

St. Paul homeless shelter expected to get key grant for expansion

Tim Nelson · Jan 12, 2015



Dorothy Day Center. Julie Siple / MPR News 2013

Catholic Charities is expected to receive a key investment for the second half of its ambitious plans to expand the Dorothy Day Center, St. Paul's downtown homeless shelter.

Ramsey County officials have earmarked \$1.7 million in seed money for a new shelter that will bring services to the homeless in the eastern part of the Twin Cities metro area. County commissioners are expected to approve the initial capital investment on Tuesday.

"We will provide the traditional meals and other things that the current Dorothy Day Center provides, but also more robust health services, more connections to permanent housing, job training, a really good computer lab and other things that will allow us to do a better job," said Tim Marx, CEO of Catholic Charities in the Twin Cities.

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Catholic Charities is set to begin work this summer on a \$40 million plan to replace its 32-year-old shelter, which has struggled to meet the needs of a growing homeless population.

Phase I will open in 2016, with a new building near the Xcel Energy Center. It will have 278 shelter spaces, including an emergency shelter and pay-for-stay beds. There will also be 193 other units, some for people with medical needs, and permanent homes for people with mental illness and disabilities.

Unlike the current facility, where the homeless sleep on makeshift mats on the floor, the new building will be modeled on the Higher Ground Shelter in Minneapolis, which has pay-for-stay housing and an emergency shelter open year-round.

As part of Phase II, the existing Dorothy Day building will be rebuilt to host the health, job, financial and other services that will complement the new shelter and housing nearby. All told, the second phase will cost as much or more than the \$40 million first phase.

The second round of construction also is planned to offer more specialized housing.

"What we want to be able to do in Phase II is have some more specialized housing for populations that need it, including health supported housing, units for youth and probably housing that has some more efficiency units," Marx said.

Catholic Charities officials hope to have both phases of the rebuilding process financed and built by 2019.

Ramsey County hasn't put money before into brick-and-mortar to help the homeless. But County Board Chairman Jim McDonough said the end of a county housing endowment has left enough funds to invest in Dorothy Day.

"These are complex and tough projects to move forward and we want to make sure that we're sending a strong message that we can be helpful in helping start that capital piece with a contribution," he said.

The county also plans to commit to leasing space in the new center for \$20,000 a year. That will put more than a dozen staff members in the facility to bring existing human services directly to the homeless on site.