

Auburndale's Golda Meir House is adding more apartments for low-income seniors

By **Daniel Kool** Boston University journalist, Updated December 1, 2021, 2:47 p.m.

A new expansion to Auburndale's Golda Meir House will add 68 apartments to the senior living center — with 45 units reserved for extremely low-income seniors and nine saved for those experiencing chronic homelessness.

The \$40.4 million renovation includes \$4.5 million in funds from Newton's Community Preservation Act and a \$4 million capital advance from the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Construction on the expansion began in August, and the 68 new units are slated to open for residents in the spring of 2023.

Lizbeth Heyer, vice president of 2Life Communities, which owns Golda Meir House, said although the city has been “incredibly supportive” in trying to address the needs of low-income seniors, supply still struggles to keep up with demand.

“The need is so substantial that it's bleak,” Heyer said. “Waitlists are still incredibly long, and we're a really long way from building our way out of the shortage of supply of affordable senior housing in Newton and in the region.”

The expansion is among the first new projects to receive support from HUD Section 202 — a federal program providing grants to low-income senior housing projects — since that program's funding was temporarily cut in 2012.

It's the second largest grant to an affordable housing project ever issued by Newton's Community Preservation Act, a state law authorizing local governments to collect a

surcharge on property taxes — an extra 1 percent in Newton — to finance historic preservation, recreation spaces and affordable housing projects.

Over 63 percent of single seniors in Boston, Cambridge and Newton struggle with financial insecurity — the second highest rate among major American cities — and over 19 percent live below the federal poverty line, according to a March [study](#) by the University of Massachusetts Boston's Elder Index, which charts costs of living for seniors.

The waitlist for a subsidized apartment in Golda Meir House currently includes over 770 seniors, according to Allison Hausman, director of communication for 2Life.

Hearth Inc., a local nonprofit specializing in the needs of homeless seniors, will help support residents coming off chronic homelessness. The Department of Housing and Urban Development defines chronic homelessness as homelessness that lasts at least one year or that occurs at least four times in three years for individuals with substance dependencies, serious mental health issues or chronic disabilities.

There are roughly 1,200 homeless individuals over 50 in the Boston area, including Newton, according to data collected by Hearth Inc. Of nearly 18,000 total individuals experiencing homelessness statewide, more than 2,000 are considered chronically homeless, according to The US Interagency Council on Homelessness.

Dawn Matchett, chief program officer at Hearth, said seniors experiencing homelessness often appear 15 to 20 years older than they actually are — meaning they face chronic health conditions earlier than their housed counterparts.

She said heightened loneliness and isolation are “unique to older adults who are homeless, as opposed to a younger cohort.”

Cecilia Otang, an outreach case manager at Hearth who currently works with residents of 2Life's Shillman House in Framingham, said the transition from chronic homelessness to stable housing can be jarring for some people.

“We have to provide stabilization,” she said. “Some of them don’t have families, some of them don’t trust the system.”

Otang said case managers help residents keep up with bills and medical appointments, check on their emotional wellbeing and show “there’s someone on their side.” Without that support, she said, many are unable to maintain permanent housing.

Residency at Golda Meir House currently has 199 apartments with one or two bedrooms and includes access to community services like fitness classes and nutritional support, as well as a daily lunch program, Heyer said. Employees also help residents access and manage external supports like food stamps and social security benefits.

Heyer said social and cultural programming help give residents “daily joy and connection in their life” and ease the transition into permanent housing. She said 2Life has had previous success with formerly homeless residents at its Brighton location.

Matchett said the needs of those coming out of chronic homelessness vary between individuals, meaning a strong relationship between resident and case manager — and between case manager and 2Life’s own service coordinator — is crucial.

Unlike traditional shelters, which provide temporary housing, apartments at Golda Meir House are intended to serve residents for the rest of their lives. Reservations are slated to open next year.

“The goal is always just to help individuals live the highest quality of life possible as independently as possible,” Matchett said. “That looks different for everyone.”

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