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## Hundreds attend groundbreaking of \$50 million project for housing Metro Detroit's homeless

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By [Michael Wayland](#) | [MLive.com](#)

Ending homelessness in Metro Detroit — some may call it a fool's errand, but others, such as Sheilah P. Clay, see it as a challenge.

"It would be easy for us to write them off, but we've seen so many of them turn their lives around," said Clay, president and CEO of Neighborhood Service Organization. "We refuse to write them off."

Clay spoke today at the official groundbreaking for a **\$50 million renovation project** to help house Detroit's homeless at the former Michigan Bell Telephone Co. building at 882 Oakman Blvd. in Detroit.

The project — expected to be complete by the end of 2012 — will create 155 one-bedroom apartments and support services to help stabilize formerly homeless adults, along with administrative offices for the private nonprofit human service agency. More than 300 people, including city and Wayne County officials, attended the event. Detroit Mayor Dave Bing **called the project "a great thing for the city."**

"This opportunity — here — is a long time coming, but it's a great thing for the population that's going to take advantage of it and it's a great thing for the city," Bing said, in an interview before the groundbreaking.

For more than three years, NSO raised \$40 million of the project's cost through a combination of donations, equity financing, tax credits, loans and grants.

Once complete, the 255,000-square-foot building will offer addiction treatment; mental-health counseling and case management services; life skills training; a library; computer,

art and music rooms; a gym and fitness center; chapel; laundry; walk-out roof gardens; and a small sundry shop.

“It’s just a phenomenal community revitalization effort,” Clay said. “I call it the trifecta: 155 people will no longer be homeless, we’re restoring **a historic vacant building in the city of Detroit** and we will be moving 355 people (the organization’s employees) into a community.

“We’re going to have a dramatic impact on this community.”

Ray C. Johnson, NSO Board of Directors president, said the organization knows the project can’t solve all of Detroit’s homeless problems, “but it sends a message of what can be done.”

“Many said it couldn’t be done, but because of the vision of the leadership and our partners, we were able to get the level of financing,” he said.

According to NSO, there are more than 25,000 homeless people in Metro Detroit. Check back to [MLive Detroit](#) for more details, videos and photos from today.



### **Sheilah P. Clay talks \$50 million project to house Metro Detroit's homeless**

The project — spearheaded by Neighborhood Service Organization — will create 155 one-bedroom apartments and support services to help stabilize formerly homeless adults, along with administrative offices for the private nonprofit human service agency at the former Michigan Bell Telephone Co. building, 882 Oakman Blvd. in Detroit..

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