

RIVER STREET RESIDENCES (PROJECT)
Parish Information Sheet
January 23, 2010

A Message from Bishop Larry Silva

“Addressing the problem of homelessness is one of the priorities identified by the people of our diocese in the Road Map. The River Street Residences is a housing project for which there is funding and the entire infrastructure in place. It seems like everyone should be supportive of such a worthy project, but the “Not-In-My-Back-Yard” (NIMBY) syndrome has caused some key Chinatown business and civic leaders to oppose the project. The project will probably solve many of the problems Chinatown faces with the homeless, but fear and negativity have gained the upper hand. We are trying to mobilize parishioners, residents and other churches surrounding the River Street Residences project to come together in support of it. Time is of the essence, since if the project does not receive approval within the next couple of weeks, the funding for it may be lost. I am asking for your support of this project.”

What is the River Street Residences project?

In brief, the River Street Residences will provide 100 permanent rental units to accommodate the many homeless living in the downtown and Chinatown areas. The idea came about after hearing numerous community complaints about homelessness, originating before and at the Chinatown Summit convened by Mayor Mufi Hannemann in 2006.

What kind of housing project will this be?

A model called “housing first,” which homeless providers have long-advocated as one of the key solutions to addressing homelessness. This model centers on providing people with housing quickly and following up with supportive services as needed. This would include addiction and mental health services, case management, and general support to provide stability for individuals who are homeless, thereby improving their ability to stay in permanent housing and achieve self-sufficiency. “Housing first” is a proven model as cited in a number of publications, most recently in the April 1, 2009 issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association* titled, "Health Care and Public Service Use and Costs Before and After Provision of Housing for Chronically Homeless Persons with Severe Alcohol Problems." This study demonstrated a cost saving to government, and ultimately the taxpayer, of almost \$30,000 per person annually after accounting for housing program costs through their project.

Where will the River Street Residences project be located?

There is an ideal location for this project on River Street located at the edge of Chinatown (at the intersection with Vineyard Boulevard). It is comprised of a land area of 26,925 square feet. The site was purchased many years ago by the City and County of Honolulu with the intent of developing affordable housing. With the current economic downturn we have a tremendous opportunity to present a tangible, achievable solution for chronic homelessness in Chinatown while creating construction jobs that help to boost the economy.

Who will live at the River Street Residences project?

The residents will provide a mix of residential units to accommodate individuals, couples and possibly small families including persons with special needs and disabilities. Residents will also be provided with a program of onsite supportive services.

In addition to housing for the homeless, there will be 24 hour a day staffing, a program of supportive and employment services. There will also be restrooms that can be made available to the public on a 24 hour basis.

Why is the Catholic Church and other religious denominations involved with this project?

For Catholics, the issue of homelessness goes right to the heart of living the Gospel in the face of today's social challenges. Here's why.

Christian discipleship seeks to apply the word of God and the wisdom of his Church to the issues of the modern world. Catholics and all persons of good will have a common stake in engaging the social problems of the age. It makes sense, where possible, to find ways to work together to build the common good and serve the needs of the poor.

Serving human dignity begins with ensuring every person's right to life from conception to natural death. That always means defending the disabled, the terminally ill and the unborn child. But our obligations go beyond that. The right to life implies other rights. It implies the right to adequate food, clothing and medical care, justice under the law and opportunities to earn a living. ***It also implies a right to adequate shelter; to a place each of us can call "home."***

The Catholic Church in Hawaii and throughout the world has worked to ease homelessness for a long time. Other faith-based groups and many others also do excellent, sacrificial work in helping the homeless. But still more can and needs to be done.

Hawaii's homelessness problem belongs to all of us – civil authorities, businesses, private foundations and religious communities alike. Homelessness is a wound against human dignity that should concern Catholics and other people of good will across the whole state.

In our Catholic tradition, the stranger is often God in our midst. Often today, because of fear and the unknown, we may be blocked from that reality.

What can parishes do?

Many parishes and parishioners are caring for people through food pantries, hot meal programs, clothing distribution and provision of other resources. This is needed and must continue. But what is as important, is to ensure that the homeless are provided housing. Supporting the River Street Residences project is one concrete way parishes can do this.

What can you do?

- Pray for those individuals who are strongly opposed to the development of the River Street Residences project and ask our Lord to touch their hearts and minds and let this project materialize.
- Take the time to read the handout that you received today.
- If possible, join us at the parish hall to hear more about the project and discuss any questions you may have.
- Mark your calendars and join our other Christian brothers and sisters at an informational rally on January 23rd at Harris Methodist Church from 1pm to 3pm.