

# Wayne Metro opens first new shelter for individuals in Downriver area

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By Sherri Welch



Wayne Metropolitan Community Action Agency and ChristNet, along with dignitaries, open the new River Rouge shelter for individuals in need of housing on Tuesday, April 4.

Wayne Metropolitan Community Action Agency and ChristNet on Tuesday opened a \$3.6 million overnight shelter for individuals experiencing homelessness, the first such center in downriver.

The 7,952-square-foot overnight shelter at 1230 Coolidge in River Rouge was funded by Wayne Metro, Christnet, the Michigan State Housing Development Authority and Wayne County. It's the site of a long-vacant former youth center and it will be a reconfigurable space, meaning the facilities can be used as a community space during the day and a shelter for about 30 people overnight.

"This partnership between Wayne Metro and ChristNet ensures that everyone seeking emergency shelter can receive whatever assistance they need, and be treated with the care, compassion and dignity they deserve," ChristNet co-founder the Rev. Geoff Drutchas said in a statement.

The need for emergency shelter is clear, with current demand at four times the number of available beds. Although Samaritas operates a shelter for homeless families in Westland, there hasn't been a dedicated shelter for homeless individuals in that part of western Wayne County and downriver until now.

So far since October, 245 families and 327 individuals have sought shelter in the area. There are already 86 people on a waiting list for shelter at the site.

The building has undergone \$3.4 million in complete interior and exterior renovation work. It will be available 24/7 every day of the year as a step toward dealing with the overwhelming need for housing, Drutchas said.

In August, the partners opened a \$700,000 daytime human services center at 25275 Eureka Road in Taylor.

Wayne Metro, owner of both buildings, has managed financing and construction for both projects and is providing essential services as the lead agency for the Out-Wayne County Coalition for Homeless Services.

Prior to the establishment of these two centers, emergency shelter was available only October through May at rotating locations.

"As the lead agency for the Out-Wayne County Homeless Services, Wayne Metro will continue to pursue resources to increase capacity and offerings for our homeless populations here in Wayne County," Louis Piszker, CEO of Wayne Metro, told Crain's on Monday. "Over the past 10 years, Wayne Metro and the Coalition leadership has doubled federal, state, and local funding allocations that have gone from \$3 million in 2013 to more than \$8 million with the 2023 program year."

Wayne Metro, which is operating on a total budget of \$171 million for the current fiscal year, is budgeting \$1.1 million annually to operate the new shelter 24/7, year-round. The state will also provide some base operating dollars for the shelter.

The new shelter, along with warming centers and the new day services center opened in Taylor in September are part of an Out-Wayne Continuum of Care strategy of recognizing there is a gap in shelter services in the community, Michael Centi, director for supportive housing and homeless services at Wayne Metro, said in December.

The new shelter in River Rouge replaces the temporary emergency shelter Wayne Metro began providing during the COVID-19 pandemic after a cold-weather-only, rotating shelter coordinated by the ChristNet collaborative of 55 area churches that had to cease operating amid stay-at-home orders and the pullback of older volunteers who were among those most vulnerable to COVID. Wayne Metro, which took on management of the coordinated entry system of shelter referrals and supportive services in out-Wayne (everything beyond Detroit, Highland Park and Hamtramck) during the pandemic, was providing temporary emergency shelter this past winter for 30 people at a Taylor motel.

Wayne Metro has other plans in the works to address the need for housing in Wayne County, including:

Exploring potential partnerships with public housing authorities to prevent youth homelessness by leveraging Foster Youth to Independence vouchers assigning housing navigators to connect neighbors to Housing Choice Vouchers and other low-income housing options pursuing funding specifically for shelter diversion and homelessness prevention partnering with the city of Detroit on the Detroit Housing Network and Detroit Housing Services Office and recruiting more community partners to help provide wraparound services.

Wayne Metro is also in the middle of developing a comprehensive three-year strategic plan, with a strategic plan design group comprised of several community partners, to shape the direction of the local homeless response system.