

# Work now underway on \$20 million center for city's homeless

Candice Williams and Louis Aguilar, The Detroit News

*Detroit* — The Neighborhood Service Organization broke ground Friday on what it says will be a transformative project with the mission to end homelessness in the city. Construction began on the estimated \$20 million Clay Center campus on Mack near Gratiot despite [Ilitch Holdings Inc. earlier this year backing out of a \\$1.5 million deal](#) to buy NSO's homeless crisis shelter building in Cass Corridor — a transaction that was to be a source of funding for the new campus.

The project will be done in two phases. The center is named for Sheilah Clay, who retired as the Detroit-based nonprofit's CEO last year.

Mayor Mike Duggan on Friday credited the vision of Clay, who spoke up in a meeting with city leaders years ago when it was apparent that efforts to reduce homelessness weren't working.

“Permanent supportive housing is what this city needs to start to do,” Duggan said. “Create a center where folks can go where they have mental health services; that they have substance abuse services; where they get help on writing a resume and transportation to get to a job. That's how we change this. Sheila was the voice.”

The first phase of the new campus is underway and expected to be finished by mid-to late 2020, said Linda Little, president and CEO of NSO. Following the groundbreaking ceremony Friday, crews worked on laying the building's foundation. The first phase of the project is a 45-unit permanent supportive housing apartment complex. The two-story building will house supportive services on the first floor, and the second story will be the apartments.

The apartments will be for single adults, which make up around 71% of local homeless, Little said. The latest survey taken in January by the Homeless Action Network counted 1,965 homeless in Detroit, Highland Park and Hamtramck, Little said.

The second phase of the project will have 56 beds for a temporary shelter, a medical residence for homeless who have been discharged from the hospital and still need medical care and a “fully integrated health care clinic,” Little said. “That does not exist on one campus anywhere,” she added.

And it's the part of the campus that needed to be delayed due to the llitches backing out of the verbal agreement to buy the Tumaini Center at 3430 Third St. The NSO is still doing fundraising for the second phase.

The non-profit is in talks with MHT Housing Inc. to sell the Tumaini Center, Little said: "We're close" to a deal.

NSO also operates the Bell Building on Oakman, which opened in 2011 and offers 155 fully furnished, one-bedroom apartments for formerly homeless adults. The Clay Center will further NSO's mission, said Richard Lichtenstein, board chair for NSO.

"I'm certain that NSO will be bragging about the Clay Center just as we bragged about the NSO Bell Building in the years to come because this was another giant step on the road to ending homelessness in Detroit," he said.

City Council President Pro Tem Mary Sheffield said Friday that since creating a task force on homelessness, she's met and worked with numerous organizations that handle the homeless population. With that came increased awareness around homelessness.

"These are humans," she said. "These are our family members, our aunts, our uncles, our cousins. They are a part of the city of Detroit."

Sheffield said she'll never forget visiting the NSO's Bell Building.

"(I) got the opportunity to actually see individuals in that facility," she said. "To see the smiles on their faces because of the quality care they were receiving. To hear some of the testimonials. To be able to come out of homelessness which is very, very touching. To see that building that is a snapshot of what you will see here on this site. It is top quality, state-of-the-art facility that I know will be here."

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