

NEWS

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For Immediate Release

County's First Navigation Center Opens, Key in Effort to Move People Into Permanent Housing

Redwood City – You can bring your dog, your partner and your belongings.

By making San Mateo County's first Navigation Center more like a home than a shelter, local officials expect people experiencing homelessness to move in as a stepping stone to permanent housing.

County officials today cut a ceremonial ribbon to celebrate the opening of the Navigation Center, which will provide 240 safe temporary living spaces for individuals and couples along with intensive on-site support services in Redwood City. Shelter residents are expected to begin moving in soon.

The Navigation Center is designed to serve up to 260 San Mateo County residents experiencing homelessness who may be reluctant to go to traditional shelters. Unlike a traditional shelter (cots or bunk beds, little privacy), the Navigation Center allows couples to room together, pet owners to bring their animals and clients to store many of their belongings.

"This Navigation Center will provide a home-like setting for clients as they move toward permanent housing solutions," said Dave Pine, president of the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors. "What we have heard over and over again is that being homeless strips people of their dignity. This Navigation Center will help restore that dignity."

The \$57 million Navigation Center resembles a market-rate apartment complex: outdoor plazas, landscaping, basketball court, dog run and a garden area. Individual units have doorbells.

“The idea is that the people who stay here are our guests,” said Mike Callagy, the County’s chief executive. “We provide a safe and attractive place to stay while clients can work on the underlying causes of their experiencing homelessness.”

Case managers, for instance, will work with clients to connect them with specific services provided at the center: trauma counseling, substance use treatment, health and dental care and additional interventions designed to overcome barriers to seeking permanent housing.

The on-site medical, dental and behavioral care is a first for a non-congregate shelter in San Mateo County. This unique approach will help unsheltered patients receive care faster and let providers coordinate overall care.

The opening of the Navigation Center is a key step in achieving the Board of Supervisors’ goal of [ending homelessness](#). This also involves efforts on multiple fronts to expand access to affordable housing, mental health care and other services that would help to prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place.

The objective is to find housing for every unsheltered homeless person who chooses assistance – that “homelessness will be a rare, brief, and one-time occurrence,” according to the County’s [Strategic Plan on Homelessness](#).

The [County and its partners](#) are committed to a “housing first” approach to ending homelessness. This places a priority on interventions that “focus on returning individuals and households to safe, secure housing that they can use as a starting point to address other issues,” according to the strategic plan.

The Navigation Center will be operated under a contract with [LifeMoves](#), a Menlo Park-based nonprofit with experience providing interim housing and supportive services for homeless families and individuals.

“LifeMoves exists to end homelessness, and we can’t do that alone,” said Aubrey Merriman, LifeMoves chief executive officer. “It takes public, private and service system partnerships to catalyze innovative projects like these. LifeMoves is honored to be part of the collective solution and I thank everyone who rose to the challenge.”

Located just east of Highway 101, the County [broke ground](#) on the project just over a year ago after reaching a land swap agreement with the city of Redwood City. The speed of construction was aided by the units and even the elevator being prefabricated and shipped to the site for installation. Off-site fabrication also lowered the per-unit costs. The shelter is thought to be the nation’s first [multi-story prefabricated shelter](#) and has served as a blueprint for shelter designs elsewhere.

A recording of the livestreamed ribbon cutting is posted at <https://www.facebook.com/CountyofSanMateo/>

Background

With the goal of achieving what's termed a functional zero level of homelessness (where every unsheltered person in San Mateo County who chooses assistance can be sheltered in an emergency shelter or in temporary or permanent housing), the County is working to increase the supply of temporary and permanent housing options.

Navigation Center Details

Location: 275 Blomquist St., Redwood City

- 240 housing units, arrayed in wings of one, two and three stories
- 168 with in-unit restroom
- 72 without in-unit restroom
- Space for 260 clients

Features/Amenities:

- Dog run, pet-friendly policies and animal care classes
- Barbecue area
- 68 parking spaces including seven for electric vehicles
- Space for 140 bicycles
- Community garden
- Laundry
- WiFi

On-site Services:

- Individualized care plans designed to link residents/clients with the full range of County services and partnerships
- Two-room medical clinic staffed six days a week & designed to provide basic/comprehensive/urgent medical care
- Two-chair dental clinic staffed five days a week with specialists available weekly
- Behavioral health professionals on-site seven days a week to provide mental health and substance use disorder services



The center includes large dining and community halls, an electric commercial kitchen to serve residents and space for on-site counseling and other services.

The project targets Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification, all-electric design and carbon neutrality. Solar used in the project will generate 60 percent of the estimated energy requirements and recycled water will irrigate the landscaping.

The Office of Charles Bloszies, a San Francisco-based architectural firm, designed the project, which was built by XL Construction based in Milpitas.

Cost:

- \$57 million total cost (\$237,500 anticipated price per bed)
- Annual operating costs of approximately \$5.01 million

Funding Includes:

- \$55.3 million California Homekey Grant Award that includes \$46.1 million for capital costs and \$9.2 million for operating costs
- \$5 million donation by John Sobrato (donation part of a County match)
- \$1 million donation by Vinod Khosla for on-site health care
- \$500,000 federal grant for furniture secured by former Congresswoman Jackie Speier
- \$125,000 from Health Plan of San Mateo for dental services
- \$150,000 from Healthcare for the Homeless for dental equipment
- \$450,000 from Sequoia Health Care District for dental services at both the Navigation Center and Maple Street Correctional Center
- Additional substantial contributions from multiple project trade partners

Homelessness in San Mateo County

A [one-day count](#) found that there were 1,808 people experiencing homelessness in San Mateo County on the night of Feb. 23, 2022. This number includes:

- 1,092 people experiencing unsheltered homelessness staying on streets, in cars, in recreational vehicles, or in tents
- 716 people experiencing sheltered homelessness staying in emergency shelters and transitional housing programs

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