



Emma Norton, a nonprofit housing and support services provider, hopes to begin construction next year on this 60-unit housing project at the Highland Bridge site in St. Paul. (Submitted image: UrbanWorks)

Funding boosts Highland housing

By: [Brian Johnson](#) December 21, 2020 3:57 pm

With major funding in hand, a project that will provide housing and support services for people in need is teed up for a possible 2021 construction start at the Highland Bridge redevelopment site in St. Paul.

Emma Norton, a nonprofit provider of housing and support services for women and families who have been homeless, is nearing construction thanks to an \$18 million funding allocation announced last week by the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency.

The project will create 60 homes for women and children and office space for Emma Norton, said Tonya Brownlow, the organization's executive director. At present, Emma Norton operates a 50-unit building near downtown St. Paul and a townhome site in Maplewood.

"The great thing is, it will allow us to expand [from 50 to 60 units] and it will be their own apartment versus what we have now, which is shared rooms," said Brownlow, whose organization is partnering on the project with Project for Pride in Living.

The allocation is part of a \$195 million pool of funding approved last week by Minnesota Housing. The funding supports 73 developments that will create or preserve 2,387 housing units, including rental apartments and single-family houses.

With private and local money, the total development cost is \$529 million, Minnesota Housing said.

Specific funding sources include \$100 million in housing infrastructure bonds from the 2020 state bonding bill, which was approved by the Legislature and signed by Gov. Tim Walz in October during a special legislative session.

Jennifer Ho, Minnesota Housing Finance Agency commissioner, said the housing infrastructure bonds "make it possible for us to create some of the most deeply affordable homes and serve Minnesotans with extremely low incomes. The permanent supportive housing we can create with these bonds are desperately needed and are in short supply across the state."

Most of the \$195 million is going to multifamily projects. In all, Minnesota Housing selected 22 multifamily projects divided evenly by metro area and outstate locations. The projects will support 987 new units and rehab work on 402 units.

In addition, Minnesota Housing announced \$2.6 million in grants to support 327 units of manufactured housing, and \$3.5 million in loans to support 129 units of workforce housing. Earlier this year, Minnesota Housing allocated \$9.6 million in loans for rehab of 544 homes.

Emma Norton's project, which also includes office space for the nonprofit organization, was fully funded on its first application to Minnesota Housing, which is "pretty unheard of," Brownlow said.

Designed by UrbanWorks Architecture of Minneapolis, the Emma Norton project will serve people who have experienced homelessness, chemical dependency, and mental health issues, Brownlow said. Residents will have access to mental health programs and other support services.

"This building will be a much better fit to support their needs, not just for housing but their whole health and recovery," Brownlow said.

Brownlow added that the project will increase Emma Norton's office and housing space from about 23,000 square feet at present to nearly 60,000 square feet.

The new building will rise near Mount Curve Boulevard and Hillcrest Avenue within Highland Bridge, a redevelopment of the 122-acre former Ford Plant in St. Paul. The Emma Norton site is about a block away from a bus stop on Ford Parkway, Brownlow said.

The next steps are to finalize design and get through the closing process with Minnesota Housing. Emma Norton hopes to raise another \$1.5 million or \$2 million in private money and begin construction "sometime in 2021," Brownlow said.