \$100 a month."

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