

A Gateway to Affordable Housing

County partnership with nonprofit generates quality apartments for low-wage workers

Dallas County government sits on prime real estate in north Oak Cliff. One of its government centers has an address at 400 S. Beckley Ave., between the popular Jefferson Boulevard corridor and Bishop Arts district to the west and the deck park under construction to the east, next to the Dallas Zoo.

As part of a yearslong effort to consolidate government offices, Dallas County will open a new government center on Jefferson Boulevard where residents can pay their tax bills or pick up a marriage license. And instead of selling the 3-acre property on Beckley Avenue, Dallas County is doing something smarter: It has agreed to lease the land to an affordable-housing developer that plans to build a mixed-income apartment complex on the site.

The project, known as Gateway Oak Cliff, will have 230 units: 46 rentals leased at market rate and 184 apartments for people making 60% or less of the area median income countywide. For a family of four, 60% of the area median income is \$51,700 a year, and for a single person, \$36,200.

Aggressive redevelopment in north Oak Cliff has ushered in waves of luxury townhomes and high-end apartments. All this activity in recent years has pumped up property values and stirred concerns about the displacement of working-class families in the predominantly Hispanic area.

“I am really happy and proud that the Commissioners Court took action,” said Dallas County Commissioner Elba Garcia, who represents most of north Oak Cliff. “We talked, and we actually walked the walk and

are addressing affordable housing needs.”

Dallas County’s partner in this project is the Catholic Housing Initiative, a nonprofit whose portfolio includes several affordable apartment properties across North Texas for families and seniors, and two supportive housing centers in Dallas that provide services to people struggling with homelessness. The county had previously collaborated with the nonprofit and others by kicking in \$10 million to acquire a North Dallas hotel and assist homeless people who had been treated for COVID-19.

Gateway Oak Cliff is not a homeless center. Joe Dingman, co-founder and treasurer of the Catholic Housing Initiative, told us the property will offer homes to people working in the lower-paying end of our economy. Think warehouse workers, grocery clerks and school janitors.

Catholic Housing Initiative expects to receive federal tax credits to build the complex, which would start construction this fall. The county won’t manage the property day to day, but as a partner in the project, it’ll receive ground lease payments and share in any money that’s left after the property collects rent and pays its bills and debt, Dingman said.

We commend county commissioners and county staff for their creative approach to generating quality affordable rentals in Dallas, and we hope other local governments are watching. Hardworking people in low-paying jobs across North Texas need a decent place to live, so spurring the development of affordable homes must be a shared effort.