Catholic Charities has yet to break ground on a major reimagining of the Dorothy Day homeless shelter in downtown St. Paul, but the second phase of its “ReVision” project has gotten a financial boost.

The Ramsey County Board of Commissioners approved nearly $1.7 million in funding for the Dorothy Day Connection Center on Tuesday morning, the first local funding secured for the project.

“The partnership and investment by Ramsey County in the Connection Center provides confidence and critical momentum to ensure both components of this new vision for the Dorothy Day Center become a reality,” said Jessie Sorensen, a senior vice president with Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis.

Higher Ground St. Paul, the first phase of Dorothy Day's overhaul -- a $40 million replacement of the existing facility with emergency shelter and housing -- is fully funded and construction will begin this summer.

Modeled after the Catholic Charities' Higher Ground building that opened in Minneapolis in 2012, the five-level St. Paul facility would offer 278 overnight and pay-for-stay shelter beds, as well as apartments providing 193 units of transitional and permanent housing. The goal is to move shelter visitors gradually into more stable housing and eventually out on their own.

The second-phase Connection Center will provide additional on-site housing, employment referrals and health-related services to those experiencing homelessness and housing instability; it needs a total of about $12 million in funding from local sources, according to the county.

The goal is to begin work on the Connection Center sometime around 2016, after Higher Ground St. Paul opens, and complete both phases by 2018. Overall project costs are still being finalized.

“This is an important step in the pursuit of our broader goals to cultivate economic prosperity and eliminate concentrated areas of poverty throughout Ramsey County,” Ramsey County Board Chair Jim McDonough said in a prepared statement.

The perpetually overcrowded emergency shelter opened in 1981 as a day facility for 30 to 50 guests at a time and now draws up to 250 homeless visitors on a cold night. Most sleep on mats laid end-to-end on the floor, and 42 cots accommodate women in a second-floor office space.

Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis is spearheading the Dorothy Day overhaul with local, state, private and philanthropic funding sources expected alongside the county's contribution. So far, more than $36 million in public and private funding has been raised for both phases.

That includes $6 million in state bonding, approved by the state Legislature last session, for the emergency shelter portion of the Higher Ground St. Paul building, and $19 million from the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency for permanent housing in the same building.

The new Higher Ground facility will be constructed at 411 Main St., replacing the Labor and Professional Centre. The new Connection Center would eventually replace the existing Dorothy Day Center building about 500 feet away at 183 Old Sixth St.