

New apartment project near Buffalo World's Fair site offers 150 affordable units

Jonathan D. Epstein

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Mark Fuller has worked on more than 80 housing projects during his career, but few have been as complicated or costly as the one his agency just opened in North Buffalo, near the historic site of the 1901 World's Fair.



The new Pan-American Square Apartments on Delaware Avenue offers 150 affordable and supportive housing units.

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DePaul Development Services' Pan-American Square Apartments – named with a nod to the Pan American Exposition – features 150 units of affordable and supportive housing, spread across three connected buildings, on a long, narrow former railroad corridor that extends halfway from Delaware Avenue to Colvin Boulevard.

Its construction first required an extensive environmental remediation of the former rail bed and landfill, leveling of the ground, installation of 300 piles or pillars almost to the bedrock to support the buildings, and a costly upgrade of electrical service with new power lines. In all, those factors added more than \$6 million to the total cost, which tallied \$93 million when finished.

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"They're all challenging in different ways, but this had a lot of special challenges," said Fuller, DePaul's president.



The lobby at DePaul's Pan-American Square Apartments on Delaware Avenue.
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But the housing need is high, as demonstrated by the oversubscribed lottery for the available units, which Fuller expects to fill up quickly after processing applications and completing background checks.

"We didn't want to overwhelm the building. But we'll be filled within 60 days, which is probably quicker than anything we ever do," he said. "You realize how many people are really struggling out there."

The state-funded development has been more than 10 years in the works, and its completion in August follows nearly two years of cleanup and construction. Designed by SWBR Architects, the four-story project includes a mix of studio, one-bedroom and two-bedroom apartments, all reserved for individuals or households earning no more than 60% of the area median income, or about \$35,000.



DePaul's Pan-American Square Apartments on Delaware Avenue.
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"The Pan-American Square Apartments exemplifies how partnership, resilient design, and equity can tackle Buffalo's housing crisis, offering stable housing and person-centered services for those we serve," Fuller said. "The development is a catalyst for community revitalization and a model for affordable, sustainable living in New York."

Over half, or 80 units, are supportive "single-room occupancy" units for those with mental health challenges, funded by the state Office of Mental Health. Those are single rooms with a sink and stove, access to a shared bathroom in the corridor, and three meals a day from a first-floor cafeteria and dining room. Another 20 units are for those with substance-abuse disorders or homeless, as well as units for seniors aged 55 and older who need support services.

"The majority of the 80 tend to be pretty sick and don't have the ability to cook and pass meds and all of that, so we pretty much do everything for them," Fuller explained. "The idea is that someday they may become independent, and a lot of times people move out into the community."



A studio apartment at DePaul's Pan-American Square Apartments on Delaware Avenue.
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In all, two-thirds of the apartments have some level of support and are fully furnished. The remaining 50 units are regular affordable housing.

DePaul Community Services, an affiliate, provides onsite services such as case management, coordinating health care, transportation, integration into the community and independent living skills. Several apartments are also accessible and equipped for those with physical, hearing or visual impairments.

The project is also an early all-electric adopter and test case for the state, with high-efficiency appliances, hot water, heating and cooling, energy recovery ventilation units, water-conserving plumbing, LED lighting and highly insulated walls.



An apartment kitchen at DePaul's Pan-American Square Apartments on Delaware Avenue.

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The project was funded with \$28.5 million in equity from federal low-income housing tax credits through New York State Homes and Community Renewal, as well as \$12.4 million from its Federal Housing Trust Fund, \$11.2 million from its Supportive Housing Opportunity Program and nearly \$1.9 million from the Clean Energy Initiative Program partnership with New York State Energy Research and Development Authority.



The community room and mural at DePaul's Pan-American Square Apartments on Delaware Avenue.

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The state Office of Mental Health is also funding debt service for a \$29.5 million first mortgage, with another \$200,000 in a program development grant. The state Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance's Homeless Housing and Assistance Program provided \$3.3 million. And the supportive units get operating funds from the Mental Health office's Community Residence-Single Room Occupancy program and the Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative.



A furnished apartment living room at DePaul's Pan-American Square Apartments on Delaware Avenue.
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Meanwhile, DePaul is also busy working on three other projects in Western New York, including a 14-bed community residence in Cheektowaga, an 80-bed single-room-occupancy facility under the Office of Mental Health at 2600 Main St. in Buffalo, and an 80-unit affordable housing project at 2329 Lockport Road, in the Town of Niagara.

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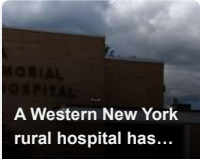


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