



## Venice Community Housing Corporation

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October 28, 2015

### **RFI: Provision of Community Services and/or Programs of a Recreational Nature at the former Westminster Senior Citizen Center**

Via email to: [rap.partnerships@lacity.org](mailto:rap.partnerships@lacity.org)

#### **1. General Information**

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#### **2. Proposed Use of Facility**

Venice Community Housing (VCH) proposes to operate a homeless serving facility that includes a voluntary personal property storage program, brief counseling and referral, Coordinated Entry System (CES) evaluation and access to toilet and shower facilities, as well as other supportive services as the City may permit as described herein at 7. *Optional Services*.

VCH currently operates a pilot voluntary storage project out of a City owned 8'x25' storage container located next to the paddle tennis courts on Venice beach. With the support of the Council office (initially it was Councilman Rosenthal who requested that VCH create a storage program during the winter of 2012 to allow more homeless people access to the Winter Shelter and later Councilman Bonin who then supported our efforts to extend the program operation year around) VCH and a cadre of volunteers have managed to provide a safe and free storage option for 26 homeless people who deposit their personal property in 26 60-gallon trash containers ("bins") provided by the City. The container is open for business one hour a day (currently 4:30pm-5:30pm) five days/week (Tuesday-Saturday). Bin users must renew their arrangements

weekly and, if they fail to do so---after attempts by staff to contact bin users---VCH considers the property to be abandoned and coordinates with Street Services to remove the property to 90 day storage. The program has been fully utilized for over a year and we have a wait list of over 100 people.

Based upon the dimensions of the building provided in the Request for Information and confirmed by recent inspection of the building, VCH could expand its program from 26 to approximately 140 bins to serve 140 users and by placing a storage container on site could also provide a 90 day storage option for property deemed to be abandoned and removed from the bins. On-site 90 day storage would enable owners to more easily and quickly retrieve property that had not been abandoned.

A permanent storage program could be staffed 8 hours per day, seven days per week in order to provide ready access for deposit or retrieval of property. Additional overnight storage in the lobby area could be provided during the term of the winter shelter program to encourage maximum usage of the Westside Shelter. In previous years, access to the shelter was limited to those who took the bus and carried with them only so much personal property as they could place on their laps. Many people with more property than they could take with them on the bus elected not to participate in the program because they had no safe storage option for property left behind. Moving the bus pick up point from Market Street and the Ocean Front Walk to the Westminster Center (where it had been located in some past years) would make it especially convenient for those who wanted to access the shelter.

The building includes a private office that would be suitable for brief service and referral as well as the administration of the evaluation tool (VI-SPIDAT) needed to assess and rank homeless people in the Coordinated Entry System. A kitchen is available for preparation of meals and the parking lot, with 21 spaces, could be made available for a homeless vehicular parking program.

### **3. Staffing and Other Expenditures**

See **Attachment 1**.

### **4. Operating Hours**

The storage facility would be open 8 hours per day, seven days per week. The facility could also be open during evening hours for meetings (e.g. AA, NA), medical and/or legal clinics depending upon funding.

### **5. Fee Schedule**

No fees for services

### **6. Donations**

Currently, VCH receives donations of food, clothing and other personal items which are distributed to homeless families in our transitional housing program and monthly to other homeless and low income members of our community at our administrative offices. The Westminster Center could also work as a Donations site of food, clothing and other items.

## 7. Optional Services

As previously referenced, at the discretion of the City, VCH could provide a variety of services in addition to safe, free storage for unhoused people. Those services could include brief service and referral, evaluation and registration into CES, food preparation and distribution, overnight vehicular parking program, access to rest room facilities and regular shower facilities through a partnership with San Fernando Valley Rescue Mission. The Venice Family Clinic has also offered to partner with VCH to provide medical outreach services at the Center.

## 8. Current Operations

VCH is a non-profit, Venice based housing and community development organization that has created affordable housing and other resources that low and no income people in our community need to sustain themselves.

Historically Venice has been one of the most economically, racially and culturally diverse neighborhoods in Los Angeles. More recently, Venice's rich social fabric has been threatened by economic forces eliminating affordable housing for Venice's poor and working class residents and eroding tolerance and appreciation for the diversity that has made Venice a global landmark. Although homelessness has existed in Venice for at least a half century, conflict over how to address homelessness in the community has increased dramatically in recent years. Since its founding in 1988, Venice Community Housing has focused on providing neighborhood-based solutions to neighborhood problems, whether the loss of affordable housing, youth gang violence, or persistent homelessness; a model it continues to utilize today.

