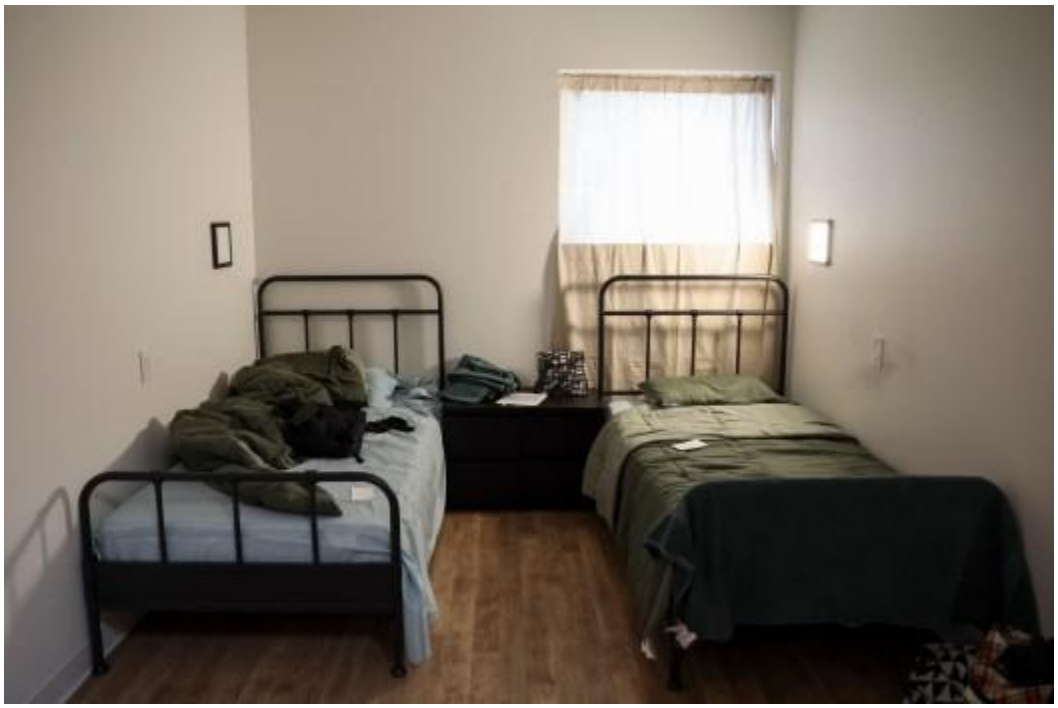
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A different kind of homeless shelter for men opens in Rogers Park



A bedroom in the new North Side Housing and Supportive Services homeless shelter serving single men in Rogers Park on Dec. 9, 2024. (Eileen Meslar/Chicago Tribune)

By Sylvan Lebrun | slebrun@chicagotribune.com | Chicago Tribune

A new shelter for homeless single men has opened in Rogers Park, rejecting typical shelter hallmarks such as congregate living and a ban on residents remaining during the daytime.

Run by the nonprofit North Side Housing and Supportive Services, the shelter at 7464 N. Clark St. can house 70 men in double-occupancy rooms. Residents also will be able to access case management and health care services and three meals a day on-site, officials said at the ribbon-cutting Monday.

Beds are already beginning to fill up, as men displaced during the clearing of a major homeless encampment in Humboldt Park on Friday were given the opportunity to move in. Fifteen men were transported right to the shelter's door after leaving the encampment Friday, while 13 other homeless men from across the city moved in during the weekend.

"A lot of times I did try to get shelter but it was pretty much full, I wasn't able to get in," said 32-year-old Jimmie Jenkins, who arrived at the shelter Saturday night. "(This was) the first time I've came to a shelter and they really opened the doors up to me right away."

Jenkins has been primarily sleeping on CTA trains for a year, he said. His time at the Rogers Park shelter has so far been "peaceful," he said, adding that "since I got here, I've been grateful."

Although more than two-thirds of the homeless people in Chicago are men, only around 22% of the city's shelter beds are available to single men, according to housing officials. Mayor Brandon Johnson also noted in his remarks Monday that shelter for homeless men has historically been "available only in large congregate settings."

Unlike traditional homeless shelters, which require residents to leave the premises each morning before returning at night, the Rogers Park facility will allow residents to stay throughout the day and access services 24/7, Chicago Department of Housing commissioner Lissette Castañeda said Monday.

“(This shelter) represents a shift towards a more dignified and humane care for those in need,” Castañeda said. “People who are seeking shelter here can begin to rebuild their lives without the added pressure of having to leave and return each day. They will have constant access to supportive services… as well as the dignity of having a place they can call their own.”

No time limits will be imposed on stays at the shelter, Johnson said, with the aim being to help all residents move into permanent housing.

North Side Housing and Supportive Services has set aside over 150 affordable apartments for those experiencing homelessness, units many of the shelter’s residents may eventually move into, said board member Dick Simpson. A new North Side Housing and Supportive Services homeless shelter serving single men in Rogers Park on Dec. 9, 2024. (Eileen T. Meslar/Chicago Tribune)

The city estimates the new shelter will serve approximately 250 men a year.

