



A DECADE OF PROGRESS

Milwaukee City/County Commission on Supportive Housing

Johnston Center Residences

A 2006 series of investigative articles in the Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel elevated the consciousness of the community regarding housing conditions for individuals with mental health issues. The series, “Abandoning Our Mentally Ill,” provided graphic documentation of dangerous living conditions and exploitative landlords. The series also pointed out that local social service and government agencies were failing to apply for federal funds to build permanent special needs housing, because they were unable to find developers interested in constructing this housing product.

report further recommended that a joint City/County Commission on Supportive Housing (Commission) be created to develop an infrastructure to facilitate development of permanent supportive units in Milwaukee.

The Commission held its first meeting in January 2008 and, for the past decade, has provided support to encourage the development of Supportive Housing by working collaboratively with developers,



Workshop sponsored by the Supportive Housing Commission in September 2011.

the Milwaukee County Behavioral Health Division, the Milwaukee Continuum of Care, City and County government and the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA). As part of its work, the Commission educated the community about both the unique attributes of PSH developments that make them effective in addressing the long-term issues connected to homelessness and the steps needed to bring the supportive housing model to scale in Milwaukee.



Mayor Barrett signed legislation creating the City/County Commission on Supportive Housing in September 2007.

In October 2006, Mayor Tom Barrett and then-County Executive Scott Walker convened a Special Needs Housing Action Team (SNHAT) to investigate solutions

to this crisis. The team’s report, released in June 2007, recommended that the model of Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) be implemented locally.

Such housing creates modest, highly-affordable housing units and embeds on-site service providers who assist residents to remain housed. The SNHAT

- The requirements for success include:
- Affordable building sites that are located near public transportation and services needed by residents.

- Capital financing structure sufficient to leave buildings with little or no debt upon completion and provide affordable rental rates.
- Site-based rent vouchers to supplement rent paid by tenants, many of whose income is limited to Social Security disability payments. Federal rent vouchers, allocated to buildings by local housing authorities, cover operating costs at the buildings.
- Zoning classification that recognizes the difference between standard multi-family buildings and supportive housing.
- Qualified on-site service providers, and funds

to pay for their presence at supportive housing buildings.

- Property management collaboration between real estate property managers and service providers. Such collaboration is required to build management models that recognize tenant rights and responsibilities and support tenants as they seek to become independent and establish a good rental history.



CREATING AN INFRASTRUCTURE TO SUPPORT PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

Over the past decade, thanks to the work of public, private and non-profit partners, the model of permanent supportive housing has been firmly established in metropolitan Milwaukee. Nine developers, including both private and non-profit organizations, have constructed 19 buildings providing both quality, affordable housing units and on-site supportive services. These projects house more than 600 individuals and families in Milwaukee County. Another 80 units of supportive housing are expected to be occupied in 2020.

Numerous small steps were required to reach this milestone, among them:

- The Milwaukee Continuum of Care successfully partnered with local developers to access development bonus funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).
- WHEDA, which distributes Wisconsin's allocation of federal low income housing tax credits, established a credit set-aside for supportive housing developments in 2009. These credits have been a key element of the financing packages for many of Milwaukee's supportive housing buildings.
- The Milwaukee Continuum of Care (CoC) published a 10-year Plan to End Homelessness in 2010, including recommendations and goals for PSH development. The CoC plans, organizes and evaluates the continuum of services for homeless individuals and families to ensure compliance with HUD regulations.
- The Milwaukee Common Council in 2011 adopted changes to the City's zoning ordinance, defining permanent supportive housing. Projects that meet the PSH definition are subject to relaxed parking and density standards, compared to other forms of multi-family housing.
- The City of Milwaukee has provided gap financing totaling \$5.75 million to supportive housing developments built within the city limits. Funds were provided by the Milwaukee Housing Trust Fund and federal CDBG, HOME and Neighborhood Stabilization Program sources.
- The City of Milwaukee sold property at discounted rates for 10 of the 17 supportive housing buildings constructed in the city.
- The Housing Authorities of the City of Milwaukee and Milwaukee County have provided more than 360 site-based housing vouchers to make PSH units affordable for very low income residents.
- Milwaukee County has entered into contracts with a variety of agencies to provide on-site supportive services at PSH buildings. The CoC has partnered with IMPACT Inc. to coordinate the placement of individuals and families into permanent supportive housing.
- In 2017, the State established the Wisconsin Interagency Council on Homelessness, convening multiple State cabinet officials and representatives of four CoC organizations, including Milwaukee. The Council released a Statewide Action Plan, "A Hand and a Home," in late 2018. The plan calls for additional State spending to provide housing assistance for homeless individuals. It also commits the State to pursue a federal Medicaid Waiver to allow for billing of Medicaid for supportive services related to housing. Legislative action will be required to implement a number of the Plan's recommendations.

In 2015, the City and County embarked on a Partnership to End Chronic Homelessness (now called Housing First Milwaukee). Both units of government pledged to provide significant resources to address the needs of individuals whose circumstances meet the federal definition of chronic homelessness. These individuals generally have a disability and have lived continuously for a significant period of time in a shelter or a place not meant for human habitation, such as an outdoor encampment or a vacant building.

Housing First Milwaukee (HFM) operates on the premise that the lack of a permanent place to live is the single most important problem that must be solved for homeless individuals. HFM offers housing without barriers to entry. Chronically homeless individuals are referred to housing in scattered site apartments owned by private landlords, and given access to services and case management on a voluntary basis. Rent vouchers provided by Milwaukee County, with some City financial support, ensure that apartments are affordable.



Greenwich Park Apartments grand opening.

