



CONTRIBUTED RENDERING

The Southwest Community Health Center, Inc. and the Bridgeport Housing Authority are nearing construction of a nearly \$20 million medical, dental and housing complex on an empty 1.16-acre parcel on Albion Street. The new buildings will replace Southwest's clinic one block away at 361 Bird St., while providing additional public housing units in the city.

# AGENCIES PARTNER FOR HOUSING/MEDICAL COMPLEX

By Kella Torres  
STAFF WRITER

BRIDGEPORT — In a unique collaboration, the Southwest Community Health Center and the Bridgeport Housing Authority plan to build a nearly \$20 million medical, dental and housing complex on an empty 1.16-acre Albion Street site.

The new buildings will replace Southwest's clinic one block away at 361 Bird St., while providing additional public housing units. Kathy Yacavone, president and chief executive officer of Southwest, said she has heard of similar partnerships in California and other states, but none in Connecticut.

"It is a unique concept and we are just thrilled about it," she said.

Southwest has been at the Bird Street site, owned by the housing authority, for more than 30 years, but must vacate that building soon because the housing authority does not have the funds to make the structure handicapped-accessible.

Peter Hance, the BHA's redevelopment and modernization director, said the agency is under contract with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to make all of their facilities ADA-compliant within the next two or three years. Nicholas Calace, the BHA executive director, said upgrades to the Bird Street site could cost up to \$1 million, but the building is only worth about \$300,000.

For this reason, the two agencies partnered on plans for a new clinic and 35 two-bedroom apartments at 46 Albion St., where the Evergreen Apartments once stood. That property is also owned by the BHA.

"HUD is working with us because they know this stuff doesn't happen overnight," Calace said. "I'm trying to be very optimistic. It looks like we're getting close."

Southwest has already received just over \$800,000 in federal stimulus funds

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John Marshall Lee  
MEMBER, BLACK ROCK HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION

for the nearly \$2.5 million dental center. "We will be financing the balance of that project ourselves," Yacavone said. She said the agency is pursuing construction loans and hopes to put the project out to bid by May.

Federal guidelines for the stimulus funds require that the project be completed by June 2011, Yacavone said. "Our goal is to open the dental center by next fall, which is really ambitious," she said. "The architects working with us are working feverishly to get the construction documents out."

The BHA, meanwhile, is using \$7 million in funds to build new units replacing those lost with the demolition of the former Father Panik Village, as well as supportive housing units. The agency has also applied for 4 percent tax credits, which they would sell to investors in an effort to raise the additional \$5 million needed to complete construction of the housing phase.

Hance described the architectural uniqueness of the project's design, which includes energy-efficient windows, extra insulation in the walls and a green roof on the medical center and the one-story hallways that will connect that building to the dental center.

In the middle of the dental center, there will also be a garden-like courtyard. Also, in order to provide a more picturesque view from apartments, the front of the structure will jut out at an angle, Hance said.

This way, instead of looking at the side wall of the Super Stop & Shop across the street — with the entrance

on Fairfield Avenue — residents will look up and down Albion Street. "It has a little bit of a slant so you have a front view of Captain's Cove" from the window on the north wall, Hance said. The other window will face Fairfield Avenue.

Hance said he would like to see the building walls painted vibrant colors and a mural displayed on the bare wall facing Fairfield Avenue.

Once the dental center and housing units are completed, Southwest will move forward with plans to build an adjoining two-story medical center. The roughly 19,000-square-foot building will house Southwest's medical and behavioral health services, as well as its administrative offices.

Yacavone said construction of that building is estimated at \$5.5 million. "That's our challenge now, to find the funding as soon as we can," she said.

John Marshall Lee, a Black Rock resident and member of the Black Rock Homeowners Association and Black Rock Neighborhood Revitalization Zone, said he likes the agencies' plans for the vacant Albion Street lot. "By putting these things together you come up with something good," he said.

Donna Fewell, president of the P.T. Barnum Tenant Association, said she loves the building design. "I think it's magnificent," she said. "We are all in favor of new apartments around here."

Hance said he was glad that area residents have embraced the project. "In a time when lots of people question whether or not public housing is good or needed," he said, "the fact that these two neighborhoods came together to endorse the project shows the character of Bridgeport."

"They see that this project provides health care that is needed," he added, "and brings housing that is needed in a building that will be a landmark and, we hope, a vision for redevelopment for the city."