DESC Burien: Affordable Housing Demonstration Project
Fact Sheet

The following fact sheet is intended to provide information about most-asked questions regarding the DESC affordable housing demonstration project.

Please use the hyperlinks to jump to information about the topic.

General Information

Burien's Affordable Housing Demonstration Program

DESC Burien Project Proposal

Development Process

Proposed DESC Burien Building

Current Building and Tenants

Permit Process and Departures Requested

Project Feasibility without the Demonstration Program

Construction Project Financing

Relationship with the Community

Potential Impacts on Property Tax Revenue

Potential Impact on Sales Tax Revenue

Potential Impacts on Future Downtown Development

Potential Impacts on EMS and Police Services

Serving People Experiencing Homelessness in Burien

Onsite Management

About Burien's Affordable Housing Demonstration Program

On November 4, 2019, the Burien City Council adopted Ordinance 718, creating an Affordable Housing Demonstration Program. The program allows up to five demonstration projects, one of which is required to be affordable to households earning up to 30% of area median income. Burien City Council is responsible for selecting the demonstration projects.

Program Application Process:

- The applicant is required to hold two neighborhood meetings.
- Planning Commission recommendation is required.
- City Council approval is required.
- The applicant may request certain "departures" from the Zoning Code.
- All other permit processes and City reviews apply.
- A long-term affordability agreement is required.

DESC Burien Project Proposal

Downtown Emergency Service Center (DESC) has submitted a project proposal to be selected as a demonstration project. DESC Burien is a 95-unit apartment building that includes professional supportive services to serve people who have previously experienced homelessness. Tenants sign a lease agreement and pay 30% of their income on rent. The proposed project is not a temporary shelter and would not provide services to people who are not residents of the building.

DESC Burien tenants will have the typical rights and responsibilities of traditional housing with the added support of onsite case management, onsite property management, and 24/7 staffing with 6-7 staff on-site during most hours of the day.

Onsite case managers assist tenants in connecting with behavioral health providers, attending medical appointments, keeping units clean and in good condition, obtaining Metro passes, paying rent on time, and managing their medication. Other provided support includes some meals as well as onsite activities, therapeutic groups, and crisis management services.

Proposed Building

The proposed DESC Burien building would be six floors in height, similar to the height of Burien's Town Square development, and the upcoming Kinect@Burien project. On the ground floor, the building will feature lobby areas, counseling offices, meeting rooms, a kitchen and administrative offices, and an outside courtyard. Streetscaping improvements are planned, including landscaping and sidewalk upgrades.



Three parking stalls are proposed at this time. As in other projects, required parking would be determined through a parking demand study.

Current Building and Tenants

Owner: Burien Medical Office LLC
Construction Date: 1968
Current Status: A purchase and sale agreement is in place
Number of Tenants: 12

DESC says they have retained the services of a relocation consultant who will provide relocation assistance to all tenants. The City of Burien Economic Development department will help current tenants find new commercial spaces in Burien. Ten of the 12 leases will expire before construction is planned.

Permit Process and Departures Requested

"Departure" refers to deviations from strict adherence to the development regulations. "Incentives" are allowed if certain components are included in the project, increasing the building floor area above the base total. The following chart provides a comparison between the DESC project and other typical projects in downtown Burien:

	Without Demonstration Program (Any Development)	**With Demonstration Program DESC**
Relocation Assistance	Not required by Burien Municipal Code	DESC will provide relocation assistance for all existing businesses
Parking	Subject to parking demand study, approved by the City	Subject to parking demand study, approved by the City
Building Height	Six floors with corresponding incentives Three stories without incentives	Currently proposing six floors
Floor to Area Ratio (FAR) (Ratio of building floor area to lot area)	3.5 FAR without incentives 7 FAR with incentives	3.75 FAR proposed
Common/Outdoor Recreation Space	8,075 square feet (95 units x 85 square feet)	6,000 square feet as proposed DESC notes that kitchen and professional support offices (approximately 3,000 square feet)

