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OPINION

MA LEADS THE WAY

Public-Private Partnerships Form To Create Supportive Housing For Homeless Vets

Developments Recently Opened In Boston, Brockton And Bedford

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SPECIAL TO BANKER & TRADESMAN

Several new developments providing supportive housing to homeless veterans in Massachusetts have recently opened their doors. The commonwealth remains a leader in providing resources to the men and women who have served the country, especially when it comes to housing. Massachusetts has made a commitment to making sure homeless veterans have the housing and services they need to stabilize their lives, and these new developments are testament to the hard work taking place at the federal, state and local levels.



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In December, the openings of the New England Center and Home for Veterans' newly renovated space in Boston, a 94-unit permanent supportive housing development for homeless veterans, and Howard House, a refurbished building also targeting homeless veterans located on the campus of the U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs (VA) medical center in Brockton, demonstrate how creative

nonprofits are working with governmental agencies to address the problem of homelessness among veterans. But these two projects are only the most recent in a series of supportive housing developments for veterans across the commonwealth.

The Community Economic Development Assistance Corporation (CEDAC) provided the first financing commitment to the New England Center and Home for Veterans in 2013, a \$250,000 predevelopment loan that helped the nonprofit to plan and implement its \$35 million project. While the project won't be fully complete until March, more than 30 formerly homeless veterans moved into their new homes in time to celebrate the winter holidays. The center also received \$1 million from the city of Boston and over \$17 million in funding from the commonwealth's Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) for the project, and is working closely with the VA and the state Department of Veterans' Services to make sure that the residents have the rental subsidies and services they need. This project, among others, contributed to Boston's success in ending chronic homelessness among veterans and ensuring that newly homeless veterans move quickly into housing with services.

The VA has been an excellent federal partner to state and local governments through their creative use of medical campuses. Howard House is the latest example of the VA's

partnership with private developers to turn surplus property into supportive housing. The historic 1924 structure had recently been underutilized as storage space. The VA worked with development partners Peabody Properties Inc., Windover Construction and Affordable Housing and Services Collaborative Inc., to create 14 units of supportive housing. Residents moved in a few weeks before the New Year.

Partnerships Provide Resources

This follows a similarly constructive partnership between the VA and the same organizations to create supportive housing for 69 elderly veterans on the campus of the Rogers VA Medical Center in Bedford. The Bedford Green Apartments, which opened in 2015, was the brainchild of the leadership at the medical center, who recognized an opportunity to utilize their campus to provide housing options for the senior men and women who served our nation. The new construction development also comes with the medical and social services needed by low-income and formerly homeless veteran seniors. In addition to utilizing surplus land for both developments, the VA provided \$1.2 million and 14 rental subsidies for Howard House and \$2.4 million and 69 rental subsidies for Bedford Green.

CEDAC, along with DHCD, supported Peabody Properties and the Affordable Housing and Services Collaborative with both of these

developments, helping them secure \$3 million in funding for Howard House and \$2 million in funding for the Bedford Green Apartments through a state supportive housing fund and an innovative state pilot program that promoted the production of supportive housing for vulnerable populations across the commonwealth.

These are not the only organizations creating housing for homeless veterans. In Western Massachusetts, a nonprofit called Soldier On has developed several supportive housing

projects for struggling veterans and has also focused on the unique challenges that women veterans face. And on the South Shore, the nonprofit Father Bill's & MainSpring built Jack's Place and Patti's House, which created 22 units of permanent supportive housing there. CEDAC works with all of these organizations, providing financial and technical support to make these projects a reality.

Solving the problem of veterans' homelessness takes cooperation from all levels of government and sustained commitment from

the nonprofit sector. By being resourceful and imaginative, nonprofits and governmental agencies in Massachusetts have reduced homelessness among veterans. Fortunately, we're well on our way to meeting the challenge of ending homelessness among the men and women who served – but more work needs to be done. ■

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