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Architects were asked to design appealing homeless shelters on a \$1-million budget. Here's what they came up with

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An artist's rendering shows a proposed design for a 150-person homeless shelter by DLR Group and EPT Design. (DLR Group and EPT Design)

One rendering shows a courtyard accented by contemporary planters and cafe tables. The tents where recently homeless people would live are shaded, and almost hidden, under wooden trellises.

It is one of three designs — depicting shelters of 50, 100 and 150 beds — produced by a group of architects working pro bono in support of Mayor Eric Garcetti's \$20-million initiative to build shelters in all 15 of Los Angeles' City Council districts.

The goal is to come up with standard designs that could be placed on a lot anywhere in the city, and are pleasing enough to help the shelter plan overcome its two biggest obstacles: First is the reputed aversion homeless people have for the dreary conditions in shelters. Then there's the almost inevitable community opposition that shelter proposals encounter.

The architects were recruited by the nonprofit Urban Land Institute. Working independently, all three teams came up with similar ideas for easing the isolation and regimentation of traditional shelters, where cots are lined end to end in a large building with limited access to the street.



An artist's rendering shows a temporary shelter designed by JFAK Architects. (JFAK Architects)

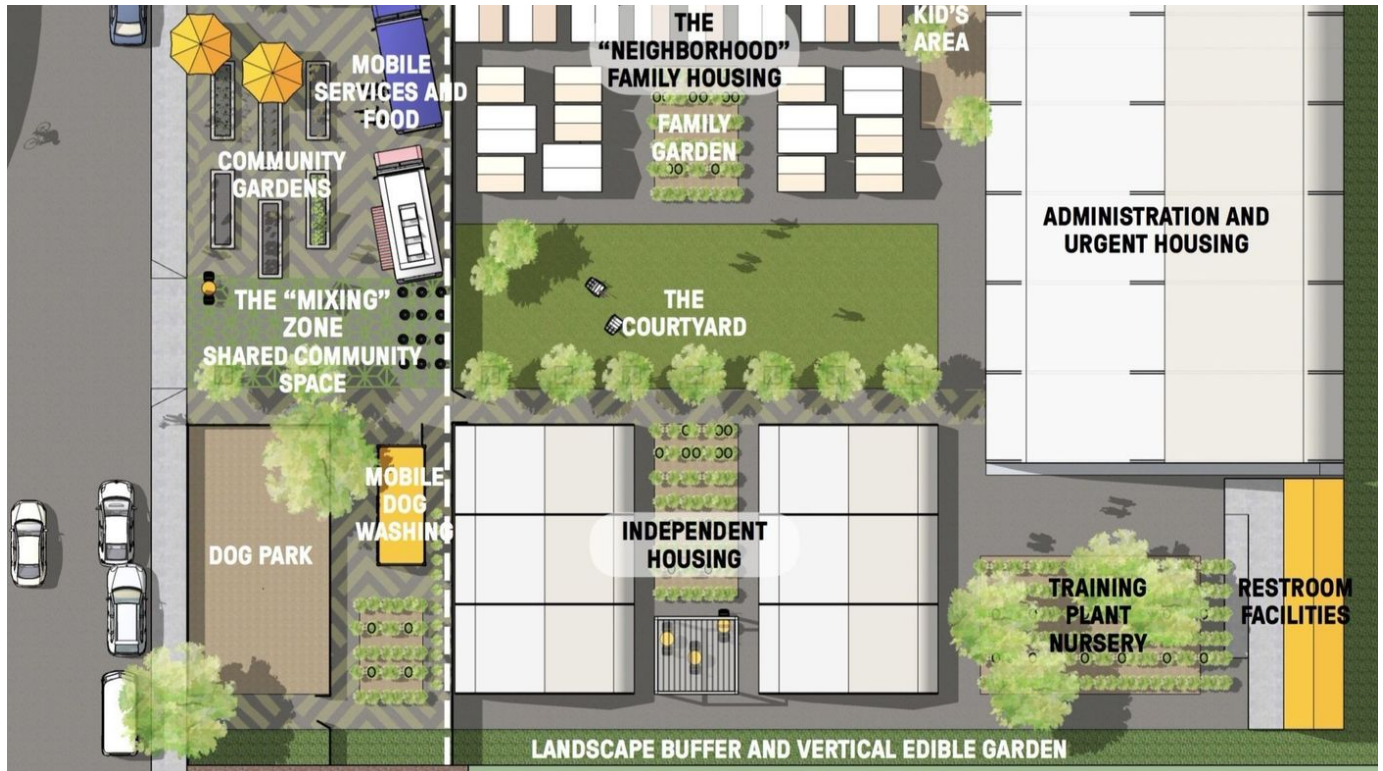
“One of the things they all had consistently was that the front door ... shouldn’t be a landscaped fence or a solid art wall that segregates the now newly housed residents from the community members that are living there,” said Clare De Briere, chairwoman of the Urban Land Institute’s Los Angeles District.

Their designs contrast with the prototype shelter soon to open near downtown’s El Pueblo. Hastily developed by the city for Garcetti’s A Bridge Home program, it’s a collection of trailers backing up to busy commuter streets and the 101 Freeway.

“If we do it again like that, we haven’t learned anything,” said Marty Borko, executive director of the institute’s L.A. district. “Everybody will be much smarter now about how to do this because they’ve gone through that process at El Pueblo.”

De Briere said the architects were asked to come up with plans that could be built for less than \$1 million.

Now, officials need to find a suitable lot in all 15 council districts.



An artist's rendering shows a temporary shelter designed by SWA and Studio One Eleven. (SWA and Studio One Eleven)

Real estate services firm CBRE and architects Gensler Los Angeles have their summer interns working on that problem.

