

Construction, fundraising advance for Dorothy Day project

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An excavator crushes concrete rubble at 411 Main St. in St. Paul, site of the future Higher Ground St. Paul building. Higher Ground is the first phase of the \$100 million emergency housing, permanent housing and support services project for the Dorothy Day Center. (Staff photo: Bill Klotz)

The Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis is more than halfway toward its \$40 million private fundraising goal for the \$100 million Dorothy Day Center emergency housing and support services project in St. Paul, the organization said Thursday.

During a ceremonial groundbreaking, the organization said that nearly \$23.63 million has been raised for the “new vision for the Dorothy Day Center,” described by Catholic Charities as an “an innovative model to prevent and end homelessness.”

Donations include a \$5 million lead grant by The Richard M. Schulze Family Foundation, \$1 million each from the Frey Foundation and the Pohlad Foundation, and a combined \$1.1 million from the Saint Paul Foundation, F.R. Bigelow Foundation and Mardag Foundation.

Catholic Charities launched the private fundraising campaign in May.

“We are really excited and gratified by the private sector response to this new vision to advance the \$40 million campaign,” Catholic Charities CEO Tim Marx said in an interview.

Construction crews are already working on the first project phase, known as “Higher Ground St. Paul, which includes an

emergency shelter and 193 units of permanent housing in a five-story building at 411 Main St. in downtown St. Paul.

Marx said construction started in July with the demolition of an existing building at the site. Workers will begin to install precast concrete walls later this month, Marx said.

The second construction phase will deliver a six-story building with social services and another 170 units of permanent housing. The phase two "Opportunity Center" will be across the street from Higher Ground St. Paul.

When both phases are finished, in 2018, Catholic Charities will have about 359 new permanent housing units, compared with 170 units in the existing building, which is overcrowded and deteriorating.

The project team includes St. Paul-based Cermak Rhoades Architects as the designer and Watson-Forsberg of St. Louis Park as the contractor.

"So far they have us on time, on budget, and meeting specifications," Marx said.

Project supporters hope to get \$60 million in public funding for the two project phases. To date, the state of Minnesota, Ramsey County and other public sources have committed about \$25 million.

Marx said the organization will seek another \$12 million from the state in its 2016 legislative request.