SECOND AVENUE COMMONS FACILITY TO OPEN FOR THOSE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

October opening announced for first-of-its-kind, low barrier facility for individuals experiencing homelessness in Allegheny County

PITTSBURGH, Sept. 29, 2022 – A coalition of corporate, civic and community leaders gathered today to mark the dedication of Second Avenue Commons, an innovative 45,000-square-foot facility in downtown Pittsburgh that will provide shelter and comprehensive wrap-around services for individuals experiencing homelessness. In early October, the building will be turned over to Pittsburgh Mercy which will oversee day-to-day shelter operations in collaboration with Allegheny County DHS, Community Kitchen Pittsburgh, Second Avenue Commons, Inc. and UPMC. By mid-October the Commons will be open to clients.

The five-story facility, located at 700 Second Avenue, adjacent to the Liberty Bridge, is the first-of-its-kind in Allegheny County that will operate as a year-round, low-barrier shelter for adults, their pets and possessions. Its wrap-around services will address the complex issues that can confront people experiencing homelessness, including addiction and unemployment. UPMC will operate a medical and behavioral health clinic in the facility, providing services to those who visit the building. Pittsburgh Mercy was selected to operate the shelter and drop-in day programs following a rigorous RFP process facilitated by Allegheny County. Community Kitchen Pittsburgh will be operating the kitchen, eventually offering job training opportunity for residents of the Commons. Forty-three single-room occupancy apartments will be available. Existing street outreach programs, like those facilitated by Allegheny County, Highmark and Pittsburgh Mercy, will have flexible workspace at the Commons.

PNC’s Realty Services led the project, by both assembling partner organizations to initiate collaboration as well as oversaw the design and construction of the facility, which largely concluded this week. The project took less than three years from conception to completion and was the result of an unprecedented public-private partnership, including dozens of organizations in the public and private sector.

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More than 40% of related project vendors qualify as Minority- and/or women-owned businesses and disadvantaged enterprises (MWDBE), far exceeding the Urban Redevelopment Authority’s program requirements, which aim to advance equitable development in the region.

The $22 million project was made possible by contributions of $10 million from PNC Foundation, $6.75 million from Highmark Health and Allegheny Health Network, and $1.75 million donation from UPMC, as well as grants from the Henry L. Hillman Foundation, Heinz Endowments, R.K. Mellon Foundation, The Pittsburgh Foundation, the Keystone Communities through the PA Department of Community and Economic Development and various other personal donations and countless hours of consultation and expertise from the broad stakeholder group. UPMC has also committed to donating $5 million of in-kind services at the shelter. Land for the facility was donated by the City of Pittsburgh and the Urban Redevelopment Authority.

Present at the dedication ceremony were representatives and community partners from the following organizations, which have contributed to the progress of the Second Avenue Commons: Action Housing, Allegheny Conference, Allegheny County Department of Human Services, County Executive Rich Fitzgerald, City of Pittsburgh Mayor Ed Gainey, Highmark and Allegheny Health Network, Pittsburgh Mercy, The PNC Financial Services Group and UPMC.

The vision and the approach to planning and design for Second Avenue Commons has been informed by research on trauma-informed design, best practices and lessons learned from comparable facilities across the country, and by local experts and community partners who are addressing homelessness in Allegheny County daily. These experts include individuals with lived experience and those representing local healthcare, government, public safety, social services, community-based organizations, and professional services, design and construction organizations. The Commons is providing a range of services at one location, so individuals won’t need to visit several different agencies. The Commons will function as a navigation center to connect individuals experiencing homelessness with the resources they need to move toward permanent housing.

Point-in-time data gathered by Allegheny County from a recent day in September shows 650 individuals experiencing homelessness in Allegheny County with approximately 200 unsheltered adults. The facility is expected to help reduce chronic homelessness and the number of unsheltered individuals in this region.

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For general information on Second Avenue Commons, please reach out to info@secondavenuecommons.org. All media inquiries should be directed to Olivia Lammel at olivia.lammel@pnc.com or 412-952-4880.

