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## Local/Regional

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# Bill in Congress may back shelter for homeless vets

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NASHUA – Harbor Homes is in final negotiations to secure a location downtown that would be the site of a 20-unit transitional living house for homeless veterans.

Cynthia Andreola, community relations director for Harbor Homes, said the goal is to have the project finished by June 2010.

The project could receive financial support from a federal appropriations bill being considered by Congress.

The new facility would be paid for, in part, by an “earmark,” or funding requested by specific members of Congress, in a federal appropriations bill passed by the House and now being considered by the Senate.

The bill includes \$475,000 for the project, according to a statement from Sen. Judd Gregg’s office Thursday. The bill was approved by the House and will be considered by the Senate next week.

Andreola said the project would still move forward if the bill fails, but said the funding, which covers about 10 percent of the entire project cost, would certainly help.

“We are dedicated to trying to continue to resolve the problem for homeless veterans, one way or the other,” she said.

Andreola said she couldn’t be more specific about what site they are looking at until the deal is finalized. It was learned on Wednesday that Harbor Homes has offered to pay \$818,000 for Spartans Hall at 73 E. Hollis, which is being sold as part of Spartans bankruptcy proceedings.

Once completed, the facility would be known as “Dalianis House,” named after Griffin Dalianis, chairman of the State Veterans Advisory Committee and commander of the Gate City Chapter 7 of the Disabled American Veterans.

Harbor Homes, a private, nonprofit housing agency in Nashua, currently operates two transitional living houses for homeless veterans in the city.

One site is located at 440 Amherst St., designed for single male veterans.

There is also Buckingham Place on Spring Street, which has 20 apartments for men and women and veterans with families.

Between the two facilities, the result of a program called Veterans FIRST that Harbor Homes established in 2004, there are 40 veterans being provided with housing and transitional living assistance.

The need for more space for homeless veterans is significant, said Andreola. There are currently more than 60 homeless veterans on a waiting list for space.

According to data supplied by Harbor Homes, veterans make up 23 percent of the homeless population.

"We have a constant waiting list," she said.

The length of a veteran's stay at transitional facilities is capped at two years, during which veterans must be working, serving as a volunteer or pursuing an education.

Once their stay is complete, the program helps veterans find permanent housing. Andreola said that since 2004, her organization has helped more than 60 men and women move on to independent living.

For many veterans, a combination of physical and mental health issues can lead to homelessness, she said. For others, it is a combination of bad decisions and bad luck, she said.

Once becoming homeless, Andreola said that starts a downward spiral.

"We're trying to stop that spiral and help them build back up to the point where they can move on to independence," she said.

During their time with the program, Andreola said veterans are put in contact with benefits they are eligible for, as well as getting them connected to physical therapy or mental health programs they need.

They are required to be substance-free, but they are also put in touch with programs to deal with any addictions they may have.

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