

The county also pays for maintenance on the building, which it owns, and plows the parking lot in the winter, Guenzel said. "It's important that the building doesn't diminish in value, and doesn't get run down, so we took that commitment on. It's probably less than \$20,000 per year."

A \$1 million operating endowment for the shelter, for which initial pledges are being collected over a five- to 10-year period following the building campaign, also will contribute, said Diane Davidson, executive director of the Washtenaw Housing Alliance. The goal of the fund is to use the interest to offset operating expenses.

An unwanted neighbor

Before the new shelter opened, neighbors were worried about its presence, concerned the shelter would crowd in more than its stated 50 beds and overnight warming shelter for 25 people. But Glenn Ziegler, who lives east of the shelter and has been active in the Near Westside Neighbors Group, and who had voiced concerns before Delonis opened, now says, "So far, so good." He credits neighborhood input for helping things go well. He also likes that the county owns the building.

"That put the full faith and credit of the county behind the efforts," Ziegler said.

Still, he said, he sees "transient foot traffic, and incidents where things are removed from parked cars. ... I don't know if there's a tie-in, again, a substantial amount of foot traffic appears to be related to the shelter."

Other neighbors have taken precautions. At the Arbor Atrium office building, directly across from Delonis, after tenants repeatedly found people loitering – sitting in stairwells, sleeping in hallways, smoking – a security system has just been installed, said Debbie McCloud, property manager for Continental Capital Realty Inc.

"People come into the building. That doesn't necessarily mean it's just all homeless people. ... But they appeared to be so," McCloud said. "It's a concern for the tenants."

Some advantages

Others see a downtown that has fewer aimless, loitering pedestrians since Delonis opened.

"I see a noticeable difference downtown," said Joe Fitzsimmons, who lives downtown. He is on the housing alliance board and was a top fund-raiser for the shelter. "I don't see people wandering at all. ... When the shelter was closed during the day, they'd go get food here or there, and now it's all centrally located."

Ann Arbor Police spokesman Lt. Michael Logghe said that with the opening of the shelter, "there's not necessarily been any positive or negative change in our runs for service. ... Having everything in one facility makes it that much easier for all, for the service providers."

Although some worried the shelter might be a magnet for out-of-town homeless, Schulmeister said that hasn't happened. For years, she said, at least 25 percent of the clients served by the alliance are from outside the county. That hasn't changed in the past year, she said.

About 1,200 people use the shelter's services a year, and that hasn't changed either with the new building. Only 200 to 250 of those actually stay in the night shelter and have the full treatment for an average stay of 53 days, Schulmeister said. A client may stay as many as 90 days.

Also unchanged is the waiting list. Because of the shortage of affordable housing in Washtenaw County, Schulmeister said, "the shelter is still jammed up, not enough beds."

Men, as many as 30 on the list, wait up to six weeks for a place in the shelter, she said. Women, usually one or two on

the list, wait up to two weeks. The shelter cares for two-thirds as many men as women, who might have children so use other shelters or have friends and family to help.

"We still have a wide-open front door and a trickle out the back door," Schulmeister said. "Until we can make it a flow-through, we still will have a problem. ... People aren't going to be served because we can't get people into housing fast enough."

Schulmeister worked with the Washtenaw Housing Alliance and others on the county's plan to end homelessness, unveiled in September. As it is, 98 percent of shelter residents could qualify for federally subsidized Section 8 housing but only about 1 percent leave the shelter with subsidized housing, she said.

Life at the shelter

A day at Delonis offers help for everything from toxic relationships to cocaine anonymous to reading and writing skills. It's a full schedule from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Medical, legal and job-hunting help is available every week. Meals are prepared by community volunteers under the auspices of Food Gatherers in the shelter's community kitchen. Curfew is 9:30 p.m.

The new shelter is a lot calmer than the old quarters, Schulmeister said. "People like the facility. They feel like they're getting help."

Some clients complain about the rules – rules about wake-up time, TV hours, evening curfew and more. A basic rule is that the shelter is a sober facility – clients are given random drug and breathalyzer tests.

Kathleen T., 44, at the shelter after losing her Detroit-area business, said everyone chafes at the 9:30 p.m. curfew. But for those with substance abuse issues, she said, late evening is when "drinking could occur."

Schulmeister said a rough spot she'd like to smooth this

winter is the evening transitions, which, in cold weather, involve getting people moved into the warming center, the overnight bed space and the rotating shelters at churches. "You have different people in the building and they have to be moved from place to place. ... We have to be able to track who's where. There's just a lot of people going from place to place."

Another rough spot she'd like to smooth is to reduce emergencies when staff must drop what they're doing. When case managers are working with 100 cases at a time, she says, and if a client relapses into drug use or gets sick, the staff must drop what they're doing to take care of that and help the person through the crisis. "I want us to be more playful, have more structure, manage things," Schulmeister said, so that "we don't drop the ball for other people."

Despite the rules, Kathleen T. said she fully appreciates the shelter. "I never pictured myself being here," she said. "I went to U-M. What am I doing here? But now that she is, she's taking full advantage of what's offered, and she enrolled at Washtenaw Community College in hopes of opening her own day-care center.

More important than the rules, John Hartfield says, is the support of the center's staff who help with any job or medical issue and even with how he thinks about his situation.

"They try to find other avenues. I feel blessed to be here," Hartfield said.

Hartfield hopes to move out of the shelter soon. A cousin might help him get into hospital work, he says, and he talks about saving money. That's not how he felt when he arrived. "I really disliked myself for how things had gone. I'm a lot more positive now. They've really helped me see a better outlook."

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