

Questions and Answers from Presentation of Columbia Housing Annual Plan

Friday, June 5, 2020

Question 1: What is status of Demolition at Allen Benedict Court?

Answer: The demolition contract has been awarded and staff expects the first work to begin on the site at the end of this month with a fence being placed around the perimeter first. The Columbia Fire Department has plans to use the site for training exercises in July. Actual demolition should begin in mid-August of this year with the site being completely cleared, graded and seeded by the end of the year.

Question 2: Why did Mrs. Mathews decide to capture the history of Allen Benedict Court with the “Allen Benedict Court: Forever in my Heart” campaign?

Answer: Mrs. Mathews stated that she understands the importance of the property to many people within the community and wanted to honor that history by capturing the good memories people have of the site.

Question 3: What opportunities under Goal 5 exist for women and minority contractors?

Answer: Business opportunities are posted on the website whenever available and the site acts as a portal for companies seeking to do business with CH. Per HUD regulations, all contracts require a minimum 30% participation from minority and women owned businesses, each general contractor must meet that requirement.

Question 4: Explain the CH Procurement Process?

Answer: All business opportunities are placed in a dedicated area on the CH website called “Business Opportunities”. Those listings include all relevant information for the service/good being requested with appropriate contractor requirements, forms and due dates. Prior to the bidding of each project, a meeting is held to discuss the specifications and to address any additional questions. Bids are submitted on the due date, responses reviewed by committee and the contract is presented to Board for approval if needed based on cost. Mrs. Mathews also encouraged everyone to sign up for news on the website as opportunities are communicated via eblast.

Question 5: There have been documented cases in other cities of landlords violating tenant rights after a RAD conversion. What measures will CH take to ensure proper oversight is maintained post-conversion?

Answer: Tenant rights are an important part of RAD conversion; many protections are built into the process itself. No private landlords will be involved as CH will maintain ownership of the properties under a non-profit entity. Current leadership has extensive RAD conversion experience and is committed to providing the best service possible to those impacted.

Question 6: What is Mrs. Mathews email address:

Answer: imathews@columbiahousing.org

Question 7: How do you assemble the right team(s) to meet the stated goals?

Answer: Staffing is currently being transformed to ensure needs are met going forward. Senior leadership is being thoughtful and strategic about putting together a diverse, accomplished group. Communication is critical to staff informed and empowered and the Board of Commissioners provide input and leadership via the Committee system all while keeping residents first.

Question 8: Mrs. Mathews, you stepped in at Columbia Housing during a challenging time, how do you typically meet challenges?

Answer: Mrs. Mathews stated that she did not see the situation as challenging but rather as an opportunity to be better housers by listening to resident and the community.

Question 9: Can you tell us a little bit about Columbia Housing's current property inventory?

Answer: There are currently 1684 units of public housing owned by CH. There are also 8 additional properties that CH owns that are market rate units. CH wants to expand its privately held portfolio of properties in order to make finding units easier for tenant with vouchers. CH operates the largest HCV program in the state with over 4000 vouchers currently being administered.

Question 10: Do you plan to increase senior housing?

Answer: There is a 95-unit senior building planned for the old Gonzales Gardens site. The newly redeveloped community will be called The Oaks at St. Anna's Park. The new senior property will be state of the art and will include a community space, computer lab and exercise room and will be available to individuals 62 and older.

Question 11: What resources are available to residents that might be experiencing domestic violence during the pandemic?

Answer: Sistercare has always been a strong partner and can respond quickly if needed. CH has partnered with Sistercare over the years to provide services to residents in need. Sistercare is able to provide access to a variety of services through their organization. Within CH, a resident experiencing domestic violence can be transferred to a new location and their identify protected.

Question 12: There weren't programs available for personal development when I was a resident? How can I or others participate in bringing that kind of information to current residents?

Answer: CH has a Resident Executive Council that meets monthly to discuss resident needs, Mrs. Mathews attends the meetings and communicates with the officers on a regular basis. A new Senior Vice President of Resident and Family Services, Talleria Jackson, has recently been hired and will be doing things to increase meaningful activities for residents. Mrs. Jackson's staff and department will assist residents with making and achieving self-sufficiency goals, aging in place plans and service coordination with local providers to ensure residents have access to a variety of programs.

Question 13: Is the way people are treated, the way you can apply and the ability to reach a person being addressed?

Answer: Customer service is being addressed at all levels within the organization. Technology issues that create barriers to easy interaction are being corrected. In the reorganized agency, a Customer Service team will be in place to ensure callers reach a person and that concerns are addressed within 24 hours.

Question 14: There is a stigma attached to families with vouchers, in the past people have been directed to contact the landlord if a problem existed with a voucher holder. Has that changed and who will be monitoring properties to ensure proper upkeep?

Answer: CH certifies a family's qualifications to participate in the Housing Choice Voucher program. Once a family has been issued a Housing Choice Voucher, they may take that voucher into the private market and rent from any landlord that will honor the voucher. The landlord is responsible for tenant selection and background checks, if a landlord determines that their tenant is violating their lease they should notify CH immediately as a lease violation may also be a program violation that could result in the loss of assistance for the tenant. As CH does not want to see anyone evicted, they will work with the client and landlord to resolve potential issues.

Question 15: Is CH working with the Lyons Street Neighborhood Association regarding the redevelopment of the old Gonzales Gardens site?

Answer: Staff has been in ongoing discussions with the Lyons Street NA, a presentation was made to their group prior to the COVID-19 crisis where important feedback was gained that was worked into the new site plan. Staff will continue to meet with the Neighborhood Association as work on the site progresses.

Question 16: Is there an announcement regarding the redevelopment of Allen Benedict Court?

Answer: A solicitation will be issued soon for a development partner. They will help drive the community engagement process and input will be sought from former residents, community stakeholders and others. Staff expects to have a development partner identified by end of the summer or early fall.

Question 17: When will the community input process begin for Allen Benedict Court?

Answer: Late fall of this year with the bulk of activities probably occurring in the 1st or 2nd quarters of 2021.

Question 18: With local VA offices closed, can veterans apply directly to CH?

Answer: Veteran's wishing to participate in the Veteran's Assisted Supportive Housing (VASH) program may only apply through the VA. CH serves approximately 400 families within this program.

Question 19: What are the criteria for becoming a development partner at Allen Benedict Court?

Answer: When the solicitation is published, it will include a clear set of criteria for potential respondents. The ability to help raise funds for the project through the private market will be a part of the required criteria as CH has no funding to complete the work.

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