		don't explicitly "count" as recreation space. Activities that will occur in those spaces include group dining, cooking classes, and counseling.
Private Recreation Space or Balconies	Balconies required for some units based on a formula	No balconies proposed
Design Features	Determined through administrative design review	Determined through administrative design review
Ground Floor Retail	Not required at this location, though it is included as an incentive option for additional floors	Not proposed, but services and amenities proposed at ground floor are similar to Merrill Gardens at Burien (lobby, dining area, community room)
Residential Unit Density	No density limit in downtown Burien	Consistent with Burien Municipal Code
Next Steps after Council approval	Apply for Administrative Design Review. Includes review of applicable development standards and design of the building.	Apply for Administrative Design Review. Includes review of applicable development standards and design of the building. Draft memo of understanding for inclusion in the Affordable Housing Demonstration Program. Second public meeting is required.

Project Feasibility without the Inclusion in the Affordable Housing Demonstration Program

According to DESC, feasibility is highly doubtful without the departures allowed by the Affordable Housing Demonstration Program. The organization's architect analyzed the cost impacts of developing a building without the departures offered by the demonstration program and determined that the re-designed structure would add $2.5 to $3 million to the overall cost of the building. This additional cost would be at the expense of features that serve tenants and staff.

These cost increases would decrease competitiveness for future funding with the Washington State Housing Finance Commission. The Commission has placed a high priority on cost containment for publicly funded projects. It is likely DESC Burien would not get funded.

The organization says that several hundred thousand dollars has been invested in DESC Burien to date. Unlike private developers who are able to budget for design changes, DESC is a nonprofit that relies on public funding to construct supportive housing.

