

Today, a virtual ribbon cutting was held as Urban Ministries of Wake County announced the opening of the new Helen Wright Center for Women. With a 73-bed capacity, this is the county's largest shelter for adult, single women experiencing homelessness.

In 2018, under the direction of former County Commissioner Chair, Jessica Holmes, the board of commissioners tasked Urban Ministries with expanding shelter capacity for the more than 800 women who experience homelessness in our county each year. County commissioners pledged \$2.39 million to the project and UMWC purchased a new building at 3603 Bastion Lane. Renovations are scheduled to be finished June 1, 2020.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, Wake County's Housing Department and Urban Ministries of Wake County have agreed to keep both the new facility and the old facility open for as long as possible to ensure social distancing and the safety of the women. The new building will house up to 38 women and the old building, located at 401 W. Cabarrus Street, will house up to 28.

In addition to the increased operating costs of a new shelter, additional staff needs to be hired to keep both facilities open. The county has pledged more than \$300,000 to this effort, including some \$64,000 which will be used to secure permanent housing for some women. In 2019, Urban Ministries of Wake County helped 68 women leave Helen Wright with signed leases (and counting.)

Urban Ministries of Wake County also operates crisis programs, like its food pantry, as well as a clinic and pharmacy for uninsured adults at its building on Capital Boulevard. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the pantry shifted from client choice shopping to curbside, and is now serving roughly 1,000 people a week. The clinic shifted to telemedicine and is carefully bringing patients back in over the next month. The pharmacy is also now curbside.

Video footage of the new Helen Wright Center and ribbon cutting (with Lorena McDowell / Wake County Housing Dept. Director and Wake County Manager David Ellis) is attached. **Please courtesy: Ed Ricker / Sandhills Videography for aeriels and Dart McAdoo for the rest.**

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