



Huntsville Housing Authority to seek private, public housing mix for Brookside Apartments

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Huntsville
Housing
Authority

The Huntsville Housing Authority is applying for a federal grant to redevelop Brookside Apartments on Seminole Drive.

HUNTSVILLE, AL -- The Huntsville Housing Authority may yet tear down its small complex near the Lowe Mill, pulling in private dollars to replace Brookside Apartments with a new mix of public and private housing.

The plans are uncertain, the turnaround is short and the whole deal is contingent on winning a federal grant. But on Monday, the authority board took a step forward, unanimously approving a partnership with two private developers.

Aslan, a real estate development company in Louisville, and the local Big Spring Partners downtown redevelopment group will have less than a month to help cobble together a design to compete for a grant of up to \$22 million.

The federal HOPE VI revitalization grants are highly competitive, as only half dozen or may be given out nationwide this year. Authority officials could not recall Huntsville winning a HOPE VI grant for construction.

The deadline for the application is Nov. 17. Michael Lundy, executive director of the authority, said he hoped to have meetings this week to begin designing a new project for Brookside.

Carlen Williams, director of development for the authority, said Brookside currently has 72 units, making it one of the smaller aging developments downtown. She couldn't say whether the redevelopment would maintain the current level of public housing.

"We do not intend to lose a public housing unit in this process," said Williams. "I'm not going to say they are all going to be replaced on site."

Authority board member Phil Redrick was hesitant to approve a partnership, saying he would have liked to see a presentation at Monday's meeting at the Oscar Mason Center. Lundy assured him there would be several public discussions before the board was asked to approve a final version.

"The starting pistol has just been fired," said board member Tommy Beason, an early proponent of a possible redevelopment of Brookside. "I don't think there is anything they can show us right now."

Board president Charley Burruss said that time constraints made necessary the vote on Monday, and that having a codeveloper was a key to a successful grant application.

The HOPE VI grants, administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, are designed to help authorities improve "severely distressed public housing" and decrease the concentration of poverty. The federal program will distribute a total of \$113 million this year.

The Huntsville Housing Authority has already been attempting to deconcentrate poverty, tearing down Council Courts near Huntsville Hospital and relocating families throughout the city. The authority was recently denied federal stimulus money for similar redevelopment projects at Sparkman Homes and Searcy Homes.

Williams said the authority had worked with Aslan to develop the senior center scheduled to be built near Huntsville Hospital. She said Aslan suggested bringing in a local partner to strengthen the application.

She said authority officials met recently with Mary Jane Caylor, executive director of Big Spring Partners and a state school board member, and Bob Ludwig, a Big Spring Partners board member and publisher of The Times.

Caylor said there are no designs, but there have been conversations about ways Big Spring Partners would work with the authority on this project to improve the wider downtown area.

"It's talking about some town house structures, some cottages," said Caylor. "It's not talking about traditional projects you see now."

In other news at the meeting:

- Lundy, the executive director, told the board that the authority had purchased the seven homes discussed last month, homes the authority will fix up and possibly sell to help public housing residents move toward home ownership.

Lundy also said he located two more single-family homes on Drummond Road and Gallatin Road in south Huntsville. He said he could seek approval for purchase next month.

- Lundy said the authority had federal approval last month to buy five federally owned homes being used by evacuees of Hurricane Katrina. Lundy said he had identified two more for possible purchase, including one on Broadmore Road in north Huntsville and another on Mountain Creek Drive in Monrovia.

See earlier coverage of the plans for **Brookside**.

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