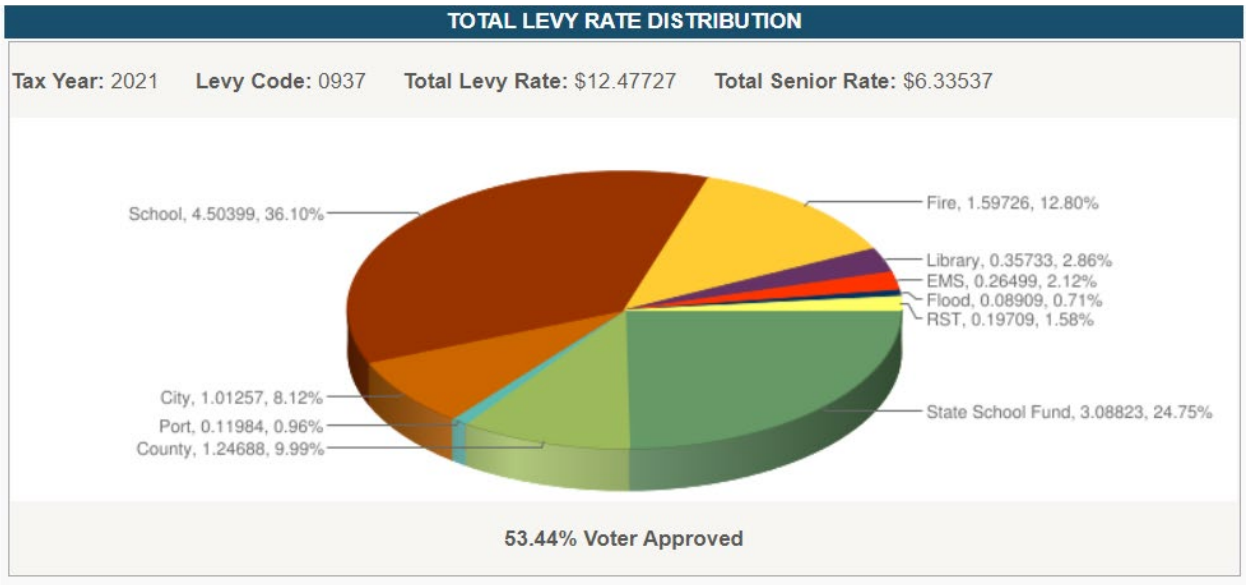
Construction Project Financing

DESC Burien will be funded by public funding sources such as the Washington State Department of Commerce Housing Trust Fund, the King County Housing Finance Program, and the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit. Ongoing services will be receiving operating and funding support from King County. The project will also receive 95 King County Housing Authority vouchers. By working with these public funders, DESC Burien will be required to commit to making the building affordable for 50 years, submit tenant eligibility paperwork each year, and undergo annual unit inspections.

Potential Impact on Property Tax Revenue

Property tax information from the King County Department of Assessments shows that the City of Burien government receives slightly more than $1,700 per year in property tax revenue from the property currently. Approximately $2,700 is allocated to fire and emergency services. DESC intends to apply for a property tax exemption and has stated that many other of their facilities have been granted a tax exemption. This is similar to tax exemption status experienced by education, religious and nonprofit property owners. In the downtown area, this includes Merrill Gardens and several churches.

Valued Year	Tax Year	Appraised Land Value ($)	Appraised Imps Value ($)	Appraised Total ($)	Appraised Imps Increase ($)	Taxable Land Value ($)	Taxable Imps Value ($)	Taxable Total ($)
2020	2021	390,600	1,207,200	1,597,800	0	390,600	1,207,200	1,597,800



Source: King County Department of Assessments.

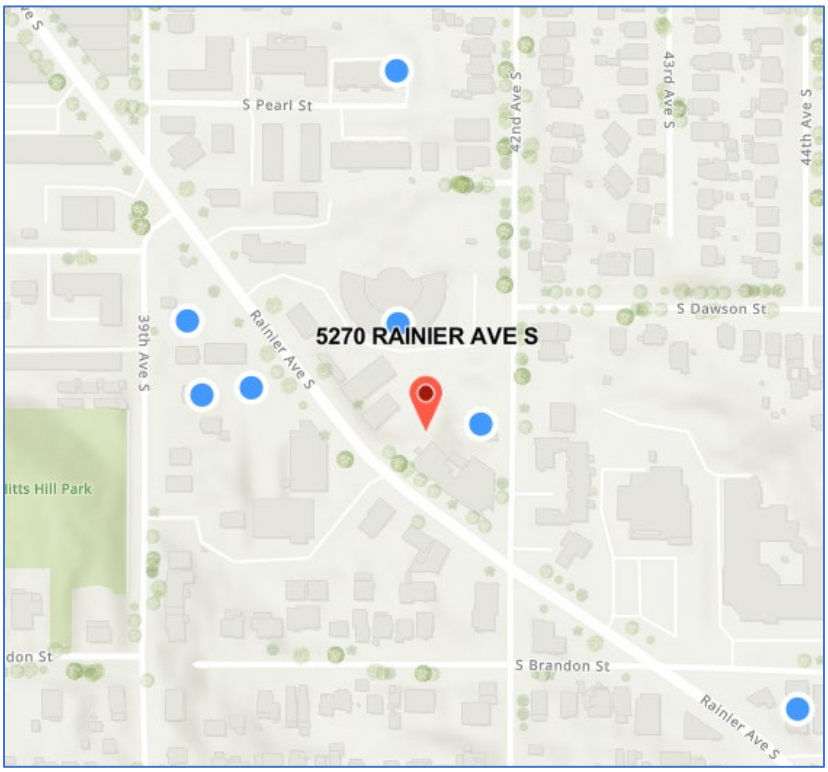
Potential Impacts on Sales Tax Revenue

Washington State Law (RCW 82.32.330) specifically prohibits the City of Burien from sharing information regarding the amount of sales made by a business and the amount of sales tax reported to the City. Through its relocation program, DESC will work with Burien staff to re-locate existing businesses to new locations within Burien with the hope of retaining the businesses and resultant sales taxes. DESC notes that the organization will pay sales tax on the building construction costs and other related costs, and tenants and staff will be spending money in Burien where purchases are subject to sales tax.

