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## Fort Smith directors allocate nearly \$2.8 million in federal grant money

Largest portion of funds go to Next Step Homeless Services for new shelter by [Monica Brich](#) | May 7, 2023 at 1:01

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Killian Young (from right), Kimberly Elam, Marvin Young, Karrie Cheater and James Brown gather Friday at Next Step Homeless Services in downtown Fort Smith. The City of Fort Smith Board of Directors approved nearly \$2.8 million in federal grants on Tuesday for various River Valley agencies, with Next Step receiving the most to build its new facility. Visit [nwaonline.com/photo](http://nwaonline.com/photo) for today's photo gallery. (River Valley Democrat-Gazette/Hank Layton)

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FORT SMITH -- City directors have allocated nearly \$2.8 million in federal money to help several River Valley agencies.

The city received \$812,865 in Community Development Block Grant money and \$462,538 in Home Investment Partnership money from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Next Step Homeless Services received the largest portion of the grants with \$13,797 for transitional case management and \$48,957 for its new homeless facility.

Fort Smith also received roughly \$1.5 million in American Rescue Plan money, which President Joe Biden approved in March 2021 to address the continued impact of the covid-19 pandemic on the economy, public health, state and local governments, individuals and businesses.

The directors Tuesday approved allocating the rescue plan money to the Crawford Sebastian Community Development Council, Next Step, the Center for Legal Services, Riverview Hope Campus and the Community Rescue Mission.

Next Step again received the largest portion with \$920,987 for affordable rental housing.

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The advertisement features a dark blue background on the left with the Tempur-Pedic logo and a large '50% OFF' discount. The right side shows a woman sitting on a bed with a dog. Text includes 'MATTRESS FIRM', 'TEMPUR-PEDIC', 'WHILE SUPPLIES LAST', '50% OFF', 'TEMPUR-Breeze', and 'Select in-store floor models\*'. A small red circle with a white 'L' is visible in the bottom right corner of the image area.

Ward 3 Director Lavon Morton asked for an update on Next Step's new facility, considering the agency

received the largest amount of money.

Next Step runs a day room at 123 N. Sixth St. downtown. The new location will be roughly four acres at 815 S. Sixth St. near the Oklahoma border, which is surrounded by several industrial businesses and would put Next Step closer to another local homeless service, Hope Campus.

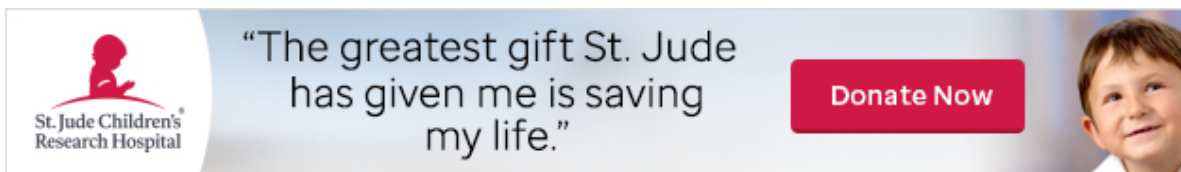
City directors approved rezoning for the shelter last spring.

Sharon Chapman, Next Step executive director, said the proposed shelter would provide noncongregate housing with 30 houses maximum on the property. The people using the services would likely be drug- and alcohol-free and addressing mental and physical health issues before finding employment and becoming independent, she said.

The shelter will take over a year and a half to complete, at which time Next Step plans to close the day room in order to focus on providing transitional housing, she said.

Next Step was able to provide services for 1,400 individuals and house 100 people in 2022, Chapman said.

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The advertisement is a horizontal banner. On the left is the St. Jude Children's Research Hospital logo, which includes a red silhouette of a child and the text "St. Jude Children's Research Hospital". To the right of the logo is a quote in black text: "The greatest gift St. Jude has given me is saving my life." Further right is a red rectangular button with the white text "Donate Now". On the far right of the banner is a close-up photograph of a young child's face, looking slightly to the right.

The new facility is expected to cost about \$3 million and take about a year and a half to complete once construction starts.

Chapman said the federal money the directors approved puts Next Step about halfway through its fundraising process. She said they plan to apply for more grants allocated through the state, as well as applying for a forgivable loan to complete the project.

"We have a board meeting tomorrow. I'm suggesting that if we are allocated the funds tonight, that we make a decision to move forward and go ahead and start that six- to eight-month process of design and engineering so that we can be ready as soon as we have all the funds to break ground," Chapman said.

"I think we all agree this is a great project because at the end of the day, what we're focusing on is getting people out of the homeless population back into a productive workforce, and that is really the very attractive thing about your program," Morton said. "You already do that, and this really expands that program in a really large way. So we appreciate what you're doing."



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