

Daily Herald Editorial Board

What we can learn from Heart's Place

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We are believers in the big-heartedness of people in the suburbs who often step in to help strangers in need. But that circle of concern hasn't always extended as well as it could to those who have mental illness or drug or alcohol addiction, or to their caregivers or loved ones, who often are overwhelmed.

Proposals for supportive services and housing frequently have been rebuffed, typically because homeowners object to the presence of residential or treatment facilities near their neighborhoods.

There are signs that might be changing. We hope so and continue to urge people in the suburbs, and local officials, to judge proposals on their merits and on facts rather than fears.

One cause for optimism is Heart's Place in Arlington Heights, which will open in a few weeks with 18 rent-subsidized apartments for people living with mental illness or another disability. The development will have on-site support and therapeutic services for residents and a shared community space.

The development sits on the same site near Arlington Heights and Dundee roads where a similar proposed project, Boeger Place, was rejected in 2010.

In the ensuing years, the North/Northwest Task Force on Supportive Housing for Individuals with Mental Illness moved on and found success elsewhere. Myers Place opened in 2013 in Mount Prospect with 39 apartments. PhilHaven opened in 2017 in Wheeling with 50 apartments, winning approval after Wheeling twice voted it down. Spruce Village in Palatine will add 40 more apartments when it opens next summer.

The proposed Haymarket Center in Itasca would serve a different population but faces similar hurdles. The effort to turn a Holiday Inn hotel in a warehouse district on the west side of I-290 near Irving Park Road into a roughly 200-bed facility for substance abuse and mental health treatment has support from DuPage County Board Chairman Dan Cronin and others but has met with opposition from some residents. People understandably have questions and concerns. While we haven't yet taken a position regarding the specific Haymarket proposal, we ask leaders and residents to join us in evaluating the plan, and others like it, with open minds and with an eye toward addressing a pressing need.

People in the suburbs have drug addictions. People in the suburbs have mental illness. They deserve a chance to be treated and to live in the suburbs. Their relatives are among the most persuasive proponents, often awakening the kind of sympathy we think the suburbs are known for.

Along with that, projects like Myers Place, PhilHaven, Spruce Village -- and now, Heart's Place -- provide potent evidence that there is little to fear.