Venice Community Housing currently offers the following programs and services:

- **Housing** – VCH owns, manages and maintains 216 units of affordable housing in 15 buildings throughout Venice, Del Rey and Mar Vista, including 57 units of permanent supportive housing for chronically homeless individuals, a transitional living center for formerly homeless women and their children and a 21 unit permanent supportive housing development now under construction in Del Rey.
- **Resident Services** – VCH coordinates and provides resources that its tenants as well as homeless and other low-income individuals in the community need to secure or maintain housing and to build better futures for themselves and their families. These resources include counseling, case management, food assistance, transportation assistance, parenting workshops, conflict resolution, and connecting tenants with services available at partner agencies and government programs.
- **Venice YouthBuild** – A comprehensive program providing education, job training and leadership development opportunities to out-of-school and out-of-work youth ages 18 to 24 to help them transition into successful adulthoods.
- **After School Programs** – Academic-focused after school activities, including tutoring, mentoring and recreation, serving 70 children ages six to 18 annually at two locations, one at a family apartment complex owned by VCH in Mar Vista and the other at Broadway Elementary School in Venice.
- **Westside Science Club** – A volunteer-led Saturday morning program offering children and youth in the community opportunities to explore and experience science, technology, engineering and math through hands-on experiential learning.

- **Teen Court** – A peer-based program held at Venice High School that provides an alternative to the juvenile system for young people accused of first-time minor offenses and offering participants an inside view of the legal system.
- **Homeless Services**—personal property storage program for homeless people on Venice beach in partnership with the City of Los Angeles and the 11<sup>th</sup> District City Council office and a monthly food, clothing and personal hygiene products distribution program.

## 9. Additional Information

The City of Los Angeles has long been in the grips of an affordable housing crisis that has left tens of thousands of people homeless---most of them without shelter or support. Although the homeless are distributed throughout the City and County, a disproportionate number are located in two neighborhoods, Skid Row downtown and Venice beach. According to the 2015 Homeless Count there are 2359 homeless people in CD 11, with an estimated half of whom live in and around Venice. In September, the Mayor and the City Council declared that a state of emergency now exists which requires that the City take action to constructively address the homeless crisis. The City Council created a new standing committee, the Homeless and Poverty Committee and directed the CAO and the CLA to report on resources required to develop a comprehensive storage program for unsheltered people City wide. The report recommended that the City adopt four goals: 1. Integrate a storage program into a larger plan to provide housing and a healthy environment for LA’s homeless, 2. Maintain clean and sanitary public ways; 3. Reduce the volume of abandoned property and hazardous waste in public areas and, 4. Reduce the need for street cleaning by providing a voluntary storage program and services.

The report also recommended criteria for evaluating possible locations for such a program. They included: 1. That facilities be located to serve the highest “clusters” of homeless people, 2. That the facilities minimize the impact on residential and high traffic commercial areas; 3. That priority to be given to City owned facilities, and 4. That priority be given to locations where hygiene and outreach services could also be accommodated.

The Westminster Center is large enough to fulfill all of the goals identified in the report and satisfies the criteria established by the report regarding site location. While a 140+ bin facility may not be large enough to accommodate the long term need for storage space, it is certainly adequate to address the goals in a meaningful way. If additional storage is eventually needed, storage container(s) like the one currently used by VCH at the Beach or an LAUSD portable bungalow could be moved to the site and positioned in the parking lot behind the building.

The layout of the Center and its existing amenities allow for the provision of a variety of complimentary services and support for homeless Venetians, and because the building is owned by the City, the program could be housed rent free or as the City may otherwise require.

At the Venice Neighborhood Council (VNC) meeting on December 16, 2013, the VNC considered the issue of where a permanent storage program could be best located in Venice. Eight possible locations were identified including the Westminster Senior Center. After public

comment and full discussion by the Board, the VNC voted to recommend the Senior Center to Councilman Bonin.

The Senior Center is located next to a dog park and a secondary highway (Pacific Avenue) and the closest residence is 135 feet away from the Center. While there is no place in Venice that everyone would support, this location is the least intrusive and most convenient of all those considered by the VNC and provides the greatest opportunity to seriously address the needs of both the housed and unhoused members of our community. It would have minimal impact on neighboring residential and there are no commercial activities in the area.

To further evidence broad based community support, VCH circulated a petition in the neighborhood which requests that the City work with VCH to establish and fund a permanent, free and safe storage program at the Westminster Center. Over 350 residents signed that petition, copies of which accompany this proposal as **Attachment 2**.

The mission of the Department of Recreation and Parks would also be served. Reducing unattended property and debris from public areas including the Beach and the Ocean Front Walk would make those areas cleaner, safer and more attractive and welcoming to visitors. Providing toilet and shower facilities would improve sanitation and protect our environment while enabling unhoused residents to improve personal hygiene (and job prospects) and more easily blend in to the social scene that attracts millions of tourists every year.

VCH welcomes the opportunity to work with the City to develop a comprehensive storage and homeless outreach and service facility at the Westminster Center. It could be established immediately upon approval as no significant renovation appears to be needed to make the facility serviceable.