

The current Department of Human Services building at 415 Franklin SE has long been deemed less than desirable for the important work that takes place there. Built originally as a school, the waiting area is too small, client meeting rooms are cramped, the technology infrastructure is insufficient to provide client services efficiently and effectively. Several years ago, the department was forced to split – operating from a second office in Cascade Township – due to the lack of space. The state, county, and city have spent many years trying to find and decide on a suitable replacement facility.

Soon the Sheldon Complex at 121 Franklin SE – just a quarter-mile to the West of the current DHS offices – will be demolished and the space used to construct a brand new facility. Not only will both DHS offices be able to operate from one location, but other important human services will be able to consolidate there as well. Aside from the DHS, a Kent County health clinic and Michigan Works! office will be onsite, offering a one-stop opportunity for human services.

The 121 Franklin site is an ideal location for this Consolidated Human Services Building. Within a block and a half of two of bus routes, it is easily accessible to those using public transportation. It is also less than a mile from the Franklin exit off US-131 and offers space for parking that the current site is lacking. Furthermore, roughly 70% of DHS clients live within a three mile radius of the site.

The neighborhood has been designated by the City of Grand Rapids as one in need of new development. In fact, the intersection of Division and Franklin is illustrated in the City's Master Plan as a desired mixed-use village center location. The addition of a well-kept public space in the area will help spur this development as well as bring stability to the neighborhood. Most directly, residents of the neighborhood will have a beautiful landmark building to have pride in.

All else aside, the Sheldon Complex site is the only feasible site for this relocation. Development costs, including land value, in the downtown area of Grand Rapids are escalating to prohibitive levels. If it were not for this large site previously owned by the City and Grand Rapids Public Schools, relocation to a more suburban location would be necessary. Such a move would negate all the positive impacts that the City and County believe this construction will bring, and it would also move services away from those that need them most.