Potential Impacts on Future Downtown Development

The project is consistent with Burien design standards and zoning code requirements overall. We can look at development activity near a comparable DESC project in Seattle to see how the project could potentially impact future development in Burien's downtown.

The map below shows the location and number of projects undergoing permitting processes in the vicinity of the Rainier House DESC facility at 5270 Rainier Avenue South in Seattle. Blue dots represent the location of nearby private development projects in various phases of permitting and construction.



Source: City of Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections

Architectural renderings and summary information of development projects within the vicinity of DESC Rainier House as depicted on the previous map:

5201 RAINIER AVE S



Description
Council Land Use Action to rezone a parcel from Neighborhood Commercial 2 with a 40' height limit (NC2 40') to Neighborhood Commercial 3 with a 65' height limit (NC3 65') and the M1 suffix (NC3-65(M1)). Proposal includes a 3-story, 4-unit townhouse structure and a 6-story structure with 104 apartment units, 3 live-work units, and 1,607 sq. ft. of restaurant space. Parking for 52 vehicles proposed below grade. Existing structures to be demolished. Less

5217 42ND AVE S



Description
Shoring and excavation for future construction of an apartment building with below grade parking, per plan.

5230 39TH AVE S



Description
Establish use as and construct new multifamily structure (west building), and occupy per plan.

4419 S BRANDON ST



Description
Land Use application to allow a 5-story, 29-unit apartment building with retail. No parking proposed. Existing building to be demolished. Administrative Design Review conducted under 3034507-EG.

Potential Impacts on EMS and Police Services

Research-based evidence shows that when people experiencing chronic homelessness are housed, emergency calls decrease for this group of people. While more calls may be coming from a particular address, a net decrease in police and fire calls overall is a likely outcome.

DESC has provided information to the City of Burien regarding the number of EMS and police calls that they expect at their buildings. DESC says their buildings have 6-10 calls to 911 per month. The most common reason is a tenant medical emergency. Aside from coordinating connections to primary care, DESC also works with a consulting nurse to avoid using 911. That said, much like nursing homes and other assisted living programs, many of the tenants have severe medical needs and sometimes require emergency care.

DESC says they sometimes experience heightened call volumes often related to current struggles of an individual tenant. For example, in a comparable building there have been about 14-18 calls per month. This increase is usually tied to specific tenants who call 911 themselves for reasons that are deemed "low acuity" and a misuse of 911. DESC works with the local precinct and care team to identify and plan around reducing these calls. Furthermore, research provides evidence that the permanent supportive housing and Housing First models that DESC employs in its housing program decrease client reliance on EMS services both during the transition from an unhoused to housed state and also over the duration of time spent in housing.

Additionally, City staff has sought data to inform this discussion. Following are police and emergency service (medical) calls between 2019 and 2021. Note that staff did not attempt to interpret this data, and the following numbers may include calls associated with the address rather than the occupants of the building.

Location	**# Units**	**King County Sheriff's Office May 2019 – May 2021**	**Fire/EMS January 1, 2019 – May 2021**
LARC Burien	160	97	37
Maverick	228	105	3
Merrill Gardens	111 (+15 memory care)	40	37
		Seattle Police May 2019 - May 2021	**Seattle Fire Department/ EMS May 2019 – May 2021**
Rainier House	50	53	139

Serving People Experiencing Homelessness in Burien

Currently, Burien's LEAD and Co-LEAD staff work with people experiencing homelessness in Burien. Through King County's Coordinated Entry Program for All, these people are placed in permanent housing throughout the region, including permanent housing in Seattle. The program seeks to prioritize people with the greatest need using a regional, system-wide approach.