The interns are sifting through CBRE's real estate database looking for sites — preferably on land owned by federal, state or local governments or churches — that would accommodate one of the three plans, said Lewis Horne, president of CBRE's greater Los Angeles-Orange County region.

De Briere said Urban Land Institute is offering to assist any council office with suggestions of sites where one of the designs could work.

So far, Council President Herb Wesson and Councilmen Paul Krekorian and Jose Huizar have requested help, she said.

The design challenge and land search grew out of a report the institute produced in December that foreshadowed Garcetti's Bridge Home program.

The institute, a global network that advocates for better urban planning, set up a panel that included housing officials from New York and New Orleans and the former mayor of Pittsburgh to seek solutions to L.A.'s homelessness crisis. After interviewing about 100 local officials, the panel concluded that more should be done quickly to address the crisis of unsheltered homeless people while longer-range housing solutions are in the works.

Its first recommendation called for the city within two years to open 60 temporary shelters of 50 to 150 beds and widely dispersed geographically. The idea roughly tracked the plan Garcetti laid out in his state of the city speech in April. Mayoral spokeswoman Anna Bahr said Garcetti already had developed his plan before receiving the group's report, but credited the institute with helping to flesh out designs.

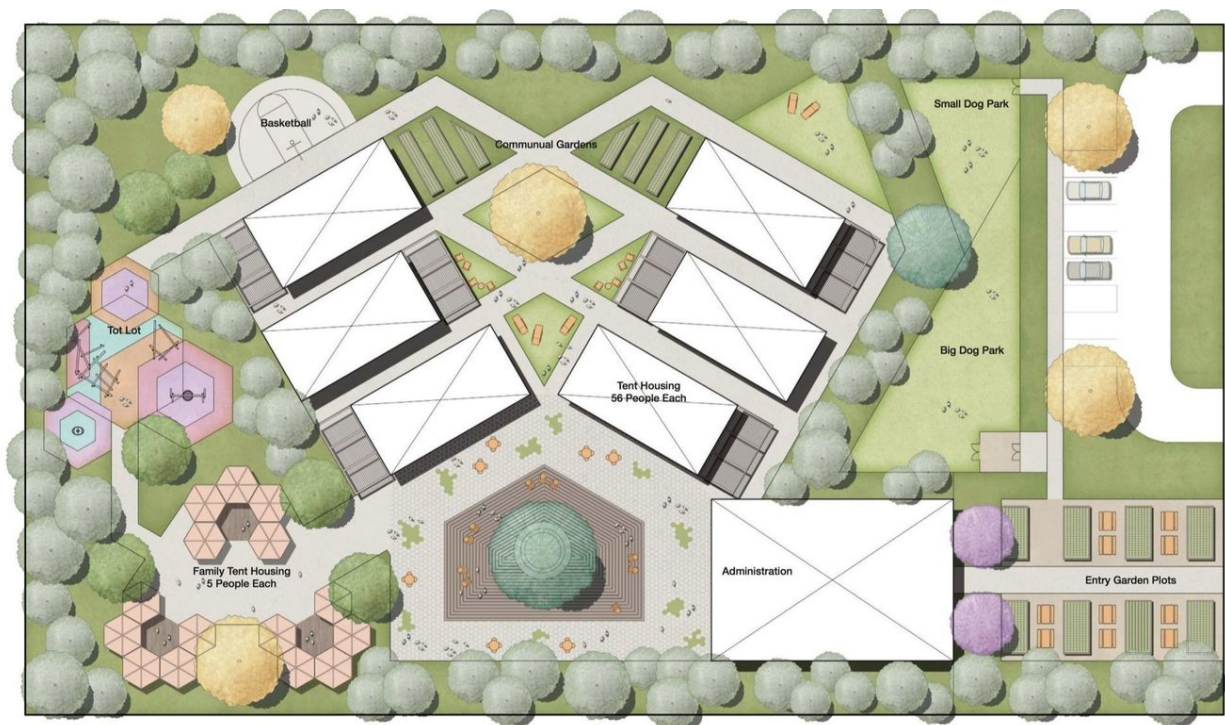
"They have been excellent support in using their network of experts to help us with design components," Bahr said.

A Bridge Home has had a rocky start. The El Pueblo project, opening in August, ballooned beyond its budget when designers added a \$700,000 interior deck to compensate for its unwelcoming configuration.

A project proposed by Wesson on a lot near Vermont Avenue and Wilshire Boulevard didn't even get to the design stage. A protest by Koreatown residents and business owners forced Wesson to withdraw the site. He now is considering other locations in his district.

The opposition highlights the importance of good design up front, De Briere said.

“I’m not saying you wouldn’t still have some community concerns about having temporary homes built there,” she said, pointing to the renderings on display in the institute’s office. “But if they had seen something that was more like some of these images, I think you would have a more positive reaction.”



An artist's rendering shows a temporary shelter designed by the DLR Group and EPT Design. (DLR Group / EPT Design)

The three designs came out of workshops with the architecture firms DLR Group, Studio One Eleven and JFAK Architects and landscape architecture firms EPT Design, RELM and SWA.

They worked with large, steel-ribbed tents, which are relatively inexpensive, come in different sizes and can be quickly set up on vacant land or in a parking lot.

The architects set a minimum space for each resident with room for dressers and armoires for storage and privacy.

All three teams came up with similar ideas to blend personal and public space, De Briere said.

The plans all have courtyards that invite community interaction, with semi-secluded areas where residents can engage one another, then more private living spaces inside the tents.

“It was a really interesting way to look at the organization of that space and really making these newly housed people feel that they are a part of the community they are in,” De Briere said, “as opposed to this big foreign tent that’s been blocked off and segregated from the community.”

<http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-homeless-shelter-plans-20180730-story.html>