

LHAND proposes veteran housing

By Chris Stevens / The Daily Item

LYNN — City Councilors voted unanimously Tuesday to support a plan that could put a roof over the heads of 22 homeless veterans and their families.

Norm Cole, Lynn Housing and Neighborhood Development director of Planning and Development, and Veterans Agent Michael Sweeney teamed up to present preliminary plans for a 20-to-22 unit townhouse/garden apartment building that would be aimed directly at getting homeless veterans and their families off the street.

“We’ve always done a lot for single homeless veterans but now we’re ready to address families,” Cole said.

Tentatively titled Heritage Lynn, the plan shows the rental units would be located at 472 Essex St., in what is now a parking lot. Situated across the street from Girls Inc., High Rock Tower and Cobbett Hill Apartments, Cole said the project would fit in nicely and complete a revitalization of the area that started several years ago.

Sweeney also noted that the apartments would come with services to address the needs of the homeless families as well.

“We’re not going to just hand them the keys to an apartment and leave,” he said.

Sweeney said 10 years of fighting the War on Terror coupled with a bad economy has left many returning veterans in need of help. Mix in Vietnam, Korea and World War II veterans and, Sweeney said, the number of those needing services only grows.

“This allows us to help veterans trying to get back on their feet,” he said. “We can give them a hand up and help them get back into society.”

Cole said LHAND is looking at conducting a feasibility study on the project to see what funding is available on the state and federal level.

“Before we get too far into it we wanted to get the blessing, the support, of the council,” he said.

Councilor Daniel Cahill said he supported the project but wondered, “What are we facing in terms of numbers of homeless veterans in this country today?”

Sweeney said, according to federal statistics, there are roughly 67,000 homeless veterans on any given night in the United States. Cole said one of the fastest growing groups of homeless veterans is women.

“Twenty-five percent of all homeless people are veterans,” Cole added. “It’s why I think this is likely to find some funding.”

Cole said he is in the process of costing out the project but the city would essentially have to get in line for state funding. He is hopeful that officials might see work started in 12 to 18 months.

"You have our support 100 percent," said Councilor Peter Capano, chairman of the Veterans, Youth and Elderly Committee that heard the proposal initially. "We'll take a vote to support but you have our blessing to pursue this."

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