

# TELEGRAM & GAZETTE

## Worcester Housing Authority opens facility designed for unhoused and low-income residents

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WORCESTER — The Worcester Housing Authority opened a new facility Tuesday designed to help unhoused and low-income residents of Worcester. The facility is located at 38 Lewis St. and is expected to house 24 people by the beginning of next month.

A Place to Live has 24 individual rooms, each equipped with a bed, oven, private bathroom and Wi-Fi. The building has a security system and will require card access to enter along with laundry facilities, a community room and private office spaces on each floor. All utilities are paid for.

The building will also have a 24-hour resident manager and case managers on the premises. Case managers will provide services such as one-on-one case management to people living in A Place to Live.

Tenants will pay no more than 30% of their income in rent. The residents will be able to live in the building through the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program as well as the Department of Housing and Community Development Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program Administrative Plan. Preference will be to those unhoused and chronically homeless, along with a local preference.



"We've encountered literally every possible barrier you can, especially trying to do this during a pandemic," CEO of Worcester Housing Authority Alex Corrales said. "One of the things we say is that a barrier is simply an opportunity for a solution. When we say that, it helps us get through day in and day out in order to be able to get where we are."

The project started in 2018. A time when the housing situation in Worcester was "more manageable" than it is today Corrales said. The overall numbers of unhoused people in Worcester has increased by nearly 30%, according to Corrales.

"Although 38 Lewis St. doesn't solve the chronically homeless problem in Worcester, it allows us to inch a bit closer towards a solution," Corrales said. "Overall, this building provides residents a permanent home and delivers a great opportunity to succeed."

Then-city manager Ed Augustus, now the state's housing secretary, started a task force aimed to develop a plan to expand permanent supportive housing in Worcester, with the goal of ending chronic homelessness in the city.

"Imagine for a moment that if we were able to engage all of our local housing authorities across the Commonwealth, to create this type of housing with these services and these resources, we would certainly be well on our way to ending the reality of chronic homelessness," Joe Finn, the president of the Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance said.

During the ribbon-cutting, officials and advocates stressed how the new building is an example of a "housing-first" strategy. Residents will not have to be sober, have jobs or meet other behavioral benchmarks to be eligible to live in the building.

"But as we celebrate this today, I think it's very important that we all keep in mind that there are communities in places across this country and even in some spots of the Commonwealth who had rather criminalized poverty," Finn said. "They'd like to jail those who struggle with issues of addiction and institutionalize and hide forever those struggling with mental health issues."

The total project costs ended up being more than \$8 million; initially, the project was estimated to cost \$3 million when it was approved by the state in 2020. Inflation and supply chain issues are among the factors that led to an increase.