Quotes

Linda Metropulos, president of the board of directors for Second Avenue Commons
“The opening of Second Avenue Commons is a testament to what a community can do when it opens its heart to those who are suffering by not having a permanent home. The Commons is the result of a remarkable collaboration between public and private sectors to respond to the need of unhoused individuals in Allegheny County. Hundreds of people worked to bring this project to fruition starting in 2019 with the leadership and financial contributions of the corporate and medical communities in Pittsburgh. Once open, the Commons will serve hundreds of people each year, providing the help they need to regain the stability in their lives that leads to finding a new home.”

County Executive Rich Fitzgerald
“We know that homelessness is challenging, but it is also solvable. Working together, we can find and provide the resources that individuals experiencing homelessness need to give them support and provide opportunities for them to improve their situations. This public-private partnership and collaboration is just one example of what we can do when there is a will to make a difference. Thank you to the organizations that worked together to provide a resource that will be so impactful for those in our community who are experiencing homelessness. We are grateful to the impact this will have on the lives of those who call Pittsburgh and Allegheny County home.”

Erin Dalton, director, Allegheny County Department of Human Services
“We are delighted to see the successful culmination of an idea that took shape over several years with input from many partners, community members and stakeholders. The shelter is based on a harm reduction model and, in addition to being open all day, is designed to provide what other shelters cannot - space for pets, partners and possessions. It is an important addition to the homelessness system in Allegheny County with the potential to engage differently with those experiencing unsheltered homelessness.”

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City of Pittsburgh Mayor Ed Gainey
“The Second Avenue Commons fills a critical need for a low barrier shelter in our city. We can solve homelessness in our city, but only if we work united together to solve it. This new navigation center is a tremendous step forward and will provide much needed safe, indoor shelter, for many of our unhoused residents.”

Tony Beltran, President & CEO of Pittsburgh Mercy
“Second Avenue Commons represents unprecedented innovation and community collaboration in addressing broad community needs and filling gaps in services for some of our community’s most vulnerable residents: persons who are experiencing homelessness. Second Avenue Commons also represents the tremendous potential for healing, health, and hope. As the provider selected by Allegheny County to operate the shelter and the engagement center at Second Avenue Commons, Pittsburgh Mercy looks forward to welcoming, serving, and providing a safe space for adults who are experiencing homelessness, including members of the LGBTQ+ communities, couples, and people with pets. We are excited about the role that Second Avenue Commons will have in creating meaningful, positive impact in our county. We look forward to additional opportunities for partnerships and community collaborations as we continue to strive toward helping to end homelessness in our community.”

Dan Onorato, EVP and chief corporate affairs officer at Highmark Health
“At Highmark Health, we believe in a comprehensive approach to addressing homelessness. Our financial support to Second Avenue Commons and clinical expertise leading to the facility’s opening is one of many efforts to address homelessness in our region.”

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**Dr. Donald Yealy, chief medical officer, UPMC**

"Access to health care is essential to a thriving community, and we're proud to be a part of this project and open the UPMC Second Avenue Health Center. The UPMC mission is to provide world-class care to as many as many as we can in our community, and to do that with the needs of people in mind - at the right time and where they need it. This new center provides health care to more of our neighbors, and it also will connect them with resources to live healthier lives."

**Bill Demchak, chairman, president and CEO of The PNC Financial Services Group**

“At PNC, we work to create positive change in the communities we serve, and Second Avenue Commons is both a powerful and practical way to address critical needs in our headquarters city. We are proud to have supported this important project through a financial contribution from the PNC Foundation, and by lending the expertise of our Realty Services team, who managed the project with sensitivity and intentionality from the start. We look forward to the lasting impact this facility will have on the city of Pittsburgh and those who live here.”

**Stefani Pashman, CEO of Allegheny Conference on Community Development**

“Today’s dedication of Second Avenue Commons is a true testament to the ‘Pittsburgh Way’ – public and private partners coming together to take on tough problems, develop solutions and create change for the better. Without such partnership – at the heart of generations of transformation in Pittsburgh – this low-barrier sanctuary for individuals experiencing homelessness would not have been possible. The expertise of many has guided a deliberate process to ensure that this facility – the first of its kind in downtown – can provide exceptional shelter, comprehensive wrap-around services and compassionate care for those in Pittsburgh who are unsheltered.”

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