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TOP STORY

Pittsfield welcomes 37 new studio apartments and a housing resource center

By Nate Harrington, The Berkshire Eagle
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PITTSFIELD — After four years and more than \$16 million in investment, a local affordable housing developer is ready to debut a housing resource center and 37 new studio apartments.

On Thursday, Hearthway — the nonprofit formerly known as Berkshire Housing Development Corporation — will host public tours of The First, which cost \$3 million to build. The space will have a housing resource center and a first-of-its-kind daytime shelter located in the Zion Lutheran Church on First Street. ServiceNet, a local agency that provides essential services to people living with homelessness and other health challenges, will operate the facility.

At the same time, Hearthway built 37 new supportive housing units — nine on the second floor of the Zion Lutheran Church, some of which already have tenants, and 28 in a new building at 111 W. Housatonic St. that will be move-in ready by January. The apartments at The First cost \$3 million, and the West Housatonic Street project cost \$10 million.

Supportive housing is designed for people who need a stable, affordable place to live, along with ongoing support services like mental health support, addiction treatment and financial education in order to remain housed and live more independently.

Tours at Zion Lutheran and 111 W. Housatonic are from 4 to 5:30 p.m. Thursday. The day's events will be attended by Ed Augustus, secretary of the Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities, and Pittsfield Mayor Peter Marchetti. Both will speak at The First at 5:30 p.m.

The projects were started under former mayor Linda Tyer's administration, and funding is from the city's share of American Rescue Plan Act money.



This fall, nine new permanent supportive housing apartments at Zion Lutheran Church will provide housing for people experiencing homelessness.
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We sit down with housing secretary Ed Augustus to discuss housing struggles in the Berkshires

The process to create The First started back in the summer of 2021, said Eileen Peltier, the CEO and president of Hearthway.

"The city was looking for a way to engage more and support more people who are experiencing homelessness, and they had some ARPA money," Peltier said.

The development of the housing resource center was entirely paid for by the federal ARPA funds.

The operating costs at The First will be covered by donations, which frees the space of requirements that come with state and federal funding. This means that people looking to use the space won't have to identify themselves as homeless or seek supportive services.



Eileen Peltier stands in the laundry, shower and bathroom area as she leads a tour of the housing resource center at Zion Lutheran Church in Pittsfield with funders and community partners.

GILLIAN HECK — THE BERKSHIRE EAGLE

The First offers shelter during the day when overnight warming centers and shelters are closed. The space is targeted to homeless people, but it is open to anyone who needs assistance with housing, said Erin Forbush, the senior director of shelter and housing for ServiceNet.

The space has bathrooms, showers, laundry machines, lockers and a commercial kitchen. ServiceNet plans to open The First from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. every day.

On top of being a resource center, The First aims to be a gathering place for people who, for example, exit supportive housing and want to be part of a community, Forbush said.

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The housing units at The First and at West Housatonic are available to tenants who make less than 30 percent of area median income. Tenants would pay no more than 30 percent of their gross income toward rent. This means the most a tenant would pay at The First or West Housatonic Street would be about \$650. If a person is making no money, they pay no rent.



The building rising from the once vacant corner lot on West Housatonic Street will soon be home to 28 permanent supportive housing apartments for people who are experiencing homelessness in the city.

STEPHANIE ZOLLSHAN — THE BERKSHIRE EAGLE

Tenants will be selected through the Coordinated Entry process, which prioritizes housing assistance for people who are, or who are at risk of becoming, homeless.

The units at West Housatonic Street "will not be completed until January," Peltier said. "But the first floor will be complete. You will be able to see the community space. You will be able to see what the apartments look like."

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Hearthway and ServiceNet's grand opening of The First and the other affordable housing spaces couldn't have come at a better time either, giving both organizations, their partners and the city something to cheer on during the holiday season.

"Ending the year with this really big reminder that we can, even in sort of difficult circumstances, do really impactful work when we come together," Peltier said. "It just has touched my heart."

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