

WBEZ 91.5

Construction begins on Midwest's first affordable housing for LGBTQ seniors

June 3, 2013

By: Lauren Chooljian

Construction vehicles knocked down walls at a building in Lakeview Monday to prepare for what will soon become the region's first LGBTQ-friendly senior affordable housing development.

The \$26 million dollar development will occupy a part of the old 23rd district Town Hall police station on Halsted and Addison streets, as well as the now-vacant space next to it. The building will be home to 79 studio and one-bedroom apartments, as well as a space for community programming run by [The Center on Halsted](#).

The development has been in the works for a while. By Lakeview Ald. Tom Tunney's count, he's been working on the issue for at least 10 years. Tunney, one of the first openly gay Chicago aldermen, says the work won't stop once the center opens.

"The selection process is going to be interesting because the demand is gonna be amazing," Tunney said. "And getting it open and learning in general how to integrate the community center with the housing component, I think there's gonna be a few challenges there."

Some Chicagoans have already voiced interest in living in the building. Tom Genley said the senior center would be a safe zone, and thus he was eyeing one of the apartments.

"Here, because I can be me, an out gay man. Here, because I do not have to hide my true self," Genley said. "Here, because the closet is for clothes."

But alongside the celebration and hard-hat photo-ops was an air of disappointment over the Illinois House of Representatives' decision not to call a vote on a bill to legalize same-sex marriage. During her remarks about the

housing project, Representative Sara Feigenholtz called the last weekend of the legislative session one where a lot of “broken dreams happened.”

“We just didn’t quite get it done yet,” Feigenholtz said. “But we’re gonna go back and we’re gonna get it done.”

Democratic state Rep. Greg Harris of Chicago decided not to call a House floor vote on the bill that would've made Illinois the 13th state to allow gay marriage. Harris said he didn't have the votes but also vowed to bring back the issue.

The Center on Halsted has been working with [The Heartland Alliance](#), a local anti-poverty organization, state and city officials on the financing and construction for the affordable housing development. All 79 units will be subsidized, and will cost no more than 30 percent of a given resident's income. Construction on the building is scheduled to be completed by the fall of 2014.

Lauren Chooljian is WBEZ's Morning Producer/Reporter. Follow her [@laurenchooljian](#).