By the end of 2018, several hundred chronically homeless individuals had been housed and voluntarily accepted case management services. Since HFM began in 2015, 96% of the individuals who have moved into apartments

have remained housed. County employees who serve as housing navigators have contributed to the high retention rate. The navigators act as intermediaries to assist HFM tenants and landlords to resolve problems.

Milwaukee County's decision to prioritize the assignment of its available federal housing vouchers to chronically homeless individuals has been a critical factor in the success of HFM. According to County housing officials, the use of rent-supported scattered-site apartments is proving to be an effective, less costly strategy to provide permanent housing and supportive services than brick-and-mortar development. While both PSH and housing first models reduce costs for services used by the chronically homeless population, such as emergency room visits, detoxification center visits, psychiatric treatment, and criminal justice activity, placement of homeless individuals in existing apartments does not require the large capital investment and long timetable involved in the construction of new buildings. Development of new PSH buildings has slowed significantly since the shift

of resources to Housing First Milwaukee. Milwaukee County's housing authority has been the largest provider of federal rent vouchers to the 19 local PSH buildings, but such vouchers are a finite resource. With the County's decision to devote all its available vouchers to HFM, and with expansion of the supply of rent vouchers at the federal level unlikely, future PSH projects will compete for the most important component required for ongoing financial stability: rent support that allows the buildings to cover their operating costs. As a result, construction of new PSH buildings is decreasing, even as placement of those needing housing in individual apartments is expanding.

WHAT'S NEXT

When founded, the City/County Commission on Supportive Housing was charged to "serve as a community infrastructure" to meet housing needs for individuals with mental health issues and other situations that put them at risk of homelessness. Since the Commission's initial meeting in 2008, public, private, and non-profit partners have come together to implement new strategies and devote increased resources to significantly strengthen metro Milwaukee's housing safety net.

Reflecting a decade of commitment by City and County government, affordable housing developers and the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority, permanent supportive housing buildings are now a firmly-established housing type in Milwaukee County. These developments provide attractive, livable, affordable housing units to our community's most vulnerable residents, and they enhance the quality of life in their neighborhoods.



Prairie apartments interior.

The social infrastructure that supports efforts to address homelessness also has been fortified. The Continuum of Care, now staffed by the City of Milwaukee, is a dynamic, vital organization, with more than 100 partners. Guided by its 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness, CoC members meet in multiple committees; have monthly training and information programs; run a competitive process to allocate federal funds; operate a housing placement service, and jointly sponsor major activities such as the annual Homeless Connect event and the annual Point-in-Time count of homeless individuals. At the same time, a more robust Milwaukee County housing division has pioneered

new approaches to serving housing needs.

Reflecting on this progress at the 2018 annual meeting of the City/County Commission on Supportive Housing, Commission members acknowledged that the work of providing housing for the neediest individuals is ongoing. However, the Commission's task – building an

infrastructure to support the development of permanent supportive housing – is complete. Fully-engaged, cooperating partners are in place to sustain and expand efforts to permanently house individuals who are homeless and at risk of homelessness. As a result, Commission members voted in December 2018 to recommend that the Commission be disbanded, with full confidence that the work it began will continue.



Thomas H. Wynn Veterans Manor, Milwaukee's first supportive housing for veterans, illustrates how these projects can have impacts well beyond housing. The 52-unit building, which opened on Memorial Day 2011, brought development to a long-vacant corner at 3430 W. Wisconsin Ave. Its first floor includes a large commercial kitchen; its use by the Milwaukee Center for Independence to make school lunches under contract with Milwaukee Public Schools created jobs. The adjacent Troop Café, open to the public, provides a neighborhood amenity that employs Veterans Manor residents. Veterans Manor was developed by Cardinal Capital and the Center for Veterans Issues.

PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS IN MILWAUKEE COUNTY DECEMBER, 2018

The units listed below include 707 occupied units and 134 units nearing construction, with completion in 2020

Bradley Crossing	4375 W. Bradley Rd., Brown Deer
Capuchin Apartments	2502 W. Tamarack St., Milwaukee
Clarke Square Apartments (completion 2020)	2331 W. Vieau Pl., 2330 W. Mineral St., Milwaukee
Empowerment Village – Lincoln	525 W. Lincoln Ave., Milwaukee
Empowerment Village – National	1527 W. National Ave., Milwaukee
Farwell Studios	1328 E. Albion Pl., Milwaukee
Greenwich Park Apartments	2353 N. Farwell Ave., Milwaukee
Highland Commons	6700 W. Beloit Rd., West Allis
Johnston Center Apartments	2150 S. 13th St., Milwaukee
Journey House Campus Housing Initiative – Phase 1	741 S. 23rd St., Milwaukee
Journey House Campus Housing Initiative – Phase 2	2033 W. Scott St., Milwaukee
Maskani Place	320 E. Center St., Milwaukee
Prairie Apartments	3940 W. Lisbon Ave., Milwaukee
St. Anthony's Place	1004 N. 10th St., Milwaukee
Soldier's Home Apartments (completion 2020)	Zablocki Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Milwaukee
Thurgood Marshall Apartments	1900 N. 6th St., Milwaukee
United House	2500 W. Center St., Milwaukee
Veterans Gardens	7829-31 W. Villard Ave., 8905-11 W. Villard Ave., 9009 W. Villard Ave., 4483-93 N. 84th St., Milwaukee
Veterans Manor	3430 W. Wisconsin Ave., Milwaukee
Victory Manor	N. 68th St. and W. Silver Spring Blvd., within Westlawn Gardens development, Milwaukee
Washington Park Apartments	3940 W. Lisbon Ave., Milwaukee