



AUBURN

Agency proposes \$6 million affordable housing complex to address Auburn's 'need'



FEBRUARY 09, 2014 6:00 AM • [GREG MASON](#) | GREG.MASON@LEE.NET

The Auburn Housing Authority is looking to make an estimated \$6 million addition to its group of affordable housing complexes.

The agency is seeking approval for the proposed Merriman Street Family Transitions Project, a

28-unit affordable housing complex that would be constructed near Merriman Street and Garrow Street in Auburn.

These 28 units, should the project be approved, would serve to house homeless families and single women from Cayuga County. The Merriman Street development would join the authority's existing Section 8 housing properties: Melone Village, Brogan Manor and Olympia Terrace.

The proposal was introduced before the Auburn Planning Board last week as organizers are seeking site plan approval within the next few months. Stephanie Hutchinson, executive director of the Auburn Housing Authority, said the project's construction cost will amount to about \$6 million.

The agency is hoping to apply for capital funding through the state's Homeless Housing and Assistance Program as soon as a request for proposals is available, Hutchinson said. The funding application would be filed through the agency's nonprofit affiliate, AHA Development Corporation.

"Our goal is to have an application ready to go the second that RFP is announced," Hutchinson said.

The Merriman Street project would not serve as a homeless shelter. The executive director said of the 28 available housing units, four to eight of those units would be transitional. Of the 28 units, the breakdown would be 14 three-bedroom units, 10 two-bedroom and four one-bedroom.

The Auburn Housing Authority would handle the property management side of the operation. Hutchinson said the agency will partner with the Rescue Mission of Cayuga County, which will handle supportive services for the residents, and the Cayuga-Seneca Action Agency, which will monitor four of the available transitional units.

The Merriman Street complex would not be open to just anybody. Hutchinson said 100 percent of potential residents would be referrals from the state Department of Health and Human

Services.

"It is not a place you can show up and expect to receive services," she said. "It's going to be a very stable area."

Both the Rescue Mission and the Auburn Housing Authority will have administrative offices on-site, so there will be "heavy security and monitoring" of the housing complex, Hutchinson said. In addition, the Auburn Housing Authority is currently looking into after-hours security.

James Breslin, director of the Rescue Mission, said the expansion will help free up the authority's waiting list for affordable housing. The Auburn Housing Authority reports more than 90 households are on the agency's waiting list.

As such, the Auburn Housing Authority is currently not accepting applications for one-bedroom units at any of its established properties due to the size of the waiting list and a 100 percent occupancy rate.

"There is definitely a need in this community for affordable housing," Breslin said. "Auburn is behind on affordable housing units for everybody."

The Merriman Street Family Transitions Project is modeled after the Rescue Mission's own transitional program, which began in 2011. Breslin said the goal is to keep tenants out of unsuitable living quarters — cars, motels, etc. — and put into a living situation where they can be supported.

The Rescue Mission would provide educational support and case management to better these individuals toward a more permanent living arrangement. The family transitions program has seen a high rate of success with the Rescue Mission in past cases, Breslin said.

"Homelessness is not a cause," he said. "It's the result of a number of factors and we're hoping to get to the bottom of it."

The Auburn Housing Authority has reached out to neighbors regarding their thoughts on the proposal. Hutchinson said the agency accepted comments and questions from residents with any concerns.

In addition, the Auburn Housing Authority has also met with representatives from the Auburn Enlarged School District and the Auburn Police Department to discuss concerns.

"We've really try to make it an open process where we meet with as many concerned parties as possible," Hutchinson said.

The next city planning board meeting is on March 4 where the parties will continue deliberation regarding the proposal's environmental review and site plan approval.