

Columbia County Wellness Hub for Homeless Could Break Ground by Year's End

Planned 75-unit campus in Greenport would replace motel placements with housing, services and 24/7 support

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A rendering of the planned Wellness Hub in Columbia County, which includes emergency housing and permanent supportive housing for people experiencing homelessness. Courtesy of Cheryl Roberts

GREENPORT — A major development for people experiencing homelessness, which could transform how Columbia County houses its homeless population, is expected to break ground by the end of the year.

Like most rural counties in the state, Columbia County places unhoused people in privately run motels that are often poorly maintained, far from social services and cost the county money. But the new development, The Wellness Hub, would include 75 units in three buildings totaling about 65,000 square feet spread over a landscaped campus less than a mile outside Hudson.

The complex is a private-public partnership spearheaded by the Greenburger Center for Justice, the nonprofit housing provider RUPCO and the social services nonprofit Gateway Hudson Valley.

Different populations staying at The Wellness Hub would be in different buildings. The 28-unit emergency shelter would include multipurpose and activity rooms and a professional kitchen serving three meals a day. The three-story, 35-unit permanent supportive housing building would be for those experiencing chronic homelessness, including those with substance use disorders or leaving prison or jail, though sex offenders would not be accepted. And the 12-unit short-term transitional residence would provide services and housing for those with severe mental illness.

The hub would be staffed 24/7 and include “significant case management,” RUPCO Executive Director Kevin O’Connor said Tuesday at a presentation to the Columbia County Health and Human Services Committee.

The private motels the county currently uses do not include services, and, in some cases, aren’t even within walking distance of stores. Cheryl Roberts, the executive director for the Greenburger Center for Justice, recalled bringing pizza to someone she had just dropped off at a motel because there was nowhere to get food in the rural area.

“The bottom line: this is not a motel,” she said at the presentation about The Wellness Hub.

Columbia County also has the Galvan Civic Motel, opened by the nonprofit Galvan Foundation. The building includes some services provided by St. Catherine’s Center for Children, but it is still in a rural area far from social service offices and stores. The motel is now owned by Bard College after the foundation gifted the institution most of its real estate holdings in the county.

Though the county and nonprofits provide services for those experiencing homelessness, substance use disorders and mental illness, much more can be done, Department of Social Services Director Robert Gibson said. The private motels were “isolating,” and though the Galvan Civil Hotel was “a good step,” it was “not equipped in and of itself to provide really intensive services to people with even more (moderate) mental health issues.”

“It feels like there needs to be another environment to provide what these folks need,” he said.

Housing people in motels is also costly. In the 2021 report commissioned by then-Hudson Mayor Kamal Johnson that kicked off efforts to build The Wellness Hub, Gibson wrote that four people experiencing homelessness in the county cost the county about \$120,000 for rooms, as well as \$5,600 in transportation costs, annually.

The Wellness Hub would house people who are completely unsheltered, sleeping in their cars, the woods, Seventh Street Park in Hudson or elsewhere. According to this year’s point-in-time count — where social service workers and volunteers attempt to tally the number of unhoused individuals on a single night — 17 people were unsheltered in Columbia and Greene counties on Jan. 22, according to provisional numbers provided by Tina Sharpe, the executive director of Columbia Opportunities, one of the organizations involved in the count. That is nearly triple last year’s total.

The number of people staying at motels and transitional houses was not yet available, but the number was 245 in the two counties in 2025.

Plans for The Wellness Hub were temporarily derailed last year after the state Department of Environmental Conservation expanded its definition of regulated wetlands, which made some of the land donated by local businessman Paul Colarusso undevelopable.

"We hoped to break ground by now," Roberts said Tuesday, "but then, this wetland thing."

Additional land was donated by local businessman Rick Cummings, and the project was reworked so the buildings were taller and took up less land, Roberts said. Though a state judge annulled the new regulations earlier this week, Roberts said they were sticking to Plan B, since it was already devised and the DEC could always successfully appeal the judge's ruling.

Roberts said she hoped the project would break ground before next year. The Wellness Hub began working with the Greenport Planning Board in February, according to meeting minutes, and the board was appointed the lead in reviewing the site plan last month. The developers still need to apply for capital funding from the state and finalize the concept plan.