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Ending veterans homelessness: Groundbreaking for \$25 million housing project in Winchendon

Project to transform two vacant school buildings into veteran housing

By Stephen Landry



Ground has officially been broken on a plan to convert two vacant Winchendon school buildings into housing for veterans and their families.

At a ceremony in front of the former Streeter and Poland Elementary Schools on Monday, state and local officials applauded the start of the \$25 million project by the [Montachusett Veterans Outreach Center](#) that will repurpose the two vacant buildings into 44 units of low-income apartments for homeless and high-risk veterans.

"This has been many years in the making, we've been waiting quite a while to get to this point," said MVOC Executive Director Dr. Stephanie Marchetti. "This is a much-needed project, and we're very excited to be the organization here to spearhead it."

Cathy McWilliams, who founded MVOC in 1982 following the suicide death of her Vietnam veteran husband, Jessie Stallings, said the new development would be a beautiful and comfortable place for local veterans to call home.

"I know that my husband, Jessie, is looking down and I know that he is filled with joy for his fellow vets," McWilliams said through tears. "I am filled with pride in my heart."

Vacant school properties sold to MVOC for \$1

The properties for the project, which will transform the two vacant school buildings into one combined affordable housing complex for veterans, was sold to MVOC by the town for one dollar. The completed project will also include 22 parking spaces, a courtyard with recreational areas, a grill area, and raised planning beds for gardening. The nearly 4-acre site will also include a columbarium memorial structure to provide a final resting place for the cremated remains of residents.



\$25 million project paid for by state and federal funding, grants, and private donations

In addition to \$20 million in state and federal funding for the project, along with several private donations, an additional \$2 million was secured in the Economic Development Bill authored by Rep. Jonathan Zlotnik, D-Gardner, who told those in attendance that it had been no small chore getting the project to the groundbreaking phase.

"Over that time, I know I've lost sleep over this project, I'm sure Steph has lost sleep over this project, so we're very excited to be seeing the runway in front of us, and what this can mean for Winchendon and our veterans and for the community," Zlotnik said. "It will be even more exciting when we can attend a ribbon cutting."

U.S. Rep. Lori Trahan recalled that one of her first trips as a member of Congress was a visit to MVOC in Gardner to meet McWilliams.

"(She) has really dedicated her life to honoring her husband's service, his ultimate sacrifice, and making sure that all of our veterans, when they come home, they have the services and the housing they deserve," Trahan said.

The project is expected to be completed by early 2026.