DESC says the DESC Burien project will serve people from Burien. DESC will work with local organizations to target and reach-out to people already experiencing homelessness in Burien. These individuals will apply for DESC Burien units through King County's Coordinated Entry for All program.

The application process for Coordinated Entry for All requests information about client preference for geographic location. DESC would encourage those experiencing homelessness in Burien who wanted to stay to indicate their preference during the application process. Using this method, DESC has, in other situations, been able to assist applicants in gaining a unit in the neighborhood of their choice. DESC continues to advocate at the County level for an approach that allows housing providers to reserve units for locals experiencing homelessness.

Onsite Management

DESC Burien will house single adults experiencing chronic homelessness, which means people homeless for one year or longer, and living with a disability. At least 25 units will be reserved for veterans experiencing chronic homelessness. Supportive housing is a specialized resource with built-in supports like onsite case management and staffing at all hours of the day and night. DESC prioritizes applicants who need this type of housing to be successful. The following is information about how DESC will manage the building.

Staffing:

DESC Burien will have an onsite project manager, five clinical support specialists, and ten residential counselors. A front desk will be staffed 24/7. DESC says that staff presence is highest during daytime hours, but evening, overnight, and weekend times will feature a minimum of two staff members on-site.

DESC reports that all DESC staff receive training across a variety of topics including effective engagement skills with clients and crisis prevention and intervention. This training teaches staff how to identify a person in crisis as well as a range of de-escalation skills to prevent situations from becoming more acute and avoid the unnecessary reliance on external sources such as police services. One of the most helpful elements of de-escalation is an existing trusting relationship with a tenant. DESC says they place a high priority on establishing trusting relationships with residents.

Tenant Leases and Agreements:

Tenants sign an addendum to the lease called a "Good Neighbor Policy" before they begin their residency. Tenants pay 30% of their income toward rent. DESC says that turnover in their buildings is extremely low, varying between 2–5% annually, and that most people who move into a DESC building make it their lifelong home. Eviction rates for tenants are similarly low. In 2020, DESC asked 14 people

to terminate their leases out of more than 1,200 people served. Of those 14, DESC found new housing or shelter for 12.

Good Neighbor Policy: When tenants move in, they sign an addendum to the lease called the Good Neighbor Policy. This policy prohibits problematic behaviors such as a loitering around local businesses. Should a business suspect that an individual exhibiting concerning behavior lives at the DESC Burien building, they may call the front desk at any time day or night for a response.

DESC says their practice is to check on the situation as quickly as possible, and to reinforce expectations if the person is a DESC tenant. In the event the person does not reside in the DESC Burien building, DESC says they would do our best to help resolve the matter. DESC staff have significant skills in engaging with this population and knowledge of resources that can help solve a problem.

Stance on Drug Use:

DESC reports that drug use is not permitted in their programs. However, many DESC clients are living with substance use challenges. DESC takes an open and honest approach with tenants about this topic. Much like substance use in the broader community, many addictions play out in private. DESC works to connect people to treatment. Some people have substance use issues that can impact the broader community, which leads DESC to treating those behaviors as lease enforcement issues.

DESC uses an approach called “harm reduction”. This is a practical approach that acknowledges risky behavior, like drug use, exists in our world. Instead of demanding risky behavior simply cease (often to little effect), harm reduction attempts to reduce the dangers associated with the risky behavior. This can take many forms, but most well-known are provision of clean needles and access to condoms.

DESC provides the following perspective: A common societal belief exists that the only path to recovery from substance use is immediate and total abstinence and/or a tough-love approach. While this approach works for some people, others have not been successful and have worsening outcomes over time. This means that other approaches are required to meet the treatment needs in our community.

DESC has partnered with the University of Washington on several studies. Research has not demonstrated any support for the idea that the harm reduction approach leads to increased substance use or a worsening of substance use outcomes. Research demonstrates that harm reduction is associated with reduced drug use, reduced harm and—at the community level—reduced need for publicly-funded services.