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PAC Group to renovate Downtown Evening Soup Kitchen, Inc.'s Drop-in & Resource Center - designed by Svigals Ptrs.

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Shown (from left) are: Doug Lovegren (Svigals + Partners, partner, AIA), Bryan Moore (Svigals + Partners, AIA), Rosa DeLauro (congresswoman 3rd District of CT), Ana Sirota (Svigals + Partners, NCIDQ), and Mario Granata (PAC Group project manager).

New Haven, CT Downtown Evening Soup Kitchen, Inc. (DESK), kicked off the renovations to their Drop-in & Resource Center at 266 State St. with a “wall-breaking ceremony,” featuring congresswoman Rosa DeLauro and mayor Justin Elicker. The celebration marked the start of a

much-anticipated capital project to renovate DESK's facilities, where unhoused individuals are connected to a variety of services.

The project's architect is Svigals + Partners, lauded for their trauma-informed designs of New Haven's Ronald McDonald House and the Sandy Hook School redesign. Doug Lovgren explains that "Svigals + Partners is delighted to support DESK in its important mission to support unhoused individuals in our city, and that the firm's mission is to utilize architecture and design to support our community."

Construction is being overseen by PAC Group, known for a variety of healthcare and clinical facility projects across Connecticut.

The conceptual design of the project began in 2019-20 with a series of interviews, focus groups, and a half-day workshop that brought together people with lived expertise, providers, volunteers, community stakeholders, law enforcement, and city officials. A major step toward the goal of creating the city's first low-barrier, Downtown Drop-in & Resource Center (DRC) was realized in December 2020 when DESK purchased the three-story building at 266 State St. The following April, DESK launched the DRC as a day program, open 1:30-5:30, Sunday through Friday – all the while, working in the background to acquire the funding, design the architectural plans, and plan for the renovations.

The 266 State Capital Project is a \$3.875 million construction project funded by a combination of public and private sources, including \$1.438 million in federal HUD Community Project Funding, \$500,000 from the state Community Investment Fund, \$200,000 in state ARPA funding, \$150,000 in city of New Haven CDBG funding, \$150,000 from Cornell Scott Hill Health Center (medical clinic underwriting), \$114,000 from Connecticut Foodshare, \$100,000 from Yale New Haven Health Systems, and \$100,000 from Yale University.

In addition to these institutional funders, dozens of private individuals have contributed to the project. Over the coming seven months, as the construction is underway, DESK will raise the remaining 15 percent of the funding through private sources.

While addressing the crowd in attendance, mayor Elicker said, "We have a crisis right now with housing across the nation, across the state, and in our city. That is something that people in this room know all too much. Groups like DESK not only partnered with us along the way but also pushed us to think differently about how to provide services."

Once completed, the new Drop-in & Resource Center will include a modern, energy-efficient commercial kitchen, additional office space for program staff, a full medical clinic (staff by Cornell Scott Hill Health Center's Homeless Healthcare Department), and additional consultation and meeting space for partnering agencies.

“Just as we’re doing literally today, this is a program that breaks down walls,” said Steve Werlin, DESK’s executive director. “This is a place of connection, where people in need build trust and relationships that lead to both basic, life-saving needs, as well as support services that improve overall quality of life.”

Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro was on hand to deliver the initial “break in the wall,” donning a hardhat and swinging a heavy mallet. “Over the years, [DESK has] grown to respond to the increase and the need with more complex services, that people need—progressive strategies and empathetic approaches.,” she said.

While construction continues, DESK will operate its Drop-in & Resource Center program in the basement of the Church of St. Paul & St. James at 57 Olive Street, with the same schedule (Sunday-Friday, 1:30-5:30 pm).