



KALAMAZOO COUNTY GOVERNMENT

In the Pursuit of Extraordinary Governance...

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Despite setbacks, Kalamazoo County continues seeking long-term solutions for county's homeless population

Last month, the Lakeside Foundation Board turned down the county's bid to purchase Lakeside Academy to provide wraparound housing services for the homeless

KALAMAZOO, Mich. — The **Kalamazoo County Board of Commissioners** and Administrator **Tracie Moored** tonight responded to discussions surrounding the county's efforts to help residents experiencing homelessness.

"To all of the residents who have spoken out on social media or contacted me directly about how we are helping Kalamazoo's homeless population, I want you to know I — and my fellow commissioners — hear you loud and clear," said Kalamazoo County Board Chair **Tracy Hall**. "Kalamazoo County has been working for months on a long-term permanent solution to help residents experiencing homelessness, but unfortunately our efforts to purchase the former Lakeside Academy were unsuccessful."

Moored and other county leaders spent the last several months in discussion with the Lakeside for Children Board to purchase the former Lakeside Academy to serve the county's unhoused population. The county's plan, which was presented to the Lakeside Board multiple times, called for providing mental health services as well as short- and long-term housing, and job training options. Ultimately, the Lakeside Board chose to accept a bid from a local developer.

"Our vision for the former Lakeside Academy was to create an all-encompassing complete program and a results-driven approach to support individuals and families in Kalamazoo County who are experiencing homelessness," Moored said. "We are disappointed the Lakeside Board did not accept our offer last month. If they had, we would be having a completely different conversation about our homeless population and those living in encampments in Kalamazoo."

"Despite this setback, we remain committed to finding lasting solutions that create long-term housing and wraparound services to help Kalamazoo's unhoused population get the care they need, and we will continue searching for the right property to make this a reality," Hall said. "Until then, we

encourage residents who want to do their part to donate to United Way, who are on the frontlines providing warm meals, blankets and care to Kalamazoo County’s homeless.”

The number of people and families experiencing homelessness in Kalamazoo has grown exponentially since 2019, and this challenge has been exacerbated by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has reduced capacity at shelters throughout the city – making a bad situation even worse.

Currently, the United Way of the Battle Creek and Kalamazoo Region estimates at least 175 people are living in encampments, a 25% increase from fall 2020. Hundreds of people throughout Kalamazoo and Kalamazoo County are currently homeless, relying on shelters or encampments to stay warm and dry.

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