Alex Soto, 26, arrived at the Rogers Park shelter Sunday after spending two months living on the streets after his mother kicked him out, he said.

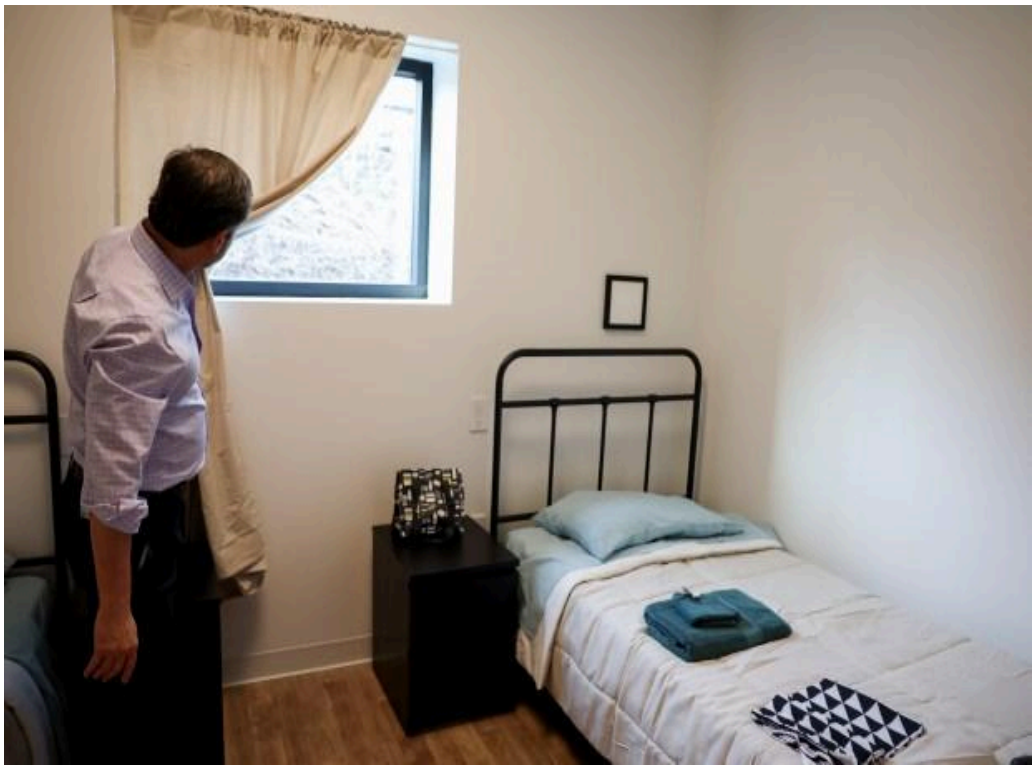
The shelter has since given him “hot meals in the nighttime” and essential items like shampoo and clothing, he said, adding that he already has started to speak to a case worker about finding a job and housing.

“It’s really up to me, when I want to leave,” Soto said. “Most definitely “Most definitely I want to get a house, that’s my goal, to try to see if I can get a house or an apartment and move forward, and not think about what I’m going through right now.”

The city of Chicago provided North Side Housing and Supportive Services a $6.9 million grant to fund the purchase and renovation of the vacant former medical building on Clark Street that now houses the shelter.

The shelter’s physical design incorporates a “trauma-informed” approach, characterized by “warm natural materials and gentle indirect light,” according to architect Sean McGuire of Gensler, the firm that designed it. The rooms were designed to feel “intentionally residential, evoking the authentic comforts of home,” McGuire said.

Each of the 35 rooms at the new shelter has its own skylight and has two beds and one or two nightstands, with the sheets and walls colored in soft tones of green. Companies including Kohler, Ikea and Steinhafels donated furnishings, according to a city press release.



North Side Housing and Supportive Services Board President Peter Marchese points out that each room has natural light during a tour of the new homeless shelter serving single men in Rogers Park on Monday, Dec. 9, 2024. (Eileen T. Meslar/Chicago Tribune)

This non-congregate shelter model was inspired by lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to Department of Family and Support Services commissioner Brandie Knazze.

When the city had to switch to using hotels as non-congregate shelters to stop the spread of the virus, a University of Chicago study found that residents experienced "significant improvements in their medical and physical health systems and an increased rate of transitioning to permanent housing," Knazze said.

"These non-congregate shelter projects are redefining what people consider shelter and what shelter looks like," Knazze said. "It helps us raise the bar, it helps us restore dignity and make sure that the people we serve know that they have a home and that we are working tirelessly for them."

The Rogers Park shelter is the first of five new non-congregate shelters the city plans to open over the coming years, which altogether will add 1,000 new beds for the city's homeless population, Knazze said.

Ald. Maria Hadden, 49th, who held a number of public meetings and feedback sessions while the shelter was in development, announced Monday that over 70% of the Rogers Park community had expressed support for the project.

"All of us are one emergency away from experiencing homelessness," Hadden said Monday. "We know that we need not just warm, safe and dry spaces, but trauma-informed spaces with staff that are paid fair wages, who know what they're doing, who can work with our neighbors to help them figure out whatever barriers are in their way for them getting back on their feet."