

Kickapoos, Keetoowahs to build senior housing

by Mike W. Ray

Published: December 15th, 2011

OKLAHOMA CITY – Two Native American tribes in Oklahoma are developing housing facilities for their senior members.

The Kickapoo Tribe of Oklahoma envisions a 10-unit assisted-living center at its tribal campus north of McLoud, and the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians is building a 30-unit elder living housing complex near Tahlequah.

According to Construction Manager Jimmy Carter, proposals from design/build firms bidding for the Kickapoo center are due by 4 p.m. Dec. 30 at the tribal health center. A facility of 7,500 to 8,500 square feet is planned.

"This is innovative for us," said Nicholas Wahpepah, grants writer and compliance officer for the Kickapoo Tribe of Oklahoma. "We have programs in place for our elders, but no assisted-living units."

According to the Kickapoo housing authority, the tribe currently has 26 low-rent houses for qualifying members: 11 units for the elderly plus 15 family units.

Residents of the proposed new center can live independently, but help will be available to them if they need it, Wahpepah said.

The tribe's nutrition center, where meals are served, is nearby, he said. The assisted-living center will be staffed with at least one registered nurse around-the-clock, seven days a week, and the tribe's nutrition staff and personnel "will be in and out of the facility each day, assisting with meals," Wahpepah said. During regular business hours other tribal employees will be available for assistance when necessary, he said.

The request for proposals for the project indicates the design/build contract will be awarded in January and the tribe wants the assisted-living center constructed within 300 days. Plans are to have the center up and running in the early part of 2013, Wahpepah said.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will provide technical support, according to the request for proposals.

"We solicited them because of their expertise," Wahpepah said. The Corps of Engineers "has been doing projects like this for years," will provide expertise with inspections and will ensure that the new facility "meets all of the federal and state guidelines and codes for an assisted-living center," he said.

The cost of the facility cannot be estimated with accuracy until the design/build companies submit their proposals, Wahpepah said. However, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development awarded the tribe an \$800,000 grant for the project and the Kickapoos will contribute some tribal money, he said.

Enrollment Department Director Rosaura Jimenez said the Kickapoo Tribe of Oklahoma has 2,632 enrolled members in five states: Oklahoma, Texas, Kansas, New Mexico and Arizona.

The Keetoowahs broke ground Sept. 30 on an Elder Living Center they are constructing on land just south of the Tahlequah city limits.

The 30-unit complex will be a mix of one- and two-bedroom homes built into quadplexes, with one duplex, said Tim Good Voice, executive director of planning and development for the United Keetoowah Band. The development will be west of the Elder Nutrition Center and east of the Wellness Center, he said.

The \$1.5 million Elder Living Center is being financed with local, state and federal money, ledgers reflect. The Oklahoma Housing Finance Agency announced it awarded a \$500,000

Home Investment Partnerships Program grant to build 11 of the units. In addition, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development arm approved a long-term, low-interest \$970,000 loan for the project, and the tribe intends to contribute \$53,165 of its own money, said Darcy Green, OHFA's housing development program supervisor.

Construction is expected to start soon and will take about a year to complete, OHFA records indicate.

The tribe intends to screen tenant applicants during the construction period, so that those who are selected can move in as soon as inspectors have given the project their seal of approval and a certificate of occupancy is issued, Green said.

"The tribe is grateful for the partnering agencies that have come together with us to provide our elders with homes that are safe and affordable," Good Voice said.

Complete URL: <http://journalrecord.com/2011/12/15/kickapoos-keetoowahs-to-build-senior-housing-facilities-real-estate/>