

July 5, 2023

## WRITTEN PROJECT DESCRIPTION FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION PART I: HEIGHT AND MASS

916 Martin Luther King Blvd.

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Construction proposed for 916 Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard (MLK) and adjoining lots will provide 16 high quality 2-bedroom apartments affordable to small families and/or couples who have been displaced, or who are at risk of being displaced, due to the high cost of rental housing in the neighborhood and Savannah. Many residents are expected to be successfully participating in initiatives offered by organizations that provide housing and supportive services to displaced persons and families. Renters can live in the apartments indefinitely providing they abide by the terms of their lease. This is not transitional housing—although planners hope that by having a stable, affordable, place to live with supportive services that some residents will use this as a springboard to larger market rate apartments and/or home purchases.

The apartments range in size from about 775 to 925 square feet and most are expected to rent for no more than the Fair Market Rent for Savannah which is currently \$1,256 a month. Rents for 2-bedroom market rate apartments being developed in the neighborhood are easily \$2,500 or more. One of the apartments is expected to be occupied by an on-site property manager. The apartments will be located in three 3-story buildings that are interconnected by a controlled access courtyard and common roof. Each apartment will include a living and dining area, a kitchen with appliances, stackable washers/dryers, and a patio/porch. Off-street parking for the apartments will be developed on a vacant lot located at 409 West Bolton Street.

The ground floor of the building fronting MLK will include about 2,000 square feet for use by the owner's on-site management and support staff. It will also include space for amenities that are expected to benefit apartment and neighborhood residents. Amenities are expected to include a small walk-up retail space, computer lab, laundry, and meeting room/space that can be used by those providing healthcare, educational and employment enhancement services.

Providing high quality affordable housing with supportive services has become increasingly important in this neighborhood. The neighborhood's affordable housing is being replaced by market rate housing with rents that are not affordable to modest and lower income persons and families. This is due, in part, to the increased cost of producing housing and the attractive location of the neighborhood to market rate apartment developers.

To help reduce costs and make the proposed housing affordable, the City of Savannah expects to make its land available for this development. The Savannah Affordable Housing Fund (SAHF) and other similar resources are expected to be combined with private financing to bring about the development of the property. The City expects to involve the Chatham County / City of Savannah Land Bank Authority, Community Housing Services Agency, Inc. (CHSA), and CHSA Development, Inc. in this undertaking. Once constructed by CHSA Development, Inc., the buildings are expected to be acquired, managed and

operated by a local non-profit organization with experience providing affordable housing and supportive services to apartment and neighborhood residents.

Staff from the City of Savannah, Community Housing Services Agency, Inc. (CHSA), CHSA Development, Inc., Chatham Savannah Authority for the Homeless (CSAH), Interagency Council on Homelessness, GMSHAY Architects, and others have been in discussions about this prospective project and site for several months. City and non-profit partner staff have met with neighborhood leaders, including the leadership and members of the Victorian Neighborhood Association, to discuss the proposed development. Responses have been positive and advice helpful.

#### Design Standard Relief Sought

This petition, seeking relief from design standards adopted for the West Victorian neighborhood, will help reduce building costs and help make the development affordable. Specifically, the relief request seeks to reduce the 13' first floor wall height to 11'. The reduced first floor wall height will be more in line with existing buildings on either side of the proposed new building. The building will meet other required design standards. While design standards can help support the retention of the architectural history and character of a neighborhood, they can also inadvertently increase development and housing costs. This can lead to the displacement of an important part of the neighborhood's history—its lower- and moderate-income residents.